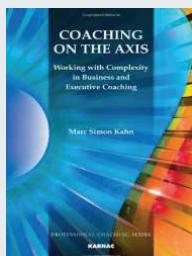


# Coaching on the axis

**Book Title:**  
Coaching on the axis

**Book Cover:**



**Author:**  
Marc S. Kahn

**ISBN:**  
978-1780491363

**Publisher:**  
Karnac Books, London, 224 pp., \$35.99\*  
\*Book price at time of review

**Reviewer:**  
Henk Struwig<sup>1</sup>

**Affiliation:**  
<sup>1</sup>Organisation Development Consultant, Investec Specialist Bank, South Africa

**Email:**  
hstruwig@investec.co.za

**Postal address:**  
10 Oldenland Street, Golden Acre, Somerset West, South Africa

**How to cite this book review:**  
Struwig, H. (2014).  
Coaching on the axis,  
*SA Journal of Industrial Psychology/SA Tydskrif vir Bedryfsielkunde*, 40(2), Art. #1241, 2 pages. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/sajip.v40i2.1241>

**Copyright:** © 2014. The Authors. Licensee: AOSIS OpenJournals. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

**Read online:**



Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

## Introduction

This book comes at an important point in the evolution of business coaching. This is a time when business leaders are becoming increasingly interested in using business coaching as a way to improve their organisation's ability to deliver commercial results. *Coaching on the axis* is a significant and critical offering to that end. Most other coaching texts tend to focus on how the discipline promotes the performance of an individual. Kahn's (2014) book, however, demonstrates that business coaching must, and can, focus on the success of the organisation as a whole (Right Management, 2009). Not only that, but he goes on to show how the formative influence of counselling on the emergence of coaching has created a cultural misalignment with the business world. *Coaching on the axis* illustrates this misalignment and provides a methodology to overcome it. In this sense, this book is not only a coaching text book but also a book of cultural theory (Schein, 2010).

## Basic premise of the book

*Coaching on the axis* essentially explores three fundamental challenges that coaches need to overcome in order to align their practice with the world of work:

1. Coaches need to release any bias in favour of the individual over the organisation and adopt the notion of a 'duality of client' (individual and organisation as equal and simultaneous clients).
2. Coaches need to balance their theoretical focus in individual psychology with organisational and cultural theory.
3. Coaches need to shift from a health and well-being mind set into a relational mind set, focused on business performance.

Kahn begins his text by taking the reader through the historical and theoretical foundations of the coaching discipline, showing how psychotherapy and counselling have laid the foundations for its emergence. He explains how the underlying cultural assumptions of these disciplines are different from that of business, which is driven by market forces and the creation of wealth (Robbins, 2011). He positions the coach as a kind of translator or broker between the individual and the organisation, someone whose ultimate purpose is the improvement of the relational state between the two, and through this, the delivery of tangible business results. Kahn explains how knowledge about people, their roles and the organisations for which they work are brought together in a relational space to promote business results. He draws equally on psychology, systems theory and workplace or business expertise.

## Outline of the text

In the first chapter, Kahn poses a fundamental question: Who is the client? The interrelatedness of the individual client and the organisation is presented, and the concept of a 'duality of client' is introduced. This chapter also explores the systemic nature of organisations and the necessity to think systemically when working with business.

The next chapter deals with organisational culture. The nature of culture and the relationship between leadership and culture is presented. It explores the cultural ideologies of business in contrast to coaching and the differences between the two. The chapter clearly exposes how underlying and unconscious beliefs associated with the coaching culture (emerging from its origins in counselling psychology) do not align with the values and norms of businesses, and the implications of this are explored. Kahn suggests the need for a more equitable and conscious integration of coaching and business culture.

Chapter three is entitled 'The complexity of theory'. The chapter is dedicated to the balance between theory and practice for a business coach. The text covers a series of strategies related to the integration and assimilation of theory and the application thereof within a business and

coaching context. In particular, it exposes the tension between the culture of science and the culture of business and the way in which this tension impacts on business-coaching practice.

The remaining chapters present the 'Coaching on the axis' approach, which acts as an overarching framework for coaches to manage the challenges previously outlined.

Chapter four introduces this framework, using the metaphor of a tree to illustrate it.

Chapter five deals with the environmental dimension of the 'Coaching on the axis' approach. The environment is presented as a complex relational system with a range of realities above and below the surface. This chapter specifically explains how coaches can access the environmental dimension during the coaching process. The sections on feedback and working with relationships are especially powerful and practical. It clearly shows how the environmental dimension can be accessed systemically but also subjectively through the eyes of the individual client.

Chapter six extensively covers the individual dimension. Several topics related to the inner and outer life of individuals are covered: from their life stories to the social and cultural realities of rank and power to the existential questions that confront people in their work contexts. Kahn further discusses methods and ideas about access to data when it comes to the individual and provides an overview of a range of pertinent theory.

Chapter seven presents the centre of the coaching axis – the relationship between the individual and the environment. Here the author brings the other dimensions into relationship with each other, and positions the work of the coach as mediator or broker of this relationship.

The last two chapters are dedicated to some techniques and a detailed case study which acts to integrate the ideas, concepts and framework proposed in this book.

## Conclusion

*Coaching on the axis* offers an overarching framework for business coaches to align their practice with workplace reality. It does not favour any one particular theoretical orientation, proposing rather an integrative and eclectic perspective (Norcross, 2005).

The approach positions individuals within the context of market-place realities, organisational culture and business objectives. It marries theory and practice with an uncompromising commercial agenda. Kahn is honest and direct about the complexity of organisational life and the depth of human experiences at work. He draws on his own work experience to bring the approach to life through stories, case studies and real-life examples.

However, clearly, systems theory features as the most prominent theoretical influence on the work as it focuses on the interrelatedness of individuals, their role and the organisational context within which they are required to perform (Senge, 1990). This holistic and systemic approach to business coaching has long been a tradition of the literature in systems psychodynamics (Brunning, 2006). *Coaching on the axis* will appeal to people who coach in 'the real world'. Although Kahn does provide a relevant overview of theory and ideas, an existing level of basic knowledge about coaching and organisational life would no doubt be useful if you want to appreciate this book fully.

## About the author

Marc Kahn is a chartered business coach with the World-Wide Association of Business Coaches (WABC), a clinical psychologist and an organisation-development consultant. He is currently head of human resources and organisation development for Investec Ltd, a listed financial-services corporation. He has been consulting to organisations for 20 years, having worked across the coaching industry as provider, teacher, supervisor and corporate procurer of business and executive coaching services.

## References

- Brunning, H. (2006). *Executive coaching: Systems-psychodynamic perspective*. London: Karnac.
- Kahn, M.S. (2014). *Coaching on the axis*. London: Karnac Books.
- Norcross, J.C. (2005). A primer on psychotherapy integration. In J.C. Norcross, & M.R. Goldfried (Eds.), *Handbook of psychotherapy integration* (2nd edn.). New York: Oxford University Press. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/1053-0479.15.4.392>
- Right Management. (2009). *Aligning leader coaching to business outcomes*. Melbourne: Right Management.
- Robbins, R.H. (2011). *Global problems and the culture of capitalism*. Boston: Prentice Hall.
- Schein, E.H. (2010). *Organizational culture and leadership* (4th edn.). San Francisco: John Wiley.
- Senge, P. (1990). *The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization*. New York: Doubleday.