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A contemporary coaching theory to integrate work and life in changing times

Abstract

In this chapter we argue that common approaches underpinning coaching, including cognitive-behavioural frameworks and the concept of work–life balance, are not well suited to form the conceptual basis of practice to assist people in a dynamic contemporary society. These mechanistic approaches originate from the industrial revolution and are based on the root metaphor of person as machine. With the changing labour market, the impact of information and communication technologies and the fragmentation of traditional meaning systems into a more cosmopolitan society, there is a need for coaching approaches that emphasise change and adaptation. Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), an organismic-dialectical metatheory for which there is significant empirical evidence, is presented as an appropriate alternative conceptual basis for a theoretically coherent and evidence-based coaching practice. Self-determination theory is based on the root metaphor of an organism adapting to a changing environment. Moreover, it is a theory of motivation, a construct of key importance to any form of coaching. A model of life-management consistent with this metatheoretical and theoretical position is described and its implications for practice will be discussed. Finally, work–life integration defined in terms of self-determination theory will be presented as a more desirable end than work–life balance.

Keywords

contemporary, coaching, theory, integrate, work, life, changing, times

Disciplines

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chapter seven

A Contemporary Coaching Theory to Integrate Work and Life in Changing Times

Lindsay G. Oades, Peter Caputi, Paula M. Robinson
and Barry Partridge

In this chapter we argue that common approaches underpinning coaching, including cognitive-behavioural frameworks and the concept of work–life balance, are not well suited to form the conceptual basis of practice to assist people in a dynamic contemporary society. These mechanistic approaches originate from the industrial revolution and are based on the root metaphor of person as machine. With the changing labour market, the impact of information and communication technologies and the fragmentation of traditional meaning systems into a more cosmopolitan society, there is a need for coaching approaches that emphasise change and adaptation. Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), an organismic-dialectical metatheory for which there is significant empirical evidence, is presented as an appropriate alternative conceptual basis for a theoretically coherent and evidence-based coaching practice. Self-determination theory is based on the root metaphor of an organism adapting to a changing environment. Moreover, it is a theory of motivation, a construct of key importance to any form of coaching. A model of life-management consistent with this metatheoretical and theoretical position is described and its implications for practice will be discussed. Finally, *work–life integration* defined in terms of self-determination theory will be presented as a more desirable end than *work–life balance*.

The Impact of Social Change

The dawn of the industrial revolution marked a crucial shift in how work was defined, how people engaged in work and how society was influenced by changes in these activities (Jones, 1990). People were considered integral to the progress and success of an industry. In this sense they were considered to be economic units within the organisation. Within western society, labour is exchanged for wages or for material things that sustain us. However, from a Marxist perspective, work also defines who we are. People are shaped by their roles in the workplace and identified in the community by their occupation.

An effect of the industrial revolution was to change the structure of our society in two notable ways. First, the nature of occupations changed as a result of the industrial revolution. For instance, there are fewer people employed in the farming sector. This change, in turn, had an impact on communities and where those communities were located, for example, a move from rural to urban settings. Second, the industrial revolution resulted in the greater separation of work and family life. There is a greater tendency for us to “go to work”. Our place of employment is no longer the humble farm or the stable located within close proximity of the family home. In most cases, the workplace is now located away from the family home. Some individuals have occupations that take them regularly to other countries (for instance, airline pilots). Improved mechanisation and transport have made this possible.

More recent advances in technology, particularly information and communication technologies, have added to the changing nature of occupations and work life (Samantary, 2001). Many argue that we have moved from an industrial society to an information society (Garrick & Clegg, 2000). Computer technology has been influential in eliminating certain occupations, while creating others. Indeed, the English mathematician Charles Babbage (1791–1871), influential in the development of computer technology, argued that the introduction of computers would have an impact on the division of labour. The new computer age would free us of the drudgery of manual labour and create more leisure time for us to pursue our goals. Whether this has eventuated is debatable. What is clear is that changes in information and communication technology have changed the range of occupations and many argue the nature of work itself. What is also clear is that technological change has also presented the possibility of the reintegration of work and family life. Telecommuting and electronic cottages have become real options for people. With these options come the possibility of social reintegration (Deken, 1981; Toffler, 1980).

In addition to changes from an industrial society to an information society is an increase in migration and globalisation. Such migration and globalisation has led to an increase in pluralist and cosmopolitan societies, further enhanced by international media (Cuenca, 2002). With this increase,

individuals may experience a greater menu of options as to possible ways to live their lives. A full sociological analysis of this complex phenomenon is beyond the scope of this chapter. However, it is important to note the range of choices that people, particularly adolescents and young adults, may face in moulding their lives. While many people in the world continue to experience a limited range of choices, an increasing number of people question religion, work practice, nature of work and employment relations (Callus & Lansbury, 2002 ; Cascio, 1996), gender relations, family role and structure (Kennedy, 2001), the nature of knowledge and the geographical location where they may choose to live. With an increased array of possible lives, there is an increased need for human services that assist people with these often difficult and confusing life choices. The rise of coaching in contemporary society has occurred against this backdrop of complexity and ubiquitous change for both individuals and families.

The Rise of Coaching in Contemporary Society

Zeus and Skiffington (2002) track the history of coaching and state that it is related to, but different from, forms of consulting, therapy and mentoring. Interestingly, the back cover of Zeus and Skiffington's (2002) book asserts that "recent studies show how life skills coaching, executive coaching and business coaching are all effective ways of achieving sustainable growth, change and development in an individual, group or organisation". While there are many books on coaching (particularly, books on how to "do coaching"), there is, however, a paucity of controlled trials on the effectiveness of coaching (Birch, 2001; Bryce, 2002; Eaton & Johnson, 2001; Green, Oades, & Grant, 2004; Landsberg, 1996; Parkin, 2001; Wales, 2003; Whitmore, 1992; Zeus & Skiffington, 2002).

Moreover, despite the rise of interest in coaching in its multiple forms — executive, life, business or other — there still remains an absence of accepted definitions or conceptual clarity. One key issue is whether coaching is used as a verb or a noun. Moreover, many existing definitions of coaching propose what it is not, rather than what it is. For example, to say that coaching is not counselling is an inadequate definition. Consider the following list of options to describe "small c" coaching or "large C" Coaching:

- > coaching as a metaphor
- > coaching as a relationship
- > coaching as a process
- > Coaching as a brand
- > Coaching as assisted self-regulation
- > Coaching as a developing profession
- > Coaching as an industry
- > Coaching as a technique/skills set
- > Coaching as applied positive psychology.



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If coaching is to become a coherent coupling of theory, science and practice, it is important to ensure that the metatheoretical assumptions underpinning the conceptualisation, scientific claims and practice of coaching are sound. Moreover, these metatheoretical assumptions need to be relevant to the endeavour of coaching which, broadly stated, assists people in their life and work performance and wellbeing. For this reason, the approach needs to emphasise adaptiveness and change.

Examination of root metaphors upon which our very theories are based is useful and quite revealing about the behavioural sciences, which are likely to underpin much of what may become an evidence-based coaching practice.

The Root Metaphor of the Psyche as a Machine

Pepper's (1973) proposes four root metaphors for the world: (1) formism, based on the root metaphor of similarity, or the identity of a single form in a range of particular examples; (2) mechanism, based on the root metaphor of material push and pull. This is similar to the notion of attraction and repulsion likened to a machine or an electromagnetic-gravitational field; (3) organicism, based on the root metaphor of a dynamic organic whole, as elaborated by Hegel and his followers; and (4) contextualism, based on the root metaphor of a transitory historical situation and its biological tensions as exhibited by Dewey and his followers (Caputi & Oades, 2001).

Behavioural, cognitive and cognitive-behavioural approaches have their origins in mechanistic root metaphors, viewing the world, and hence the psyche, in mechanistic, material push and pull terms. This view elicits the image of a coach tinkering with the cognitions of a client, pressing restart buttons, and the like. However, if the environment changes dramatically, the machine itself may be ill-suited. In our view, assisting clients to change and adapt over time in complex and diverse environments is a more important challenge for coach practitioners, coach researchers and theoreticians.

Machines of all types, including the best robots and computers, continue to find difficulties with small changes in environments, as illustrated by the frame problem within artificial intelligence circles. In closed systems and stable environments, mechanistic approaches may be adequate. However, in unstable environments and open systems such approaches are likely to be inadequate. Given the changing and complex context of contemporary life and work, the question arises as to whether it makes sense to base the emerging efforts of coaching science and practice on mechanistic root metaphors of person and world, such as traditional cognitive-behavioural approaches and the metaphor of work–life balance. In our view, the answer is clearly no. While assisting others to regulate their cognitions and behaviours is no doubt useful, the baggage of mechanistic metaphors is likely to be less so. Some alternatives are now offered.

The Root Metaphor of the Psyche as an Organism

Multiple theories, such as Chaos Theory, Complexity Theory, Constructivist Developmental Theory and Self-determination Theory have emerged to deal with the complexity and dynamism of phenomena. These theoretical approaches are consistent with organismic and contextualist worldviews.

Self-determination theory is a motivational theory based on the root metaphor of an organism (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000). The philosophical perspective of organicism and contextualism is closely related to pragmatism. It has a long history that covers the works of Plato, William James, Jean Piaget, John Dewey, and the humanist psychology movement that began in the 1960s. Sheldon, Williams and Joiner (2003) describe three key tenets of the organismic perspective underpinning self-determination theory:

1. Humans are active rather than reactive, proactive, selecting incentives for which to strive.
2. A natural integrative tendency exists within all living organisms, providing them with the potential to reach new levels of expression and functioning.
3. Life is generally dialectical, that is, an environmental challenge (thesis) is followed by an organismic response (antithesis), followed by a new order within the organism (synthesis).

According to self-determination theory, people seek out optimal challenges to master and integrate new experiences. They are engaged in a developmental process that is intrinsic to their nature and is characterised by the tendency toward a more elaborate and extensive organisation. The self develops through a dialectic between intrinsic needs and interaction with the environment.

Sheldon et al. (2003) describe five important features of self-determination theory. This theory (a) has a humanistic orientation supported by rigorous quantitative experimental research; (b) makes positive assumptions about human nature and propensities while explaining how negative outcomes may also occur; (c) assumes that people, in order to thrive, must meet three psychological needs — autonomy, competence and relatedness; (d) focuses on people's struggle to feel greater self-ownership of motivated behaviour; and (e) explains how authorities and practitioners can best motivate subordinates and clients so that they internalise suggested behaviours and self-regulate them.

Self-determination theory incorporates the well-known motivational constructs of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation refers to the performance of an activity in order to maintain some separable outcome. On the other hand, *intrinsic* motivation refers to performing an activity for the inherent satisfaction of the activity itself. Ryan and Deci (2000) claim that, unlike some perspectives that view extrinsically motivated behaviour as always nonautonomous, self-determination theory proposes that extrinsic motivation can vary greatly in its relative autonomy. That is,

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people can “take in” something that is external to them and ultimately experience it as their own. For example, a child can come to value the regulations (e.g., work habits) of her parents and experience them as her own.

Internalisation refers to a person “taking in” a value or regulation. To extend the organic metaphor, consider a person eating a Thai green curry. The curry is on the outside of the organism and it is then internalised. *Integration* refers to the further transformation of that regulation into one’s own so that, subsequently, it will emanate from their sense of self. To return to the green curry example, it is ultimately digested and metabolised to become part of the life-system of the organism. It has gone from being a green curry to being experienced as part of the person. In other words, it is integrated.

Self-determination theory elaborates the distinction of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation along the “perceived locus of causality” dimension. Sheldon and Elliot (1998) used perceived locus of causality to assert that not all personal goals are personal. The perceived locus of causality dimension is an expanded version of internal and external locus of control (DeCharms, 1968). The external aspect linked to extrinsic motivation is viewed in degrees of autonomy. Based on self-determination theory, Sheldon and Elliot (1998) describe four reasons people may have for striving towards personal goals.

1. External: striving because somebody else wants you to, or thinks you ought to, or because you’ll get something from somebody if you do.
2. Introjected: striving because you would feel ashamed, guilty or anxious if you did not pursue the goal. Rather than striving just because someone else thinks you ought to, you feel that you ought to strive for that goal.
3. Identified: striving because you really believe that it is an important goal to have. Although others may have taught this goal to you, you now endorse it freely and value it wholeheartedly.
4. Intrinsic: striving because of the fun, enjoyment and so on that the goal provides you. While there may be many good reasons to strive for the goal, the primary “reason” is simply your interest in the experience itself.

The Work–Life Management Model

We will now present a work–life management model, using the root metaphor of an organism in a changing environment, and the theoretical framework of self-determination theory (including the concepts of internalisation, integration, external, introjected, identified and intrinsic strivings).

The Work–Life Management Model is based on self-determination theory, emphasising an autonomous self proactively managing its life. The model draws on insights from the self-management (Hughes & Scott, 1998; King, 2001; Lorig & Holman, 2003) and life-management literatures (Freund

& Baltes, 2002; Smith, 1999). It simultaneously recognises intrapersonal, environmental and developmental issues; that is, a person exists in changing environments and they develop over time through interaction with these environments. These environments include workplace and home. The Work–Life Management Model, structured deliberately around the acronym MANAGER, is proposed as an organising framework for coaching practice. Each of the seven domains within the model are areas for consideration within coaching, and may include an array of techniques rather than a single technique.

The model is designed to be conceptually coherent, allowing practitioners to incorporate evidence-based techniques from the behavioural sciences. Moreover, unlike many individualistic approaches to coaching, the model emphasises the environment. It examines how work and home environments meet needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness for the individual. The seven domains of the Work–Life Management Model are as follows:

1. M = mindfulness
2. A = acceptance
3. N = nurturing needs
4. A = authenticity
5. G = goals, actions and time management
6. E = environmental opportunities and threats
7. R = responsibility.

The M of the MANAGER acronym is for mindfulness. Mindfulness refers to how individuals examine their own thinking, emotions and behaviour while it is occurring. Based on principles drawn from Vispassana or Mindfulness meditation (Feldman, 2001), this approach has recently become the central focus of several therapeutic techniques. Mindfulness is conceptually related to the intrapersonal component of emotional intelligence.

Brown and Ryan (2003) assert that mindfulness allows individuals to disengage from unhealthy thoughts and habits, hence fostering informed and self-endorsed behavioural regulation that is important to well-being enhancement. Self-determination theory posits that an open awareness (mindfulness) may be very important in facilitating the choice of behaviours that are consistent with one's needs, values and interests (related to nurturing needs and authenticity of MANAGER). Hence, for coach practitioners working within the MANAGER framework, developing mindfulness skills is central. Mindfulness meditation (Feldman, 2001) is a key practice that will assist, but there are many other related techniques that may be used. Important to employers, mindfulness can occur in daily activity at work. It is not just a practice for retreat from daily hassles of contemporary society. For evidence-based coach practitioners, the recently developed Mindful Awareness Attention Scale (Brown & Ryan, 2003) provides a useful way of evaluating progress.



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The first A of MANAGER corresponds to the ability of individuals to accept themselves and their situation. In the western world, there is a pervasive emphasis on changing, improving, and thinking that the situation could be better. While these endeavours are no doubt useful, a person who cannot gain a clear view of where they currently are may then find it difficult to change to a different situation. The argument is not that one must say they are an alcoholic or accept a diagnosis before they can recover. Rather, acceptance connotes that a clear view of reality is useful prior to the change process. Mindfulness relates to acceptance as being present to the current situation and environment. To extend the organismic metaphor of self-determination theory, one must know and accept their environment or they will not survive. Interestingly, two popular writers currently address these very issues. McGraw (1999) asks us “to get real”, while Johnson (1998) likens the change process to the experience of a mouse whose cheese has been moved. The more adaptive mouse is quicker to accept that change has occurred.

The N of MANAGER refers to nurturing needs. In terms of self-determination theory, there are three primary psychological needs: competency, autonomy and relatedness. Covey (1989) refers to the production/production capacity balance, and the notion of “sharpening the saw”. While these are mechanistic metaphors similar to “recharging the batteries”, organic metaphors capture the essence of this notion. An organism requires nutrients for survival and appropriate environments to thrive. The most commonsense notion, which is indeed an organic metaphor, is “fitness”. How fit are you? How well adapted are you to your physical, social and psychological environment? How well does your environment meet your psychological needs of competency, autonomy and relatedness? (Sheldon et al., 1996). There are numerous techniques that a coach practitioner may use to include this as part of a coaching process. One may ask how is this evidence based? The increasing empirical evidence of the relationship between need-satisfaction and psychological wellbeing is certainly an answer (Sheldon et al., 2003).

The second A of MANAGER corresponds to authenticity, emphasising the importance of being authentic to one’s personal values. There is an increasing empirical literature in this area (also being popularised by prominent psychologists within the positive psychology movement (see for example, Seligman, 2002). Spence, Oades and Caputi (2004) examine relationships between goal self-integration (authenticity), trait emotional intelligence and subjective wellbeing. Similarly, McGregor and Little (1998) provide evidence for a second dimension in understanding goals. These researchers argue that the emphasis of goal research has largely been on attainment, with neglect of the meaning that goals have to people. Popular goal-setting approaches include the well-known SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, timeframed) goal used in coaching circles. This approach to goals pays scant attention to notions of meaning and

authenticity. A focus on authenticity moves the focus of the coach from the “how” of the goal to the “why” of the goal.

Waterman (1993) describes two conceptions of happiness: (a) personal expressiveness (eudaimonia), more popularly known as behaving in ways consistent with the “true self” (daimon); and (b) hedonic enjoyment, seeking of pleasure and avoidance of pain. The Authenticity of MANAGER refers more to the former. However, from an organic and evolutionary perspective, as most pleasure and pain occurs for an evolutionary reason, this approach does not neglect the latter.

While many coach practitioners are likely to examine core values, many coaching processes may neglect this as an organising framework. A coaching approach using MANAGER will place values as a central motif throughout the coaching process. From an employer’s perspective, the question becomes how do I enable my employees to be authentic and productive?

The G of MANAGER corresponds to the ubiquitous “goal” of human striving, closely linked to smaller actions and ways of managing time to achieve these actions. This is consistent with an organismic perspective: that humans are active, choosing incentives for which to strive. Hence, while acceptance has been underlined, accepting reality does not equate to being passive. The environment is dynamic; therefore an organism must also be to survive and thrive. Time management is important, as environmental opportunities that assist goal-attainment and need-satisfaction are often time-limited. Three decades of empirical evidence demonstrates that goal-setting increases attainment and commitment to tasks. Recently, there is evidence within the self-determination literature that only autonomous goals lead to wellbeing (Sheldon et al., 2003).

Coach practitioners are likely to be well-versed in goal-setting and time-management practices. However, how useful is the rational, linear and design-based mechanistic approach to personal goals when the environmental is highly unstable? The process of self-regulation and homeostasis is best exemplified by organisms rather than by machines. However, many of the coaching models used for self-regulation are ironically machine-based. The same question can be asked of organisations in their strategic planning processes (Johnson & Scholes, 2002). The challenge from organismic-based approaches and evolutionary metaphors is how adaptive are the goals or strategies being set? This question is different to: How realistic is the goal? In terms of self-determination theory, the question also becomes: Will this goal be consistent with your personal relative levels of needs in autonomy, competence and relatedness? How does the plan incorporate feedback from the environment; how does it become a non-linear process, rather than assuming that goal-striving is a linear process?

The E of MANAGER corresponds to environmental opportunities and threats. Consistent with self-determination, the environment may provide threats or opportunities to the structure and function of the organism.



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Applying the dialectic, coaching may examine how an external challenge or threat will require a response by the person. This response effectively changes the person (organism), so that they become a more complex organism.

The well-known SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis incorporates external opportunities and threats for the organisation or business. Based on an organismic metaphor, the organisation is viewed within its environment. In the same way, a person and their goals/needs exist within an environment. Rather than using the mechanistic, rational and linear design process, a person will continually scan environments (including workplaces) for opportunities and threats to their needs and goals. The coach practitioner using MANAGER will assist the individual to develop these skills of scanning the environment for opportunities and threats. Some individuals are good at one or the other. For example, scanning for threats will increase the likelihood of survival, whereas scanning for opportunities will increase the likelihood of thriving.

An important related issue (an organic metaphor) is the notion of growth. To take a new opportunity requires resources. Consequently, it is important for coaches to assist the coachee to identify which opportunities to forgo, when to grow and when to remain stable.

The R of MANAGER corresponds to responsibility. It refers to how individuals take responsibility for themselves and others, how they recognise and embrace their ability to be self-determined. Butler-Bowdon's (2001) review of self-help research underscores the motif of personal responsibility within the success literatures. For the coaching practitioner, there is no simple technique that is likely to achieve this within the person. Some clients may already have high levels of personal responsibility; others may wane in this area when under stress. Self-determination, self-governance or autonomy may be unfamiliar experiences for many. Hence, a coach practitioner using MANAGER will address these issues explicitly over time. Likewise for supervisors, team leaders and managers, there are numerous leadership models that address the issue of how much autonomy to give staff and in which situations. The same issue occurs within the coaching relationship — how much autonomy is the person willing and able to have, and how is this addressed within coaching?

Integrated Work and Life Self

Work-life balance is a well-known concept in human resource and behavioural science circles (Amundson, 2001; Birch & Paul, 2003; Caproni, 1997; Hobson, Delunas, & Kesie, 2001; Perrons, 2003; Tausig & Fenwick, 2001). A simple Internet search using google.com in July 2003 revealed 146,000 hits for the words "work-life balance". This result is more than four times the hits gained for the words "work-life integration" (Jones, 2003). This finding underscores how pervasive the concept of balance is in thinking about work and life. The balance concept suggests that a certain amount

and effort of work is appropriate and this should be balanced or in some way a “healthy” ratio to work. Stated more concretely, it is often asserted that people must make sure they have time for family and leisure, limit hours at the office and not bring work home. There are several important underlying assumptions. These assumptions are:

- > Workplace and home life are physically separate.
- > Work is primarily performed as an employee (Kiyosaki & Lechter, 1998).
- > Life and work are separate.

In terms of self-determination theory, work–life integration posits that work and personal life are integrated to maximise basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness. *Integration* refers to the further transformation of that regulation into one’s own so that, subsequently, it will emanate from one’s sense of self. In this way, work feels like self. This is not to say that the vast majority of the workforce experiences work in this way. Rather, the concept of integration may ultimately be more useful than that of balance. The underlying assumptions of this approach are:

- > The workplace and home life may be closely integrated physically or in terms of communication (e.g., working from home with flexible work hours).
- > Work may be performed on a contract basis or as a business, rather than as an employee.
- > Work and life are integrated to meet the psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness.

Consistent with self-determination theory, the concept of work–life integration is itself a synthesis, part of a dialectical process. That is, rather than balancing work and life, work–life integrates both perspectives at a higher order. This notion is similar to the example of left-wing versus right-wing political perspectives, which may be viewed as thesis and antithesis. A synthesis may be “the political spectrum” which incorporates both. While the authors do not wish to portray work–life balance initiatives as fruitless (Nord, Fox, Phoenix, & Viano, 2002; Perrons, 2003), work–life integration is likely to bring longer-term changes to a person’s wellbeing.

We have argued that internalisation refers to people “taking in” a value or regulation. Integration is a further transformation of that regulation such that it will emanate from their sense of self. Hence, work–life integration can be defined even more specifically in terms of self-determination with reference to both internalisation and integration. An individual may internalise a work-related value or regulation. However, full work–life integration means that the regulation becomes one’s own, an identified goal that emanates from self. That is not to say that ruthless employers should be excited by the potential to regulate the psyche of their employees. As self-determination theory and the Work–Life Management Model emphasise autonomy, this would be inconsistent with the approach. The aim of the

work–life integration is the nurturing of the psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness. If the dialectic of work and life are not meeting these needs, it follows that successful work–life integration has not been achieved. Unlike work–life balance in which work may provide a sense of competence, and home life a sense of autonomy and relatedness, work–life integration will mean that all needs are met as the perceived separateness of work and life diminishes.

Conclusion

Metatheories and root metaphors we choose for coaching research and practice are important. Self-determination theory provides an example of one metatheory that has utility due to its root metaphor consistent with adapting to changing environments. The MANAGER model and the construct of work–life integration, based on the theory and evidence of self-determination theory, are preliminary attempts to develop a fertile ground for a theoretically coherent and evidence-based coaching practice.

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