Coaching Effectiveness in Leadership:

A Comparative Analysis on Constructed Coaching Variants

This paper does not repeat or summarise my thesis. Instead, it develops a parallel line of thinking that could not be explored there in detail. By moving away from model-based comparisons and focusing on functional characteristics, the paper aims to offer a clearer and more practical way of thinking about coaching effectiveness in leadership contexts.

In recent years, coaching has become a widely used tool in leadership development. Many organisations invest time and resources in coaching because they expect it to improve leadership effectiveness, decision-making, and employee engagement. Even though coaching is used more and more often, it is not always clear how and why it creates value, especially when different coaching approaches are compared.

In academic and professional discussions, coaching is usually described through well-known models or schools, such as Solution-Focused, Gestalt, or goal-oriented coaching. These approaches are often presented as clearly defined methods with their own theoretical background. However, in real leadership coaching practice, this separation is not always so clear. Coaches rarely work with one single approach. Instead, they tend to combine different elements and adapt their style to the situation, the leader, and the specific goal of the coaching process. This practical reality also appeared during the writing of my thesis, which examined coaching as a path to effective leadership with a focus on Gestalt and Solution-Focused coaching. While the thesis explored these approaches in detail and included qualitative insights from coaching practice, it also showed a limitation: in everyday coaching situations, approaches are often mixed, which makes it difficult to compare them strictly based on their theoretical labels.

During the research process of my thesis, another way of thinking about coaching started to develop. Although this idea did not fit directly into the scope of the thesis in a structured form, it influenced how I looked at coaching effectiveness. Thinking about coaching in terms of observable and potentially measurable elements helped me interpret both the theoretical material and the practical examples more clearly, even if this perspective remained in the background during the writing.

Based on this insight, this paper takes a different approach. Instead of comparing coaching schools or models, it focuses on constructed coaching variants. Coaching is treated here as a process that can be described through observable characteristics, such as the number and type of questions, the amount of speaking time given to the coachee, the level of structure in the session, and the number of concrete action points that emerge.

The main aim of this paper is to examine whether different coaching variants can be considered equally effective when they are compared using the same set of measurable attributes. The assumption behind this approach is that coaching effectiveness does not depend only on the chosen model, but on how different elements are combined during the coaching interaction.

Conceptual Assumptions: Coaching as a Measurable Object

The analysis in this paper is based on a small number of explicit assumptions. These assumptions define the analytical scope and make the comparison of different coaching variants possible without relying on established coaching schools.

<u>Coaching as a bounded process</u>

- A coaching session is a time-bound interaction with defined roles.
- The interaction unfolds through observable behaviours (speaking, questioning, reflecting, deciding).
- Subjective experience is acknowledged but not the focus of measurement.

<u>Coaching variants as analytical objects</u>

- Each coaching variant is treated as a constructed object of analysis.
- A variant is defined by the configuration of its elements, not by its theoretical label.
- Variants may combine elements from different coaching approaches.

<u>Attributes</u>

Attributes describe observable features of a coaching session.
Examples include:

- number of questions,
- ratio of open vs. closed questions,
- coachee speaking time,
- level of structure,
- number of action points.

Attributes are selected for comparability, not for theoretical completeness.

<u>Measurability</u>

- Measurability is understood as comparability across variants.
- Numerical values indicate tendencies rather than precise measurements.
- The aim is structured comparison, not full objectivity.

<u>Effectiveness</u>

Effectiveness is defined functionally and contextually.
Leadership-relevant indicators include:

- clarity of focus,
- depth of reflection,
- commitment to action,
- perceived usefulness.

No single universal effectiveness metric is assumed.

<u>Scope and limitations</u>

- The framework is exploratory and non-normative.
- It does not rank coaching variants or claim superiority.
- The focus is on structural comparability, not outcome prediction.

Method: Constructing Coaching Variants

Rationale for Constructed Variants

- Real-life coaching practice is typically hybrid and adaptive.
- Coaches combine elements from multiple approaches rather than applying one model rigidly.
- Comparing predefined schools would therefore not reflect actual coaching practice.
- Constructed variants allow analytical focus on *how coaching is done*, not *what it is called*.

Principles of Variant Construction

- Each variant represents a plausible coaching configuration.
- Variants are not ideal types, but simplified analytical representations.
- Each variant differs from others in at least one key attribute.
- No variant is designed to be inherently "better" or "worse"

Sources of the Variants

Variants are derived from:

- commonly used coaching practices,
- elements of Gestalt, solution-focused, goal-oriented, and integrative coaching,
- patterns observed during leadership coaching discussions and training contexts.

Theoretical labels are intentionally avoided in naming the variants.

Level of Analysis

- The unit of analysis is a typical coaching session.
- Attribute values represent approximate tendencies, not exact measurements.
- Values are illustrative and used for comparison purposes only.

Selection of Attributes

The following criteria guided attribute selection:

- observability during a coaching session,
- relevance to leadership coaching,
- suitability for comparison across variants.

Selected attributes include:

- number of coach questions per session,
- proportion of open questions,
- coachee speaking time ratio,
- number of reflective interventions by the coach,
- number of explicit action points,
- level of structural guidance (low–high).

Interpretation of Values

- Numerical values indicate relative emphasis, not precision.
- Differences between variants are interpreted qualitatively.
- The focus is on patterns across attributes, not single indicators.

This methodological approach enables the construction of a comparative table in which coaching variants can be examined side by side based on shared attributes.

Table 1 – Constructed Coaching Variants and Attributes

Based on the conceptual assumptions and methodological principles outlined above, a set of constructed coaching variants was developed. Each variant represents a plausible configuration of a coaching session, defined through the same set of measurable attributes. The purpose of the table is not to evaluate or rank these variants, but to make structural differences and similarities visible in a comparable format.

Constructed Coaching Variant	Coach Questions (n)	Open Questions (%)	Coachee Talk Time (%)	Reflective Interventions (n)	Action Points (n)	Structure Level (1–5)
Minimal Question Coaching	10	95	85	3	2	2
Action-Oriented Coaching	16	65	60	2	6	4
Reflection-Centred Coaching	12	90	82	7	2	2
Rapid Solution Coaching	14	70	65	3	5	3
Highly Structured Goal Coaching	18	60	58	3	7	5
Dialogic Deep Coaching	13	98	88	6	1	2
Balanced Hybrid Coaching	15	80	70	4	4	3
Feedback-Driven Coaching	11	55	60	2	5	4
Exploratory Leadership Coaching	14	85	78	5	3	3
Adaptive Integrative Coaching	14	85	72	5	4	3
Presence-Based Coaching	9	92	86	6	1	1
Performance-Focused Coaching	17	65	62	2	6	4

<u>Interpretation Notes</u>

- Values represent *typical tendencies* within a coaching session.
- Numbers are illustrative and used to enable comparison.
- Each variant differs from others in at least one attribute.
- No variant is treated as a reference or benchmark.

<u>Observations</u>

- High coachee talk time appears in both low-structure and medium-structure variants.
- A higher number of action points often correlates with increased structure, but not with reduced reflection.
- Variants with fewer questions can still show high reflective intensity.
- Structurally different variants may display similar overall effectiveness profiles when viewed across multiple attributes.

This table provides the empirical basis for the comparative analysis in the following section, where patterns across variants are examined in relation to leadership-relevant effectiveness.

Comparative Analysis

This section highlights key comparative patterns across the constructed coaching variants based on the attributes presented in Table 1. The analysis focuses on structural tendencies rather than individual variants.

Structural Diversity

Coaching variants differ substantially in structure level (1–5).
High structure is associated with:

- higher number of action points,
- slightly lower coachee talk time.

Low-structure variants show:

- higher coachee speaking ratios,
- fewer explicit action commitments.

Questioning Patterns

High proportion of open questions appears across:

- reflective,
- dialogic,
- presence-based variants.

A higher number of questions does not automatically increase:

- depth of reflection,
- coachee engagement.

Fewer, well-placed questions can coincide with:

- high coachee talk time,
- strong reflective intensity.

Reflection vs. Action

Reflective interventions and action points do not show a linear trade-off.

Some variants combine:

- moderate reflection,
- moderate action output.

Deep reflective variants often compensate:

- fewer action points with
- increased insight and awareness.

Coachee Participation

Coachee talk time remains high across most variants.
Reduced coachee talk time appears mainly in:

- highly structured,
- performance-focused configurations.

High coachee participation is not limited to any single structural level.

Functional Effectiveness

Different attribute configurations can support:

- clarity,
- reflection,
- commitment to action.

No single attribute dominates effectiveness. Effectiveness emerges from attribute combinations, not isolated metrics.

Comparative Insight

- Variants with distinct internal logic can show similar effectiveness profiles.
- Coaching effectiveness appears configuration-dependent rather than model-dependent.
- This supports the assumption of functional equivalence across structurally different coaching variants.

As a conclusion, this paper examined coaching effectiveness from a perspective that goes beyond traditional coaching models. By constructing coaching variants and describing them through measurable attributes, the analysis showed that coaching processes can differ in structure, emphasis, and interaction style, while still being similarly useful in leadership contexts.

This line of thinking developed during the process of writing my thesis, which focused on Gestalt and Solution-Focused coaching. Although this approach could not be included there in an

explicit and systematic way, it influenced how I interpreted coaching practice throughout the thesis research. Working with different coaching approaches made it clear to me that in real situations coaches rarely follow one method strictly. Instead, they adjust their way of working based on the leader, the situation, and the goal of the coaching process.

As a final result, I arrived at a similar conclusion as in my thesis: coaching effectiveness does not depend on one specific model or school. Rather, it depends on how certain elements—such as awareness, questioning, reflection, structure, and action—are combined during the coaching process. Different configurations can lead to similar outcomes if they support the leader's reflection and development in a meaningful way.

Overall, this paper reinforced my understanding that coaching in leadership is a flexible and adaptive practice. Looking at coaching through measurable attributes helped clarify why different coaching approaches can all be effective, even if they look very different on the surface. From my perspective, this confirms that coaching models should be understood as tools and reference points, not as fixed rules, and that effectiveness lies in how they are used in practice.