

COGNITIVE

BEHAVIOURAL COACHING IN BUSINESS – SELECTED TECHNIQUES

ABSTRACT

The article presents the main principles and techniques of the cognitive behavioural approach applied to executive coaching. This is an evidence based approach. In addition, the article highlights two workbased coaching models: PRACTICE Model (developed by Professor Stephen Palmer PhD) and Video Coaching Competence (developed by Anna Syrek-Kosowska, PhD). The use of techniques is demonstrated in case studies.

Key words

cognitive behavioural coaching, PRACTICE model, Video Coaching Competence, coaching psychology

INTRODUCTION

Coaching has stopped being solely a „new trend” and has become a standard developmental method in business organizations, entrenching itself in the field of broadly understood helping profession (e.g. life coaching). As a result of this process, coaches are faced with entirely new challenges. This is the end of what might be called „the era of fireworks”, since the substantial amount of clients from business circles (among others managers, HR specialists, trainers and consultants) have underpinned their theoretical knowledge of coaching with personal experience either as coaches or clients (coachees). There is an increasing number of knowledgeable clients and it is not

sufficient for the coach only knowing a few coaching techniques. Therefore, one of the greatest challenges for the coach is building one's own evidence based coaching practice and learning new effective coaching models, techniques and tools that will improve the quality of the coaching process.

For many years now, international business circles and practicing coaches have acknowledged the Coaching Psychology based on reliable and verified psychological knowledge (Palmer, Whybrow 2007). Coaching Psychology may be described as an evidence based approach that uses psychological knowledge and methods to support competence development, enhance effectiveness in personal and/or professional life and to stimulate satisfaction from one's activity (Smółka 2009: 48).

There are many different approaches, models and methods of coaching used within Coaching Psychology. Business coaching can be considered as a developmental process and can be provided to employees up to senior management levels (Marciniak 2009). Cognitive Behavioural Coaching (CBC) can be applied successfully to business fields as it is structured and has a number of useful techniques and strategies.

DEVELOPMENT OF COGNITIVE BEHAVIOURAL COACHING

If we listen to the wisdom of the Roman philosophers we will find there many ideas and concepts that are close to the cognitive behavioural approach such as the words of Socrates' pupil Epictetus from Hierapolis (Enchiridion):

Men are disturbed, not by things, but by the principles and notions which they form concerning things (...) When therefore we are hindered, or disturbed, or grieved, let us never attribute it to others, but to ourselves; that is, to our own principles.

In these ideas, we find one of the main tenets of cognitive psychology which includes the cognitive processes (such as memory, perception, language formation, different brain functions) and cognitive therapy, which stresses the dominant role of thinking styles in the formation of human emotions and actions. Most coaches have probably observed the impact of clients' thinking styles and event interpretations (Peltier 2005).

The cognitive behavioural coaching approach is based on cognitive psychology theory (Ellis 1962; Beck 1967, 1976; Strelau 2000; Peltier 2005), behavioural theory (Watson, Rayner 1920; Wolpe, Lazarus 1966; Marks 1969; Rachman, Teasdale 1969; Lazarus 1971, 1981; Strelau 2000; Peltier 2005), Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (Ellis 1962), Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (Curwen et al. 2000), Solution Focused Approach (Brendan et al. 2007) and a range of cognitive behavioural techniques for working with coachees in individual and group settings (Palmer, Szymańska 2007; Williams et al. 2010).

Since the early 1990s, Cognitive Behavioural Coaching has been successfully used by coaches in Great Britain for stress management, life-, business-, executive- or health coaching (Palmer, Szymańska 2007). Currently in Poland the CBC approach is not widely used, however, due to its effectiveness its application will increase over the next decade.

MAIN THEORETICAL ASSUMPTIONS

Cognitive Behavioural Coaching (CBC) is a collaborative approach where the coachee works towards achieving the goals that have been negotiated at the beginning of the process; develops constructive, performance enhancing and helpful thinking patterns; and acquires psychological and practical skills needed for effective performance. This makes it possible for the coachee – upon the completion of the entire process – to become his or her own „self-coach” (Neenan & Palmer 2001a; Gabalewicz-Paul, 2010).

CBC has a two-tier foundation (Palmer & Szymańska 2007):

- coachee has poorly developed problem solving skills or cannot apply them successfully under pressure or stress,
- coachee’s emotions and actions are to a great extent determined by his/her beliefs and opinions about a specific situation or a problem.

Additionally, emotions such as anxiety or fear present in the problematic situation may decrease effectiveness and efficiency of undertaken actions. In the coaching practice, action plans contain problem solving and solution focused strategies that be applied in high pressure and stressful situations. It is especially valuable for example for managers, whose decision making process almost always takes place in such conditions.

STRUCTURE AND PROCESS OF COGNITIVE BEHAVIOURAL COACHING

CBC is especially valuable in executive and workplace coaching since it has a clear and useful structure and organization of the entire process that can be modified in response to client’s or organization’s specific needs or situation.

TABLE 1. COGNITIVE BEHAVIOURAL COACHING: STRUCTURE, ORGANIZATION, ASSUMPTIONS AND BEST PRACTICES

Structure and Organization of Cognitive Behavioural Coaching Process	Assumptions and Best Practices
General goals of the coaching process	Cooperation between coach and client to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solve problems • Achieve possible goals • Acquire skills allowing the client to constructively deal with problems • Modify negative, stress induced thinking ways or patterns • Eliminate negative, self-defeating beliefs • Work out effective action plans • Develop self-coaching skills
Number of sessions in the coaching process	CBC is a time-defined process. Executive and Business coaching: the number of session should be adjusted to the real possibility of achieving the identified goals. Normally: 8 coaching sessions Depending on client’s problem/goal it is possible to complete the coaching process in a fewer number of sessions.
Length of a coaching session	Executive and Business coaching: 30–120 minutes Life coaching: 60 minutes Negotiation of session length: Finding a solution should as far as possible be a factor in determining session length.
1–2 coaching session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Getting to know coachee’s expectations of the coaching • Getting to know coachee’s professional profile • Coach and coachee agree organization and program framework of the coaching process • Coach and coachee define coachee’s experiences under the cognitive behavioural approach (e.g. using the PRACTICE Model see p. 6) • Identifying coaching goals (e.g. SMART technique)
2–4 coaching session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue thinking patterns verification • Concentrate on finding and implementing solutions

2–6 coaching session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concentrate on psychological barriers leading to counterproductive behaviours • Concentrate on particular problems and verify them using CB techniques and tools
1–8 coaching session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completing coaching process – achievement of coachee’s goals
Structure of a coaching session	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Short checking up with the client, e.g. „What’s new?“ 2. Agreeing a session plan, e.g. „What would you like to include in today’s session plan?“ 3. Review of home assignment(s), e.g. „How did you manage with the last assignment(s)?“ 4. Identifying an issue or a problem e.g. „Now, let’s go on to the plan of our session.“ 5. Agreeing home assignments(s). 6. Feedback on the session, e.g. „Any comments on today’s session?“
Coaching assignment(s) in between sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid the term „homework“ since for most people it has negative school connotations • Coachee accepts coaching assignment(s) • Analyze assignment performance and its completion level

Source: based on Palmer and Szymańska (2007).

In the cognitive behavioural coaching, coach should remember that it is important to find and implement the simplest and the most effective solutions to problems based on the law of economy i.e. „apply the least effort to achieve the greatest outcome“ (in analogy to Ockham’s Razor) (see Palmer, Szymańska 2007).

COACHING MODEL FOCUSED ON SOLUTIONS: PRACTICE

CBC takes advantage of many useful models, which structure the coaching process (also self-coaching process) based on developments of cognitive psychology and behaviourism. The most known include: GROW (Passmore 2007), ABCDE (Ellis et al. 1998), G-ABCDEF (Palmer 2002), SPACE (Edgerton, Palmer 2005, Palmer, Szymańska 2007). The seven-step PRACTICE model developed by Palmer (2007) based on earlier work by Wasik (1984) helps to identify psychological and practical goal-blocking obstacles and facilitates the coachee in finding and implementing solutions to their problems. PRACTICE is used in therapy and counselling and meets the requirements of organizational and business coaching with respect to competence development, performance improvement and executive coaching.

TABLE 2. PRACTICE MODEL

Steps	Questions/Actions
1. Problem Identification	What is the problem/case? What would you like to change? Are there any exceptions i.e. the problem ceases to be a problem? How will we know that the situation has improved? Have the things been distorted or is it possible to evaluate the problem/case differently?
2. Realistic, relevant goals (e.g. SMART goals)	What do you want to achieve?
3. Alternative solutions generated	What are the possibilities? Write them down.
4. Consideration of consequences	What may happen? How useful is each of the possible solutions? On a scale 0–10
5. Target the most useful solution	What is (are) the most useful solution(s)?
6. Implementation of the Chosen solution(s)	Go and do it. (Decide on the most reasonable steps.
7. Evaluation	How well did it go? On a scale 0–10. What can you learn from that? Can we end our session here?

Source: Palmer (2007: 73).

Once the coachee has implemented a satisfactory solution in one area, the model might be further used to solve other client's problems. Generally it is important to work at one problem at a time during a session and not to deal with several issues simultaneously.

With more practice, coachees can then use the simplified version of the PRACTICE model (Neenan, Palmer 2001a, 2001b; Palmer, Szymańska 2007):

- **S** – Select problem
- **T** – Target a solution
- **I** – Implement a solution
- **R** – Review outcome

or

- **P** – Problem definition
- **I** – Implement a solution
- **E** – Evaluate outcome

These simple models are useful for quick solution-finding and decision-making, coaching as a management style, shadow coaching or feedback conversations in other development activities e.g. trainings, reviews, 360 Degree Evaluation, etc.

SELECTED COGNITIVE TECHNIQUES

CBC approach delivers many effective coaching techniques that grow from cognitive psychology theory and practice. It is not possible to include all of them in this article. However, coaches maybe familiar with erroneous thinking patterns, Aaron beck called „depressive distortions”, distorted thinking styles (15 thinking patterns developed by McKay, Davis & Fanning), Albert Ellis’ „irrational ideas” or „Kant’s Paradigm” popular with many coaching schools (see: Peltier 2005; Palmer, Szymańska 2007; Gabalewicz-Paul 2010). In coaching they are often described as thinking errors.

In the process of analyzing, conclusion drawing and decision making we are prone to commit typical informational processing errors that that make our decisions and actions less effective. Acquiring the skills of identifying thinking errors during coaching is especially valued by managers, who take many different decisions in quick succession. Table 3 contains the most common thinking errors.

TABLE 3. TYPICAL THINKING ERRORS

Typical thinking errors	Examples
Mind reading/jumping to conclusions	„My manager thinks I’m not good at my job.”
All-or-nothing thinking	„The director always ignores my presentations at meetings.”
Blaming	„It’s all because of the IT Department Director. He should do what I request.”
Personalizing	„If our company’s offer is rejected it will be my fault.”
Fortune-telling	„I am sure they will reject my application for the position.”
Emotional reasoning	„I am so nervous; I know that this notebook will crash down.”
Labelling Generalizing	„I am a hopeless manager.”
Demands Should and must type of thinking	„I have to do more to sell more.”
Magnification or awfulising	„This client has been my worst client ever. He was awful.”
Minimizing	„It’s a poor company if they have promoted me to manager.”

Low frustration tolerance for stress „I cannot stand it anymore.”	„I cannot stand the hard work.”
„Phoneyism” – the belief about being seen by others as a phoney or imposter.	„If I won’t behave properly during this supper, everybody will see through me and will treat me as a phony.”

Source: based on Palmer and Szymańska (2007).

Some coachees experience difficulty separating themselves from their thoughts and are unable to observe their thinking as a separate process that can be deliberately modified. The coach may diagnose the level of this skill by asking the coachee the following questions (Peltier 2005: 155):

- Can you notice what you are thinking and tell me about it?
- Do you sometimes think with words, sentences or in any verbal form?
- When I ask you to think what you are going to do tomorrow, how will you do that?
- Are there any images or words that you see or hear?
- Do you feel things? Do you think about feelings?

If the coach is sure that the coachee can become aware of his/her way of thinking the coach may use additional cognitive techniques that not only develop this skill but also teach the coachee to recognize, control and modify inadequate thinking patterns.

WRITING DOWN ONE’S UNHELPFUL THINKING PATTERNS

The coach asks the coachee to write down his/her thoughts appearing in stressful situations that the coachee perceives as difficult or frustrating. Once thoughts are elicited, the coachee writes down his/her typical erroneous/negative thinking patterns. The technique helps to avoid these mistakes in analogous future situations.

LOOKING FOR EVIDENCE

The coach helps the coachee to verify his/her opinions about his/her behaviour based on feedback from others and to behave in a way that the coachee thinks s/he is not able to function. Small steps – taking even small actions in overcoming reluctance and disbelief in one’s ability to deal with a situation – work best here.

Case study

For many years, Irene has been Corporate Customer Service Manager in a financial institution. Her managers frequently ask her to give presentations to key customers and the company’s Board. She finds each presentation as stressful and she calms

herself down with medication. Nevertheless, she feels awful, believing that she is not fit for public appearances and that everybody can see how nervous and stressed she is. Thus, she avoids situations in which she has to give a presentation. The coaching process gave Irene the opportunity to elicit her negative thinking errors and she decided to participate in an experiment proposed by the coach i.e. video-recording a 3 minute statement. Watching herself speaking, she was positively surprised with her image of a calm and composed person and she verified her old belief. This „small step” was a breakthrough for Irene and allowed her to start building self-confidence and developing other competences.

GUIDED DISCOVERY, SOCRATIC QUESTIONING, ANALYZING THINKING PATTERNS AND ACQUIRING SKILLS TO CHANGE PERFORMANCE INTERFERING THOUGHTS (PITs)

Guided discovery is a process whereby the coach assists the coachee in analyzing thinking patterns and acquiring skills change performance interfering thoughts. It is based on Socratic-like questions, which help the coachee to verify erroneous thinking patterns (adapted Palmer, Szymańska 2007: 101):

- Can your belief be substantiated?
- How does this way of thinking influence you?
- Have you already jumped to conclusions?
- Is there any evidence disproving your belief?
- Do you concentrate on your weaknesses and disregard strengths?
- What are the plusses and minuses of such thinking?
- Do you take some things too seriously?
- Do you use the „All or Nothing” type of thinking?
- Do you apply double standards?
- Do you overrate the possibility of something bad happening?
- Do you fortune tell outcomes instead of trying to influence them?
- Do you mind read?
- Do you expect total perfection?
- What practical strategies can you use to convince yourself of the fallacy of your thinking?

IMAGERY TECHNIQUES

In cognitive behavioural coaching, imagery techniques are used to facilitate work on overcoming problems and achieving goals. They can be used in the following areas: coping in a difficult situation imagery, motivational imagery, time projection imagery,

mastery imagery, guilt-reducing imagery, rational emotive imagery (see: Lazarus 1984; Palmer and Dryden 1995; Palmer & Neenen 1998; Ellis et al. 1998; Palmer et al. 2003; Palmer and Puri 2006; Palmer and Szymańska 2007). In executive and business coaching, the two popular techniques are coping in a difficult situation/challenge imagery and motivational imagery.

COPING IMAGERY

The coachee imagines action that (s)he would take in a situation they perceive as difficult. The imagined behaviour does not need to be perfect, but only adequate in that situation.

The following steps might be used in this technique (Palmer 2008a: 39):

Step 1. The coach and coachee discuss a future situation that the coachee perceives as difficult.

Step 2. The coach and coachee write down (on a piece of paper or flip chart) these aspects of the situation that are the most difficult for the coachee.

Step 3. The coach and coachee agree ways to cope with these difficulties (NOTE: the coach often needs to help coachee in creating new cognitive and behavioural strategies).

Step 4. The coachee takes time to clearly imagine himself/herself in this difficult situation. The coachee slowly imagines dealing with every expected difficulty that may happen. This procedure is repeated 3 to 4 times on the session. Some coachees find it helpful if at the beginning the coach leads them through the exercise. (An audio recording might be prepared and used later in step 5).

Step 5. Step 4 is repeated every day. It is important to agree a specific time of day for the coachee to practice it otherwise (s)he may stop doing it. Coping in a difficult situation imagery might also be used when the coachee gets nervous about future events or situations.

MOTIVATIONAL IMAGERY

Motivational imagery is used when the coachee is not very motivated to achieve their goal. The coachee's task is to imagine his/her future life in two versions (see: Palmer & Neenan 1998). In the first version, the coachee imagines his/her future life when she or he does not take action and achieve the identified goal (e.g. does not delegate and does everything on his/her own; does not change career or start a new relationship).

In the second version, the coachee imagines his/her life after taking action such as changing their career and so on. The impact of taking action is considered in both the short, medium and long-term.

SELECTED BEHAVIOURAL STRATEGIES

The CB coach uses behavioural strategies to help the coachee solve problems, test hypotheses (unverified beliefs), implement effective solutions and evaluate goals.

BEHAVIOURAL EXPERIMENT

First the coach and coachee design a situation in which the coachee is to act. Next, the coachee is recorded (audio and/or video) doing the action and the recording is then played to evaluate the action (the exercise may be part of a coaching session or a separate home assignment).

Case Study

Michael is the customer care manager in an insurance company. The company has been restructured and the customer care department has been turned into a call center with the main task to sell company's financial products. Michael has been given new objectives, among others he has become responsible for arranging meetings with key customers through cold calls. On the coaching session, he identified his greatest problem: bringing the call to a close and setting up a meeting and worked out solutions to that problem. His homework assignment was to implement the solutions in the next 10 calls with customers. Call recordings made it possible to evaluate the effectiveness of the implemented solutions and in the end to achieve the expected goal of 90% of calls with a set sales meeting.

Many coachees are afraid of implementing new solutions - changing old habits can be emotionally stressful. A good idea is to use „behaviourist language” and describe the homework assignment as a planned experiment. This reduces the initial stress and helps the coachee to emotionally distance himself/herself to the new situation. For example, „we are going to plan an experiment during which in your conversation with your boss you will use a different type of arguments...”

VIDEO COACHING COMPETENCE (VCC)¹

VCC, which is a method based on the assumptions of the cognitive behavioural approach and Video Home Training /Video Interaction Guidance, effectively supports development of competences chosen by the coachee (e.g. managerial competence, public speeches and voice production). The method is used in competence coaching and might be an effective tool in executive or life coaching used as a separate module.

¹ Video Coaching Competence is a method developed by Anna Syrek-Kosowska (Centrum Szkoleń i Psychologii Biznesu) to develop competences in executive skills and effectiveness coaching – a more comprehensive study is to be published soon.

Main assumptions of the VCC:

- Dedicated to develop a competence and/or a skill defined by the coachee at the beginning of the coaching process;
- Competence development is a process: it requires a specific number of coaching sessions (normally 5 sessions) and self-coaching work in between sessions monitored by the coach (coachee’s refusal to do self-coaching work makes the VCC ineffective);
- The coachee defines goals to be achieved during the entire process and regularly evaluates his/her progress;
- Competence works is done mainly through video recordings of real life situations, in which chosen competences are used;

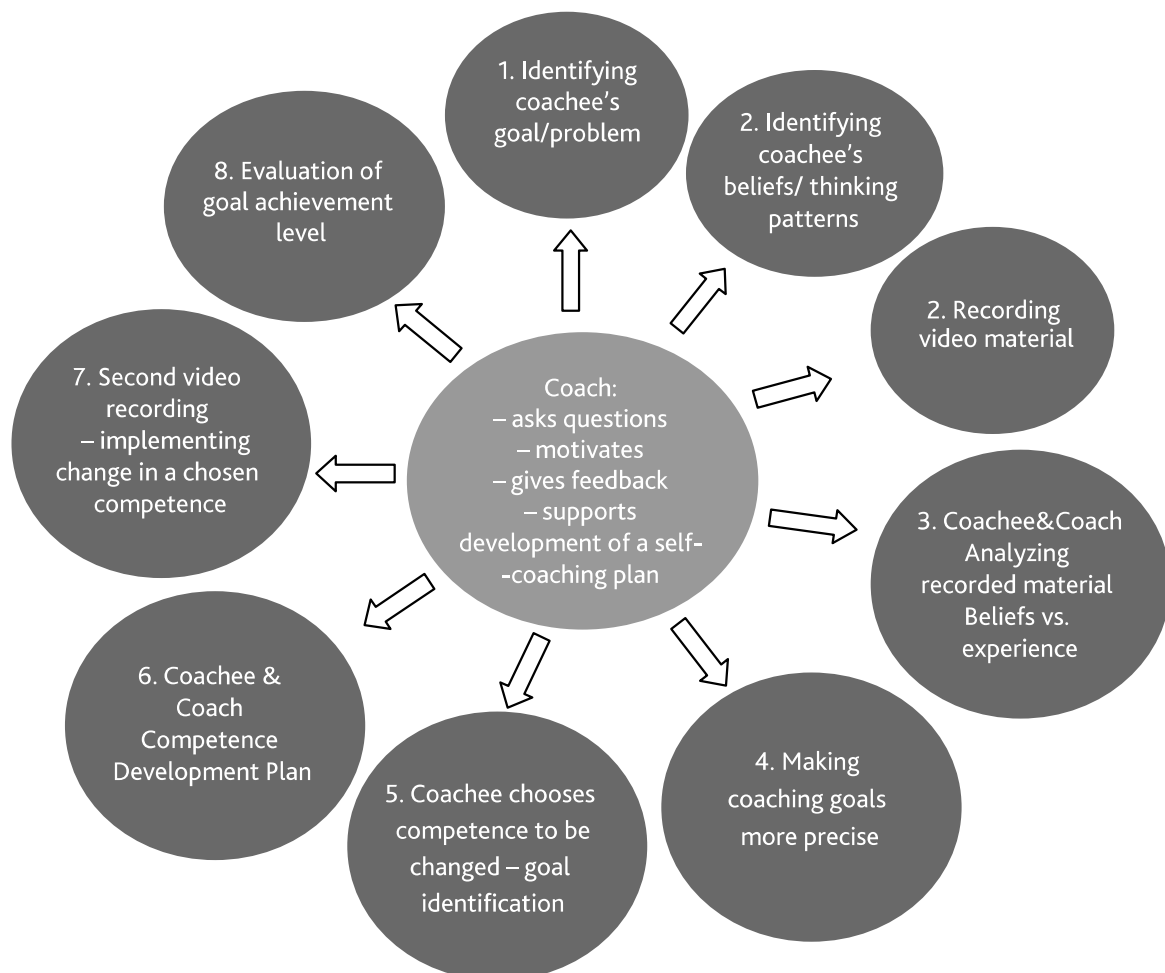


FIGURE 1. VIDEO COACHING COMPETENCE – COACHING SESSION STRUCTURE

Source: Syrek-Kosowska (2008).

- Using video recordings, the coachee verifies his/her beliefs vs. experience, modifies goals and evaluates changes;
- Feedback from the coach is based on coachee's positive resources and is a positive reinforcement;
- The coach monitors coachee's self-coaching (by choosing materials and exercises that are adequate to coachee's competence level, monitoring changes, positively motivating change in between sessions through e-coaching).

The coaching programs that are based on the VCC are very popular with managers mainly because of the maximum individualization of the competence development process, high effectiveness and the fact that implemented changes have a direct impact on professional life.

CHANGE PROCESS

There are several steps in the coachee change process during CBC (Palmer, Szymańska 2007: 106):

1. Acquiring and mastering practical skills, problem solving skills based on emotions and finding solutions skills;
2. Identifying, questioning and changing inflexible behaviour, approach and views that hamper actions and cause stress;
3. Practicing flexible thinking in order to be able to produce performance enhancing thoughts, approach and views that reduce stress;
4. Practicing tolerance to high frustration level, greater self-acceptance and increased psychological resistance.

SELF-COACHING

There is a saying that the final goal of every professional coach is to become unemployed, hence every coachee might have a chance to become their own coach. CBC is instrumental in shaping skills necessary in self-coaching such as: monitoring one's thinking styles, defining strengths and weaknesses, modifying negative thinking patterns and implementing alternative behaviours. Having all these, the coachee may successfully solve problems and achieve desired goals (Gabalewicz-Paul 2010).

BIBLIOCOACHING

Still during the coaching process, the coach may facilitate coachee's self development by motivating him/her to read appropriate books, training materials, watch DVDs or listen to recordings.

The coach may support coachee's self-coaching by:

- Helping him/her in choosing materials adequate to problems,
- Being flexible with respect to the form and scope of home assignments and adjusting them to coachee's actual abilities²,
- Monitoring self-developmental behaviour through different forms of e-coaching (i.e. motivating e-mails/text messages),
- Positive feedback.

CONCLUSIONS

Cognitive Behavioural Coaching is one solution to executive and business coaching, which by definition focuses on measurable goals and seeks quick competence improvement in a limited time period and for limited financial means. In addition, since CBC is psycho-educational it equips coachees with skills necessary for becoming their own coaches (self-coaches). Many companies that are mainly interested in employee development see CBC's strengths at modelling responsibility for achieving goals and on-going self-development, especially for managers, as added value. There are many CB coaching techniques and this paper included a small but useful range (for additional techniques see: Palmer, Whybrow 2007; Palmer 2008b; Szymańska 2008; Palmer 2009; Williams et al. 2010).

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² From a practical point of view, the coachees (especially managers) find it the most difficult to find time to use materials and practice in between sessions. The true challenge for the coach is to choose such materials and self-coaching form so that the coachee will be able to practice without jeopardizing his/her life organization. Small steps approach is the best option here. It maintains auto-motivation, which is the key to success after the coach-coachee relation is finished.

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