COACHING STYLE IN MANAGEMENT EDUCATOR'S WORK WITH C-LEVEL MBA PARTICIPANTS

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ABSTRACT

This article substantiates a coaching style of teaching as an effective approach in executive MBA (C-level) programs. It introduces the CQA-Executive (Content–Question–Action) model and a learning micro-cycle tailored to executives' profiles, characterised by high expertise and selectivity, limited time and opportunity cost, ROI orientation, and sensitivity to practical value and confidentiality. The model sequences concise expert input with reflective, managerial questioning that anchors concepts in participants' strategic challenges, followed by application-in-action and formative feedback. A typology of questions is specified (goal clarification, experience questions, assumption-surfacing, options generation, commitment-to-action, reflective questions). Class activities include decision labs, peer-advisory triads, case sprints, and reflective journaling. Assessment integrates transparent success criteria and three-layer feedback (feed up, feedback, feed forward) with transfer metrics (30–60–90-day action plans, speed of decision-making, accountability check-ins, self-assessment of effectiveness). The framework aligns with theories of adult, experiential, and reflective learning, as well as with Ukrainian scholarship on educational coaching. Expected benefits include

autonomy support, stronger self-efficacy, higher engagement, and faster decisions with improved workplace transfer. Boundary conditions, faculty development needs, and assessment alignment are discussed. The paper presents a rigorous yet pragmatic approach for integrating coaching micro-practices into executive-level lectures, cases, and projects, without compromising overall academic standards or curricular coherence.

***Keywords:** executive MBA; coaching style of teaching; reflective questioning; andragogy; formative assessment.*

INTRODUCTION

The demand for active, responsible, and self-directed learning in management programs is steadily increasing due to the rapid volatility of managerial contexts, the need to acquire and apply new knowledge, and the continuous enhancement of collaboration and leadership skills. In C-level MBA (executive MBA) programs, the priority is the rapid conversion of knowledge into the capacity to make managerial decisions with measurable business impact and controlled risks. Traditional lecture formats ensure content coverage but are inferior in fostering learner engagement, managerial reflection, and the transfer of acquired practices to complex managerial contexts. A coaching style – combining concise expert input with reflective questioning and application-in-action – aligns with the logic of adult education: lifelong learning and self-education and subject-to-subject interactions; it also meets the requirements of professional development for managers with substantial managerial experience

and addresses the beliefs of successful people-learners and their involvement in the learning process.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies conceive coaching as a dialogue (Whitmore, 2017) that unlocks the potential of students (van Nieuwerburgh, 2012) through purposeful questions and accountability for action (Cox et al., 2014). A review of the relevant scholarship shows that the foundations of pedagogical, academic, and educational coaching, the coaching as an instrument of innovation and an innovative technology in education and the impact of coaching on educational quality have been examined by has been explored by many researchers.

The theoretical basis of the coaching approach to teaching includes andragogy and adult learning principles: self-direction, relevance, experience (Knowles et al., 2015); experiential learning – Kolb's cycle: the cyclicity of experiencing – reflection – abstract conceptualization – experiment (Kolb, 1984); reflective practice that turns action into knowledge through sense-making in professional learning (Schön, 1983); self-determination (support of autonomy, competence, and relatedness) (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and self-efficacy as the growth of belief in one's ability to cope with a task (Bandura, 1997); the impact of high-quality feedback on achievement (Hattie, 2009; Hattie & Timperley, 2007); problem-based and case-based learning (Barrows, 1996); the practice of Socratic questioning (Paul & Elder, 2007); formative assessment (clarifying the task, feedback, next steps) (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Black & Wiliam, 1998; Sahach et

al, 2024); reflective practices in education (Romanova, 2010); coaching as educational innovation (Kuzan & Hordiienko, 2019; Symodeyko, 2011; Nezhynska & Tymenko, 2017); ensuring quality in education (Chernova et al., 2016; Sydorenko, 2019); instructional/educational coaching (Sydorenko, 2019; Krupnyk, 2024; Bratko, 2022; Moskalov & Lohvys, 2021); broader practices of questioning in education (Walsh & Sattes, 2015).

Educational coaching is viewed as an interactive technology that activates the learner's internal resources and optimises instructor–learner interaction within andragogy (Moskalov & Lohvys, 2021), the experiential learning cycle and reflective practice (Romanova, 2010; Denysova & Kharaghirlo, 2021), self-development (Denysova & Kharaghirlo, 2021), and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Effective feedback has a significant impact on achievement (Hattie, 2009; Hattie & Timperley, 2007), and problem-oriented formats strengthen the transfer of acquired knowledge to work practice (Barrows, 1996).

Educational coaching is often described as an innovative technology that: optimises instructor–learner interaction (Sahach et al., 2024; Kuzan & Hordiienko, 2019; Symodeyko, 2011; Nezhynska & Tymenko, 2017); leverages the power of reflective questioning (Nezhynska & Tymenko, 2017); shapes motivation for learning as a way of obtaining new intellectual experience (Sahach et al., 2024); and enables personalised learning outcomes through the active involvement of learners in the educational process (Romanova, 2010).

Recent reviews of coaching theory and practice in education synthesise effects and outline organisational conditions for success

(Krupnyk, 2024). Conceptual works on educational coaching distinguish academic coaching (achievement of a learner's personal educational goals) (Bratko, 2022), pedagogical coaching (oriented toward personal development), and instructional coaching (focused on the quality of the learner's educational experience) (Sahach et al., 2024), and they detail models of interaction and avenues of influence on the success and engagement of participants in the learning process (Bratko, 2022). At the same time, there is no operationalisation of a coaching style specifically for a C-level audience that accounts for limited time for instructional interventions, the high cost of error, the need for confidentiality, and the expectation of return on investment in learning. For this audience, it is essential to operationalise the integration of concise content design with reflective questioning and subsequent action; precisely such an operationalisation of instructional coaching is missing in the current literature. Typologies of questions that directly address learners' managerial experience and provoke individual and collective thinking in C-level business education are also insufficiently described.

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

The purpose of this research is to design and justify an evidence-based, coaching-style instructional model for C-level MBA learning. The methodology addresses the development of a model suited to executive contexts, enabling participants to experience the approach in ways that maximise perceived usefulness and support autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

Prior work indicates that instructional design is a powerful lever for developing teaching approaches and learner experiences (Moore et al., 2002; Arregi et al., 2025; Wintersberg & Pittich, 2025). Design-based approaches can be understood as both science and art: they enable designers to solve instructional problems through systematic analysis of learning conditions and iterative creation of the required learning experience (Moore et al., 2002), while actively incorporating evidence-based assessment (e.g., Chesnokova & Zyngier, 2024). Educational Design-Based Research (DBR) provides a systematic yet flexible methodology for improving educational practice via iterative cycles of analysis, design, development, and implementation (Wang & Hannafin, 2005).

The authors adapted this methodology to create and refine a pedagogy through iterative cycles in authentic settings. Acting as both researchers and practitioners, the authors worked in real-world environments to develop and adjust context-sensitive models and principles. This shows constructive alignment to ensure coherence among intended learning outcomes (e.g., decision quality, evidence use), learning activities, and assessment. This alignment considered policy drivers related to regulated labour markets (Mospan, 2017), teacher self-development (Żmudzka, 2021), assessment practices (Moskalov & Lohvys, 2021), and blended activity formats for program participants (Sysoiev, 2021).

The instructional model was iteratively refined by embedding two core elements – reflective questioning and micro-cycles into

interactive lecture sessions. Coaching-style practices were piloted in courses taught by the authors at Kyiv-Mohyla Business School (Department of Management of Organizations, NaUKMA), including Personal Development, Corporate Governance, Systems Thinking, Organisational Design, and the Master's Project. Student needs and the instructional model were iteratively tested with participants in the Executive MBA (C-level managers) and the Presidents' MBA (business founders and owners), 2014-2024, when a total of 445 graduates received their Master's diplomas. The programs (and corresponding courses) were typically delivered twice per year – spring and autumn intake, except in 2022 (one intake took place), amounting to 21 intakes in total.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Characteristics of C-level MBA audiences and pedagogical implications. According to the authors' teaching experiences, who are related to 445 C-level MBA program graduates, the authors suggest the following characteristics of the C-level MBA audience and pedagogical implications. Learners in C-level MBA programs have a high level of experience, expertise. This leads to selectivity toward learning content. The learners expect concise, evidence-based content with clear, comprehensible business value that avoids both the "obvious" and terminological overload. Under these conditions, clear, "nuclear" content blocks are needed, supported by visualisation, up-to-date

data, and examples at the level of an executive board or supervisory board.

The limited time that learners can devote to study, and the high opportunity cost, require high instructional density. Such density can be achieved through session design that complements content blocks with blocks of questions and actions, for example, working with cases and feedback blocks. Contextual diversity and confidentiality require safe conditions for "from the field" cases, such as learners' own cases. The need for confidentiality is addressed by non-disclosure agreements, case anonymisation, and peer-to-peer consulting rules, where each participant can act both as a client and as an observer, with the involvement of the instructor-coach. Learners in C-level MBA programs are result-oriented and expect a return on their investment in learning, with quick effects. Meeting such expectations requires detailing action plans to implement selected decisions and clearly formulating metrics to compare expectations with actual results.

For the C-level learners, it is critically important to link concepts, conceptual and mathematical models with practically valuable decisions. It requires constant attention of educators dealing with such a kind audience to approaches to individual and collective decision-making, as well as examples of formal business communication. At the C-level, there is a heightened need for deep reflection on assumptions. Assumptions, especially implicit ones, strongly influence the quality of strategic decisions because their consequences are often delayed and non-obvious. Approaches such as

reflective questions, Socratic questioning, and systematic work with cognitive biases should address this learner need.

The Content–Question–Action–Executive model. The conducted analysis of the characteristics of a C-level managerial audience and pedagogical implications led the authors to suggest **the Content–Question–Action didactic model for Executives (CQA-Executive model).** The model formalises a coaching style for learning as the combination of three integrated elements: content, question, and action.

● Content: concise delivery of the core material with visualisation, examples, and a minimally sufficient theoretical apparatus.

● Question: reflective questioning that ties concepts to participants' experience and personal contexts (individually, in pairs, triads, or in small and large groups).

● Action: application through micro-cases, role-based decisions, and design sprints, followed by formative assessment (clarifying the task, feedback, and next steps).

The model structures a session into three integrated phases. Let us consider, as an example, two academic sessions (90 minutes in total). Content. A 15–20-minute phase within a 90-minute session. At this stage, the instructor can present 1–2 key models, one empirical insight, and one C-level example. It is also important to explain the learning intentions and success criteria to make the expected outcome transparent. This part should not be overloaded

with learning materials to be able to create a learner's understanding in the next phases.

Question. A 25–30-minute phase within the 90-minute session, involving a coaching dialogue in a triad (client – coach – observer), where the learner acts either as a client or as an observer, drawing on the practice of Socratic questioning. Examples of managerial coaching questions, adapted from the general coaching questions (Whitmore, 2017; Cox et al., 2014), which can be applied within this model:

● Goal-focused questions: clarifying goals and success criteria. What strategic dilemma are we solving? What are the KPIs or OKRs, and their time horizon?

● Experience-based questions: eliciting relevant experience of the team or learner. What constraints are present at the board or the regulator? What is the status quo, and what trade-offs are we forced to accept?

● Heuristic questions: surfacing hidden assumptions and cognitive biases. Which assumptions are ordering the solution? Which team biases are related to the decision?

● Options questions: generating alternatives and assessing consequences. What do the alternatives (at least three) look like, including risks and cost implications?

● Commitment questions: What actions should we take, what resources are required, and what barriers exist? What

steps will we implement within one, two, or three months? Who owns the decision? What resources are available? What early warning signals will we monitor? What metrics will we use?

● Reflective questions: What changed in your understanding? Where did you feel resistance? What would we do differently next time?

Action. A 35–40-minute phase within the 90-minute session. It incorporates all elements of Kolb's cycle (1984): field case experiencing, group reflection, conceptualisation, experiment plan, and envisages one or more learning activities combining content, questions, and action. There are examples of such forms of activities:

● "Case sprint" (up to 30 minutes): individual case reading → experience-based and heuristic questions in triads → brief theoretical input → generation of alternatives via options questions → decision pitch with a scoring rubric

● "Decision lab" (up to 20 minutes): simulation of a board meeting; observers use a checklist for the quality of questions (relevance, openness, clarity, neutrality—no leading prompts); the decision is recorded in a short board/supervisory protocol.

● "Peer coaching" (up to 15 minutes): exchanging feedback in the triad with role rotation (client–coach–observer).

● "Reflective diary" (up to 5 minutes): written answers to "What became clear to me today?", "What should be the next step?", "What will I stop, continue, or start next week?"

In each activity or selected case, it is recommended to highlight elements of the learning micro-cycle: Goal (e.g., expected outcome of the board meeting, KPI/OKR); Reality (e.g., available data, constraints, resources); Options (e.g., three scenarios with risk and cost assessment); Action (e.g., commitments made, decision owner identified, implementation checkpoints at 30, 60, and 90 days).

Assessment and transfer metrics. A key precondition for successful content–question–action phases performance by learners is the articulation of open criteria, such as lesson learning goals, criteria for successful task completion, combined with assessment, integrated into the coaching style for learning. Overall, the success of the CQA-Executive model presupposes:

● Confidentiality: a non-disclosure agreement (NDA), case anonymisation, and consent to peer rating by fellow learners.

● Integration of diverse assessment methods into the session structure.

● Post-session support: discussion of decision implementation with learners after the course.

Several assessment approaches integrate well with the coaching style for learning:

● Formative assessment: clear success criteria; three-layer feedback (feed up – goal, feedback – where am I now, feed

forward – what next); fostering a culture of non-violent communication.

● Assessment of the quality of coaching questions (relevance, clarity, neutrality, depth) by the learners themselves.

● Peer assessment of classmates' solution presentations against 3–4 indicators with descriptive comments.

● Transfer metrics usable both during sessions and for post-session support: speed of decision-making; accountability checks during implementation; self-assessment of efficacy; a learner-compiled rating of question quality for peers' questions.

The expected results of applying the CQA-Executive model include several aspects of the learning experience: learner achievement; motivation, autonomy, and self-efficacy; transfer to practice. Achievement, understood as active knowledge construction and high-quality feedback, has a significant positive effect. Motivation is grounded in experiences of success in small steps and a sense of competence through opportunities to choose, voice ideas, receive support, and be autonomous in learning. Learners' self-efficacy grows as a result of successful application and social reinforcement in group work. Transfer to practice enables learners to begin contextualising new knowledge in their work settings and to formulate explicit action plans, increasing the likelihood of on-the-job application. The proposed CQA-Executive model has high potential in instructional practice under the following conditions:

● Maintaining balance of topics and time: topics within a session should reflect their complexity and the required depth of mastery; time – designing through micro-cycles of goal–reality–options–action – helps to maintain instructional pace and to optimise instructor–learner interaction (Moskalov & Lohvys, 2021).

● Maintaining the content – dialogue – assessment balance: content (from concepts to direct instructions), dialogue (triads, small groups, plenary), and assessment in multiple formats. While a starting proportion of 1/3–1/3–1/3 can be used, the balance will depend on chosen topics, allocated time, and selected interaction tools. The proportions should leverage the power of reflections (Nezhynska & Tymenko, 2017) and new intellectual experience (Sahach et al., 2024).

● Instructor preparation for the method: mastering questioning techniques, moderating discussion, and working with conflict. Key andragogy and adult learning principles like relevance and appealing to experience (Knowles et al., 2015) become crucially important for the C-level audience. The experiential learning (Kolb, 1984) concept applied to experienced professionals demands from the instructor not just a skill but mastery in reflection and abstract conceptualisation applied to the learner's practical experience and beliefs.

●   Alignment of intended learning outcomes and assessment, tasks and criteria should reflect coaching-based learning practices: learner autonomy, reliance on experience, personalisation and metacognition, knowledge transmission, and partnership between instructor and learner. For the learners of C-level, the assessment, as a form of effective feedback (Hattie, 2009; Hattie & Timperley, 2007), becomes a sufficient part of transferring the learning outcomes into the practical outcomes of their businesses (Barrows, 1996).

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that a coaching style – explicitly operationalised through the CQA-Executive model – offers a strong pedagogical fit for executive MBA (C-level) contexts. By structuring each session into high-density content, reflective managerial questioning, and action-oriented application, the model reconciles two persistent tensions in executive education: the need for rapid, practice-ready insights and the imperative to maintain academic rigour and conceptual depth. The model's micro-cycle advances learning by aligning with adult learning mechanisms: autonomy support (choice and voice during questioning), competence building (clear success criteria and scaffolded tasks), and latedness (peer-advisory formats), while Kolb's experiential cycle (1984) is enacted through case sprints, decision labs, and reflective closures.

The typology of questions (goal, experience, assumptions, options, commitment, reflection) functions as a cognitive scaffold that connects theory to strategic dilemmas, surfaces latent premises and cognitive biases, and accelerates disciplined decision-making. Formative assessment is positioned as the engine of progress: three-layer feedback (feed up, feedback, feed forward), transparent rubrics, and peer assessment improve immediate task performance and strengthen metacognition, self-efficacy, and the likelihood of transfer. The adoption of transfer metrics (30–60–90-day action plans, decision speed, accountability check-ins, leading/lagging indicators, self-assessment) renders the application visible and evaluable for both learners and programs, supporting assurance-of-learning processes. Implementation requires several safeguards. In domains with high compliance or risk, targeted direct instruction should precede coaching dialogue. Faculty capability is pivotal; systematic development in questioning techniques, feedback literacy, and moderation of disagreement is recommended. Program-level alignment – learning outcomes, assessment tasks, confidentiality protocols (e.g., NDAs, case anonymisation), and time-tabled accountability touchpoints – creates an enabling ecology for the approach. Attention to equity and inclusion is also essential so that questioning practices invite diverse perspectives and avoid privileging dominant voices.

Limitations of this work include its conceptual nature and the absence of comparative empirical evidence. Generalizability

across industries, cultures, and delivery modes (face-to-face, online, hybrid) remains to be examined. Measurement challenges persist around the quality of questioning and the durability of transfer beyond short follow-ups.

Further studies should empirically test the impact of the coaching style (CQA-Executive model) on learning outcomes, motivational variables, and long-term transfer, as well as compare it with traditional teaching formats on samples of students in C-level MBA programs. Advancing along these lines will clarify when, how, and for whom the CQA-Executive model delivers the strongest academic and professional returns, and will provide the evidence base necessary for sustainable scaling in executive education.

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РОЛЬ КОУЧИНГОВОГО СТИЛЮ В РОБОТІ ВИКЛАДАЧА МЕНЕДЖМЕНТУ ЗДОБУВАЧІВ МВА ПРОГРАМ С-РІВНЯ

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У статті обґрунтовано коучинговий стиль викладання як ефективний підхід у програмах executive MBA (С-рівня). Запропоновано модель CQA-Executive (Content–Question–Action-Executive – КПД-С Контент–Питання–Дія С-рівня) та навчальний мікро-цикл, зорієнтовані на профіль навчання топ-менеджерів: висока експертиза й вибірковість, обмежений час і висока вартість альтернативних витрат, орієнтація на ROI, чутливість до практичної цінності та конфіденційності. Модель поєднує стисле експертне введення з рефлексивним «управлінським» коучинговим запитуванням, що прив'язує нові концепції до стратегічних викликів учасників, а також із діяльнісними завданнями та формувальним зворотним зв'язком. Сформульовано типологію коучингових запитань (уточнення цілей, питання на основі досвіду, вияв припущень, генерування варіантів, зобов'язання до дії, рефлексивні питання) і наведено приклади аудиторних активностей (лабораторії рішень, дружній консалтинг, кейс-спринти, рефлексивний щоденник) разом із практиками формувального оцінювання (постановка задачі, зворотний зв'язок, наступні кроки) та метриками перенесення (30–60–90-денні плани дій, швидкість ухвалення рішень, перевірки підзвітності, самооцінювання ефективності). Запропонована рамка узгоджується з міжнародними теоріями освіти дорослих, досвідного та рефлексивного навчання і з українськими напрацюваннями з освітнього коучингу. Очікувані результати включають підтримку автономії, посилення самоефективності, зростання залученості та швидше ухвалення рішень із кращим перенесенням у робочу практику. Обговорено межі застосування (коли доцільна пряма інструкція), наслідки для розвитку викладачів і вирівнювання оцінювання. Запропоновано інтегрувати в коучинговий підхід такі способи оцінювання: формувальне оцінювання, оцінювання якості коучингових запитань, метрики перенесення, «дружнє» оцінювання презентацій рішень учасниками навчальної групи. Як очікувані результати та сфери застосування моделі CQA-Executive пропонується розглядати: досягнення здобувачів; їхню

мотивацію, автономію та самоефективність; перенесення у практику. Стаття пропонує чіткий, але прагматичний шлях до інтеграції коучингових мікропрактик у лекції для учасників навчання C-рівня, кейси та проєктні завдання без шкоди для академічних стандартів і цілісності навчальних планів.

Ключові слова: executive MBA; коучинговий стиль викладання; рефлексивні запитання; андрагогіка; формувальне оцінювання.