Mentors, Coaches and the Empowerment Factor
Why Functional Fluency is Important

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Introduction

Mentors and coaches support and inspire people to succeed in their endeavours. They take into account their clients' needs and relate these to their aspirations. They stay realistic and help their clients to do likewise. They boost confidence, raise self-awareness and help their clients to focus on a practical pathway for achieving their goals.

The coaching role, therefore, carries responsibility for guiding and influencing people. It is a special sort of leadership role in which the coach or mentor is leading by example and the nature of the relationship that they offer. For coaches and mentors, personal and professional development are synonymous. A coach can rightly say, "I am the tool of my trade".

The importance of personal development for mentors and coaches

Self-awareness and understanding, especially of behaviour for relationship management, are of key importance for mentors and coaches. Self-awareness and understanding enhance objectivity and promote empathy, making it easier to tune in to the client's world and choose appropriate responses. These skills of emotional literacy that come from personal development are then the professional tools for the coaching context. Models that enhance these abilities are invaluable for mentors and coaches. Most useful are those that translate quickly and easily into practice and provide a language for talking about behaviour and communication in ordinary, everyday terms.

The Functional Fluency model as a personal development tool

Functional Fluency is a model for mapping patterns of communication. It gives a framework for learning how to build positive and effective relationships. Functional Fluency in action is the use of those positive and flexible ways of responding to each other that aid effective communication. It is about "response-ability"; about how to choose 'responses' rather than just 'react' automatically. The purpose of the model is to promote empowering leadership, from which everyone benefits, and creative collaboration in which people enjoy working together productively. The focus, as in Appreciative Inquiry and Solution Focus approaches, is on what already works well and how to develop it.

One of the features of the Functional Fluency model is that it embodies many of the values and principles that are acknowledged to promote positive human development, for instance (Rogers 1951, Maslow 1954, Seligman 1998, Cooperrider & Whitney 2001, Griffin & Tyrrell (2003), Kauffman (2006). The philosophical underpinning, the principles within the model and the practical methods for using it are congruent and consistent.

The model is based on three categories of human functioning:
1. Social responsibility – using energy on others' behalf in terms of a) guiding and directing (control), and b) looking after people (care). These elements are important for coaches and mentors in helping them learn how to:
   - Encourage and inspire without telling clients what to do.
   - Tune in to and empathise with clients without becoming worn out.

2. Expression of self – using energy on one's own behalf in terms of a) relating to and collaborating with others, and b) doing their own thing in their own unique way. Learning about these elements helps coaches and mentors to:
- Create rapport and focus on the task.
- Enjoy using their own creativity to help enliven the sessions.

3. Assessment of current reality – using energy internally for staying aware and connected. This element is crucially important for coaches and mentors, helping them to:
- Take into account all the factors necessary for deciding on each intervention.
- Stay objective and not jump to conclusions.

From these elements, there are nine modes of behaviour. Some of these nine modes enhance positive ways of relating, others are counter-productive. The key is understanding the differences in order to enrich the positive and transform the negative. In learning how to use the model, great emphasis is put on recognising, appreciating and expanding practical and relevant ways to use the five positive modes. Only then is it appropriate to learn about the personal triggers into using the negative modes and how to deal with these. Figure 2 shows the three levels of the FF model theoretically; the three categories of social functioning, the five elements and then the total of nine modes of behaviour.

Figure 1. The Functional Fluency Model showing categories, elements and modes of human social behaviour.
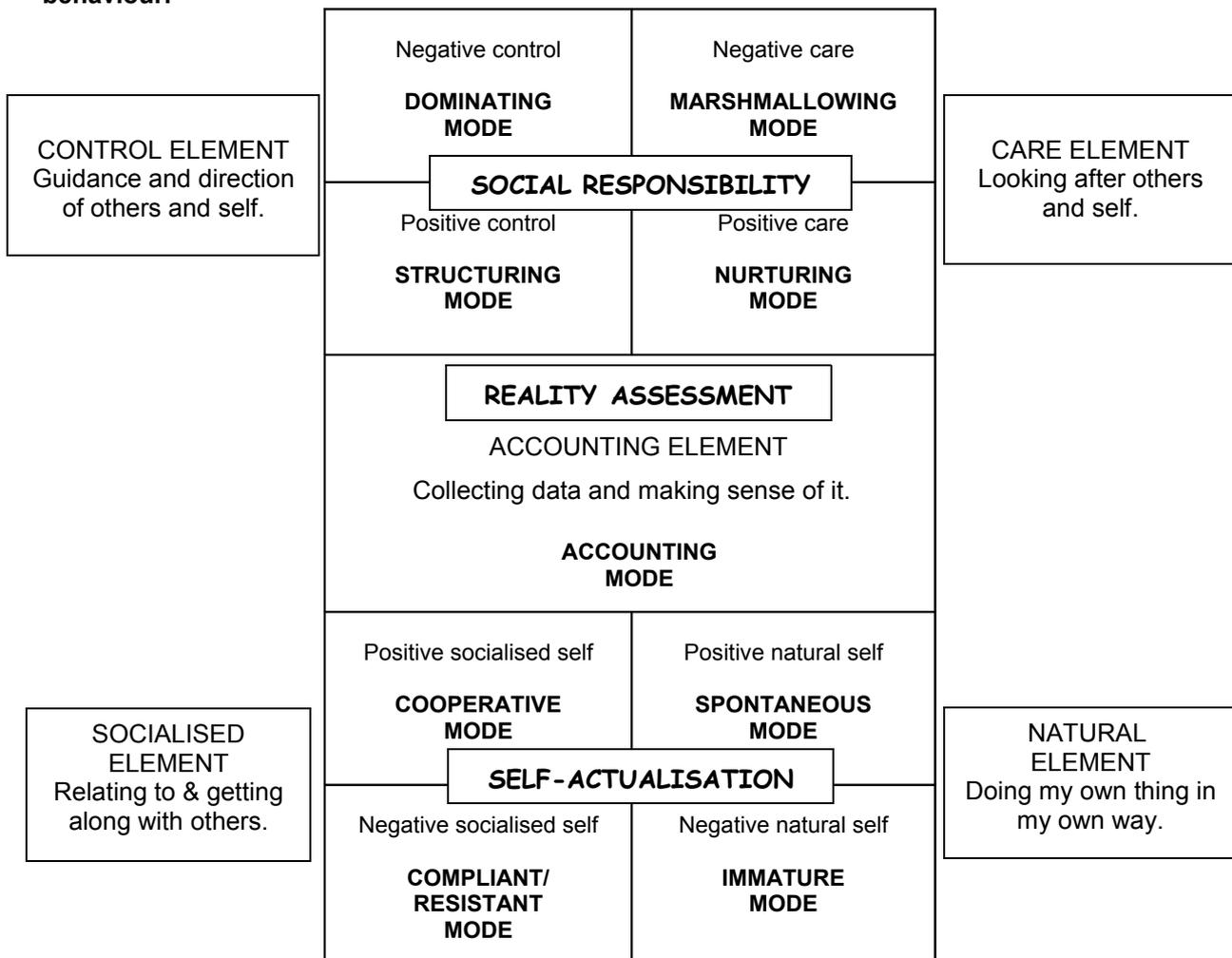
[Full details of the model including diagrams, handouts and articles can be found on the website at www.functionalfluency.com .]

The positive Functional Fluency modes
Functionally fluent behaviour is an integration of the five positive modes. Two of these are positive ways of being in charge in any social role of responsibility. There is positive 'guiding /directing', called Structuring Mode and positive 'caring' called Nurturing Mode. Structuring and Nurturing belong together for beneficial and empowering effect.

Two more positive modes involve expression of someone's own identity as a person, both in effective relating with others, called Cooperative Mode, and effective output of individual uniqueness, called Spontaneous Mode. That leaves the key central mode of behaviour at the core of the integration, called Accounting. This is what human beings do in their heads to monitor and make sense of what is going on, moment by moment, internally and externally, in order to assess current reality. Without enough appropriate Accounting practitioners would not be able to conduct effective coaching or mentoring sessions.

The negative Functional Fluency modes
There are four negative modes as well as the five positive ones, because, being human, we all occasionally slip out of the positive versions when we are tired or on a bad day! When this happens, instead of Structuring, our positive guidance can become coercive and we use Dominating Mode. Nurturing can shift from positive care into the unhealthy over-indulgence of Marshmallowing Mode. Instead of the assertiveness and resilience of Cooperative Mode we can slip into Compliant or Resistant ways of relating. Under stress we may regress from creative use of Spontaneous Mode into the egocentricity or impulsiveness of Immature Mode.

Using the Functional Fluency model in coaching
Coaches and mentors learn about the nine modes of behaviour and to recognise how they themselves use them. They gain insights into their patterns of communication and how to make these increasingly effective. The model gives a practical framework for changing behaviour. The underlying messages in the model, reinforced by the positive focus, offer hope, courage and confidence in making these changes. The most potent way to achieve the level of in-depth self-understanding necessary for coaches and mentors is to use the psychometric tool based on the model – the Temple Index of Functional Fluency (TIFF©). The unique profiles provided give a 'subjective take' to add to the objectivity offered by learning how to use the model .

Professionally, Functional Fluency concepts are put to use in three ways. Firstly, they are used personally for internal support and inspiration. Next, they are used interpersonally, in the relationship with clients, to support and inspire them. Finally, the clients, in their turn, use the Functional Fluency ideas to support and inspire colleagues and staff in the workplace. The benefits are shared and passed on in a natural progression.
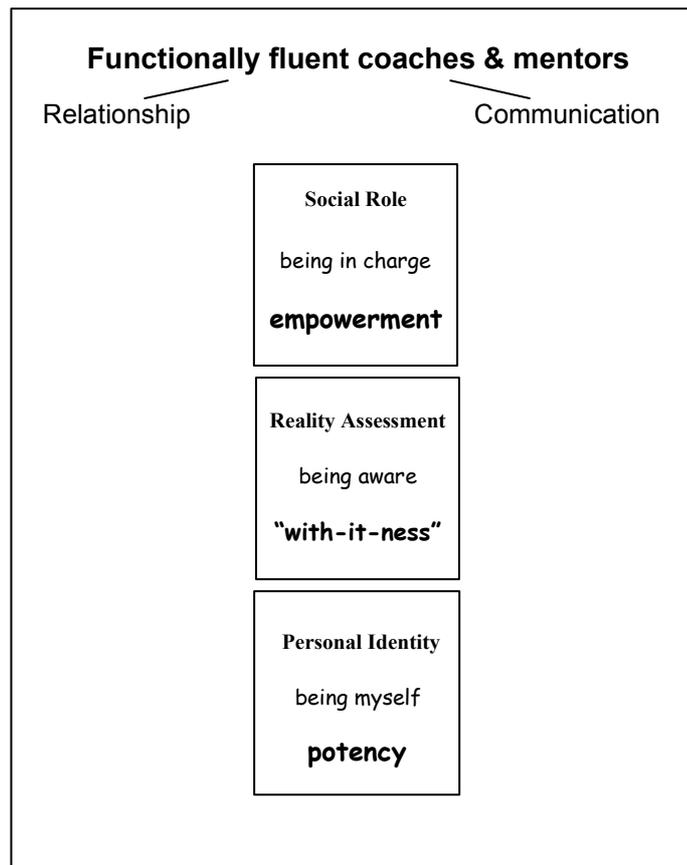
Figure 2. The use of Functional Fluency concepts

Personally   With Clients   In the Workplace

Functional Fluency and empowerment
Learning how to put more energy into the positive modes, and less into the negatives, means that coaches and mentors become more effective models for their clients. It also means that they increasingly build relationships that inspire courage and commitment, confidence and creativity. Structuring and Nurturing modes are empowering; Cooperative and Spontaneous modes engender potency. Wise and efficient Accounting makes coaches and mentors suitably 'with-it', for instance by good boundary keeping, timing and choice of methods and strategies for the coaching process.

Figure 3. Functionally fluent coaches and mentors

Functionally fluent coaches & mentors

Relationship   Communication

Social Role

being in charge

empowerment

Reality Assessment

being aware

"with-it-ness"

Personal Identity

being myself

potency

Simply articulating the ideas – describing and explaining how the model works – reinforces the attitudes and beliefs that support life-enhancing coaching and mentoring work. Learning how to use the ideas professionally energises those natural tendencies that humans have to grow and flourish, and enhances coaching and mentoring practice. All excellent mentors and coaches are functionally fluent.

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For further information, details of the model, articles and handouts about Functional Fluency and TIFF[©] please visit the website below.

www.functionalfluency.com