### Telephone-Shadowing

#### Purpose
Telephone-Shadowing (TS) is a technique that supports the coachee to transfer his or her action intentions into practice. Its goal is to help the coachee to overcome inner or external barriers against planned changes of her or his behaviour. It is expected to activate his or her self-motivation and volition strength in a concrete situation. Practical observations show that the first trials to perform new behaviour often fail and demotivate the coachee. TS helps to remotivate the coachee to try again or to optimize the planned behaviour, taking into consideration the specific context situation. The technique is also useful for changing strong habits or developing new behavior and routines under difficult conditions (e.g. high stress at work).

#### Brief Description
Originally ‘shadowing’ means to follow and observe someone secretly. Applied to the facilitation of transfer of action intentions by coaching it stands for an accompaniment of the coachee by the coach in the transfer situation. For example if the coachee intends in a presentation of an important message to the members of his organization to speak more slowly, firm and convincing than before, the coach may participate in the audience and observe the behavior. Afterwards, in a meeting, coachee and coach exchange their observations and evaluate the results. If the intended behaviour change had not been achieved, the coach may encourage a retry, engage a specific training or if necessary, facilitate the development of a more realistic short-term action intention.

Telephone-Shadowing (TS) is a simple and efficient alternative, where observation in the real situation would be very time consuming or not recommendable. Here the coach accompanies the coachee directly before and/or after the situation by telephone (Greif, 2008, 2011). A necessary precondition is that the coachee is able to describe his or her behaviour and the context situation adequately and has formed a clear goal and a strong and concrete implementation intention of his or her planned actions (Gollwitzer, 1999; Gollwitzer, Wieber, Myers, & McCrea, 2010). The use of TS is recommendable only, if the coachee is able to monitor his own behavior and situational constraints realistically.

#### Steps:
1. Planning the time or situation, when the coachee wants to perform the behaviour: „When do you exactly plan to implement the intended action? Supplementary question: “On which day and at what time?” or “As a reaction in which situation?”
2. Form a firm implementation intention: „Please form a firm action implementation intention, either about the exact time when to perform the action or in the form: ‘If X happens, then I will do Y.” (Examples: “I will start to work on the problem, as planned, tomorrow 9’o clock.” Or “If I start to get angry, I will breathe deeply and calm myself before I react.”)
3. Explain the purpose and procedure of TS and obtain consent to try it.
4. Make telephone appointments: Appointments can be made either before and/or after the situation, where the coachee intends to show his or her new behavior. Normally it is effective to arrange a call after the situation, temporarily
as close as possible. If the avoidance tendency or anxiety of the coachee is high, it is useful to make additional appointments before the critical situation.

5. TS session: In the telephone session the coachee reports if it was possible to perform the intended actions and if the consequences were as expected. The coach asks the coachee to describe the processes in detail, how he or she felt and how the environment reacted. If it seemed impossible perform the intended actions, the coachee and coach explore possible internal barriers and external barriers, e.g.
   a. Not remembering the intention in the moment
   b. Urge to do something else
   c. Distracting thoughts or unexpected behaviour in the environment
   d. Not enough time to try the behaviour, superposition of the intention by emotions such as stress or anger
   e. Sudden thoughts or fear, that the planned action may be inappropriate or negative reactions
   f. Discouraging feedback by other people before and in the situation

Together coachee and coach analyze the resources of the coachee, which he or she could use to overcome the barriers or how to live with them (see guideline “resource oriented problem analysis). Encourage and remotivate the coachee to try again in a different way or to reformulate the goal and action intention.

6. Frequency of TS sessions: Often only two to four short TS calls are necessary in order to achieve desired results. Later shadowing by Email may be efficient too. In difficult cases extra face-to-face coaching sessions and/or additional calls are recommended before the situation in order to strengthen the motivation and volition. To change strong habits, persistent calls are necessary and small stepwise changes with supportive feedback, until the desired results are reached.

7. Fade out and self-activation: If the desired results have been reached, the coach and coachee analyze, how the coachee (and not “the coach” or “the calls”) activated his or her resources in the situation. The coachee is encouraged to self-activate the resources in the future without the coach and to transfer the lessons learned to other situations.

Principles:
1. It is advisable to formulate the offering of TS outright. Long justifications or explanations make it more difficult for the coachee to agree.
2. If the coachee is concerned because he or she feels controlled by TS, do not deny that this is a kind of external control, but emphasize that he or she defines the goals and always is able stopping it. Mention, that the method can rise his or her self-regulation, according to practical experience.
3. Over time it is important to lengthen the distances between the calls, to fade out the intervention and to empower the coachee to self-activate his new volition strengths.

Expected results

Where it is applicable, TS is expected to improve the volition strengths of the coachee in spite of internal or external barriers. The coachee is able to reach desired concrete results. Therefore, it is a core technique of result-oriented coaching. Also, through the technique the coach develops much more insights about internal and
external barriers or facilitating conditions. He or she can help the coachee to develop his or her self-motivation skills and persistency following difficult goals. The coachees are proud of their success and the newly acquired skills.

Open questions and problems

1. The TS method is only applicable to intended concrete changes of the behaviour or actions of the clients. If the intended changes are defined vaguely or if they embrace a broad field of behaviours, it would be better to apply a less structured concept of telephone coaching and not to focus on concrete behaviour and interactions in the transfer situation.

2. The probability of success of the method seems to be lower, if the intrinsic motivation, persistency or skills of the coachee to perform the intended behavior in general are low or if a powerful social environment resists to the changes or if the transfer climate of the organization is bad. Here prior to planning behavior change, goals should be defined, which the coachee is able to attain. Also, initiatives to change the context conditions might be more fruitful, than to try actions without sufficient probability of success.

3. If the general intrinsic motivation and volition of the coachee trying the behavior is low or if necessary time management skills are missing, it is necessary to work on these, before TS can be uses as an adequate intervention.

4. If the coachee shows strong feelings of reactance (very seldom) or feels controlled by the calls, he or she should be encouraged to decide stopping it and to try a different intervention.

5. Some coachees may develop dependency of the coach and even might try to “delegate” their motivation and volition to the coach. Therefore it is absolutely necessary always to fade out the intervention correctly and to train the coachee how to use it independently.

Author: Siegfried Greif

References


