

## It's A Pirate Tale - A Supplementary Approach To Coaching In Business And Management

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**Abstract** – The article deals with the scientific discussion on coaching in the business context. On the one hand, the need for qualified human capital is increasing; on the other hand, the possible requirement profiles of employees are becoming more and more extensive. Given the prevailing framework conditions in human resource development, a need for action in terms of innovative approaches can be assumed. The number one success factor is and remains the human being. The main purpose of this research paper is therefore to investigate to what extent the topic of "piracy" can be implemented as a complementary approach in coaching processes for business and management. The relevance of this problem is that there is insufficient scientific literature on innovative approaches to coaching and thus a need for new impulses can be assumed. From the author's point of view, integration is therefore possible, as almost everyone is likely to have a positive association with the topic of pirates. For the research, a literature search was first conducted. In the subsequent conceptual work, an approach was developed to embed and apply the context of pirates in existing established coaching elements, such as the Logical Levels (according to Robert Dilts), goal work or the theme of values. The results and practical implications of this contribution are concrete approaches to make the potential of this approach recognizable and usable.

**Keywords** – Coaching, NLP, Pirates, Pirate Coaching

*"Always be yourself, unless you can be a pirate. Then always be a pirate!"*

### 1 Introduction and problem definition

Pirates play a major role in many films. One of these popular pirate characters is Captain Jack Sparrow, the strangely gesticulating, swaying pirate (Hnilica, 2011). He now stars in five parts of the 'Pirates of the Caribbean' film series. Since the first part of the film series, the genre of the pirate film has not been so successful for several decades (Suchsland & Alvarez, 2003). The theme is not only present on the screen, but also in poetry, e.g. in Goethe's 'Faust'. In it, Mephisto lands before Faust's eyes on a magnificent ship and reports on a successful sea voyage that was nothing other

than a brutal pirate voyage with captured treasures and ships (Grieb & Todt, 2012).

When looking at history, pirates are often limited to the "Golden Age of piracy". But even in ancient times, pirates robbed goods and engaged in extortionate human trafficking. The Vikings and Saracens who settled on the coasts of continental Europe could be considered their ancestors in the early Middle Ages (Grieb & Todt, 2012). For as long as seafaring has existed, combating piracy has been one of the tasks of naval forces. Even today, pirates threaten the security of sea routes. Around 1990, with the onset of globalization, there was a renaissance of piracy at sea. Off the coast of Somalia, pirates are responsible for more than 75 percent of the attacks on ships registered worldwide. The focus is particularly on the coasts of the Horn of Africa (Brake, 2019; Petrovic, 2012; Trittin, 2011).

The term pirates also acquired an interesting meaning during the Nazi era, especially in Germany. The Nazi youth movement 'Hitler Youth' was challenged by a number of oppositional youth groups. Often these were founded by working class youth in industrial conurbations in West Germany. Many of these groups called themselves "Edelweiss Pirates". Edelweiss Pirates were based in local associations which organized camps and other events for their peers (Biddiscombe, 1995).

Pirates have also played a role in more recent politics. After pirate parties were founded in Sweden and Austria, this trend also came to Germany. Höhl describes in her study that the Pirate Party presents itself with pragmatic proposals and thus increasingly reaches the target group of young adults (Höhl, 2012). The relative new player in the European party system defines "free access to knowledge and culture" as one of its core issues (Schäffer, 2013).

Maritime semantics can also be found in economic publications. For example, Damaschke & Giebe (2020) chose the following subheadings for the structure of their book chapter on Big Data & Analytics:

1. On to new shores - why set sail (meaning: reason for certain action)
2. The sea is getting rougher - a look to port and starboard (meaning: look at the causes)
3. Lifting the treasure trove of data (meaning: formulating a target picture),
4. Hard by the wind - all hands on board (meaning: involving employees)
5. Viewed from the crow's nest (meaning: formulating a vision) to structure their contribution in an appealing and innovative way for readers

Internet piracy has been a well-known phenomenon since the late 1990s and the music provider Napster. Internet piracy basically affects all digital cultural projects, such as software, games, music, films and e-books. Internet piracy has long since reached academia. The Genesis Library and Sci-Hub see themselves as free alternatives to renowned scientific publishers and portals. Their declared goal is to make the world's knowledge available in an open access version for all researchers worldwide (Bonik & Schaale, 2016).

As early as 2012, the two professors Durand and Vergne drew comparisons between market participants and pirates. Sea pirates, pirate radio stations, cyber pirates and bio pirates are particular examples of a broad category of organizational actors that they call the pirate organization. Sea pirates fought against the mono-political 'East-India Trading Company' in the 17th century, pirate radio stations fought against monopolies like that of the 'BBC'. Cyber pirates fought against monopolistic corporations like IBM or Microsoft. Here the parallel is drawn between freedom of the seas and freedom in cyberspace. So-called bio pirates have also been operating in the biogenetic field for decades (Durand & Vergne, 2012).

On the one hand, the need for qualified human capital is increasing; on the other hand, the possible requirement profiles of employees are becoming more and more extensive. The prevailing framework conditions in human resources development suggest a need for action with regard to innovative approaches. The number one success factor is and remains the human being. Since numerous examples and parallels between pirates and various intersections of life and economic life could be pointed out, a possible embedding of the topic of pirates in coaching methods for the area of business and management will be examined in the following. For a uniform understanding, the term "pirate coaching" will be used for the subject of the study. The aim of the article is to present a concrete and realizable possibility to use pirate coaching as a format within the framework of human resource development measures.

## 2 Theoretical classification and research question

### 2.1 Coaching

Coaching is a personnel development tool that was originally used for top management. The actors in the coaching process are on the one hand the coach as process facilitator and on the other hand the coachee who wants to work on a topic. Coaching is an intentional support process whose quality is characterized by voluntariness, acceptance, discretion and trust (Geissler & Günther, 1986; Graf et al., 2015; Looss, 1986).

It supports individuals in regulating interpersonal resources and aligning them in such a way that positive, purposeful changes can be achieved. Within this framework, concerns can be clarified that would otherwise remain hidden. Good coaching ensures that issues are dealt with that have been neglected or repressed until now. Often these are points where the coachee could make themselves vulnerable (Dilts, 2003; Grant, 2017; Rauen, 2014). Coaching is understood as a goal-oriented, systematic and time-limited support of a development and change process (Jautz, 2018). The overall goal of coaching is a methodically supported improvement or restoration of professional performance and satisfaction of coachees. This should be accompanied by a feeling of autonomous action control and in the form of individual well-being (Nazarkiewicz & Krämer, 2012).

## 2.2 Research question

Coaching methods aim to promote the development of new strategies for thinking and acting (Dilts, 2003). It is assumed that integrating the topic of piracy into existing coaching methods can promote new strategies for thinking and acting.

The topic of questions takes on an enormous significance. Questions are the central intervention tool. They initiate hypothetical imagination processes that can set self-reflection processes in motion. Questions help to minimize knowledge deficits, to identify knowledge needs and to articulate interests. Questions are thus elementary elements for coaching. On the one hand, they always presuppose new experiences, but they are also designed to enable new experiences because they enable a change of viewpoints and perspectives of perception (Graf & Spranz-Fogasy, 2018). If the questions were to change purposefully with reference to pirates, new perspectives could be made possible and the coachee could benefit.

Based on this research gap, the following research question can be formulated: "Can the topic of pirates be integrated into existing coaching processes in the field of business and management?"

## 3 Methodological approach and model

### 3.1 Methodological approach

The first possible concrete ideas for linking the topics of coaching and pirates emerged as early as 2014. These were formulated in a corresponding final thesis as part of the author's NLP Master's degree training (Giebe, 2014). The aim of this research paper was to conceptualize these ideas in a scientific approach.

First of all, an exploratory literature research lasting several months was carried out with the aim of sifting through and categorizing the topic of "pirates". On the other hand, scientific literature and studies were sought that address the topic of "coaching" and enable a reference to the research topic. After the research work had been done, the conceptual considerations began as to which points of intersection or models would be suitable for integration. The results are presented in this paper.

### 3.2 Model

The research focuses on a well-known model as an example. This is the "logical levels" according to Robert Dilts. This model can be applied in individual coaching, self-coaching or group coaching.

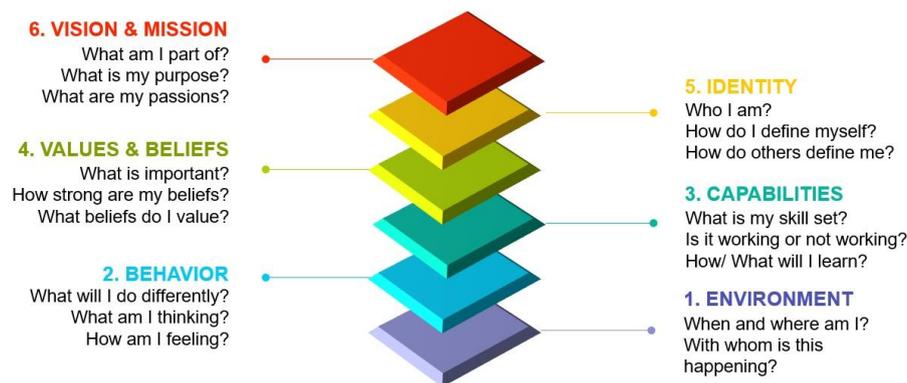
Based on the theory of Gregory Bateson, Robert Dilts has further developed the format of the "logical levels". The model consists of the following six levels (see figure 1):

1. environment

2. behavior
3. abilities
4. values and beliefs
5. identity
6. affiliation.

The coachee's behavior can be described on the individual levels. The model helps to better understand oneself and one's environment. At the same time, it should offer an indication of the level at which changes need to be made if personal development is to take place. The logical levels are thus largely levels of change. They serve to clarify where, for example, a problem, a goal or one's own mission is located. The logical levels can be used, for example, in problem-solving and resource work (Dilts & Zolno, 1991; Sachsenmeier, 2009). Through guidance and questions by the coach, the coachee's resources in each level are made aware. These resources can then be brought into the next level and ensure a valuable dialogue for the coaching work.

**Figure 1:** Own representation: Logical levels according to Robert Dilts



The role of the pirate is very well suited to be used as an image in everyday professional life. The striking symbolic power of the old swashbucklers can be used. It can be helpful to ask oneself how pirates would act in certain moments (Schmid, 2018).

The coach has the trusting task of guiding the coachee through this format. A step-by-step approach is recommended, in which a theme is first identified. This is formulated by the coachee, on which it is worthwhile for him to work. This is followed by the formulation of goals for the coaching. The first point of intersection with pirate coaching is the drafting of a possible plan of action. With the help of the logical levels and a "pretend you are a pirate" framework, the coachee should be given the opportunity to put himself in the role of a pirate. When defining concrete measures for the change process, the coach can place concrete questions with the coachee with the help of the logical levels and use answers for the coaching strategy. In this way, impulses from the coach could be used and release resources in the

coachee. In the role of the pirate, the coachee has the space and time to define concrete actions for the business context (see table 1). Once the action plan has been defined, it can be implemented. With action and the next stage in the coaching process, there is the second point of intersection with pirate coaching. The coachee in his business role can apply the developed behaviors in practice to work on his issues. The evaluation process is the next stage and provides the opportunity for reflection. The coachee can make statements about which of Pirate's ways of acting have brought him concrete benefits and which have not. This in turn provides points of reference for a good coach.

**Table 1:** Integration of the logical levels into pirate coaching

Level	As a pirate (examples)	Questions (from a Coachees perspective)
Environment	The pirate sails into the horizon on a sailing ship	Pirates also sail into waters unknown to them, to what extent should I also come out of my comfort zone?
Behaviour	The pirate feels a sense of adventure and says what he thinks	The behaviour of pirates has always been profit-oriented. Which behaviour is profit-oriented for me?
Capabilities	The pirate has good nautical knowledge and is experienced in fighting	Pirates could appear sympathetic, even if they sometimes did not act legally. What can this mean for my actions?
Values & Belief	The pirate loves freedom, and does not obey any laws	Pirates does not obey any laws. To what extent can I be unconventional in my actions in the future?
Identity	The pirate is an adventurer	Pirates are adventurers. What is my sense of self and what really makes up my life?
Vision & Mission	The pirate is a proud part of a group (e.g. Buccaneers)	Pirates had their own ethics, religion and spirituality. What is behind my goals? What do I "really" really want?

## 4 Discussion

The above-mentioned bullet point offers a model of the potential of this research approach. Therefore, further aspects are elaborated below, which can offer further valuable impulses for an optimal pirate coaching and thus enable profitable coaching work.

The attempt to solve problems and conflicts of the past is not aimed at in coaching. It may be noted that coaching methods are more result-oriented than problem-oriented (Dilts, 2003; De Shazer, 2017). Therefore, pirate coaching should also focus on a solution-oriented approach.

Success in pirate coaching is related to clean and winning goal work. A goal is the purpose towards which effort is directed. Goals are seen as a

multi-faceted element in the coaching process. Grant (2017) developed an integrative model for goal work in coaching, for example. Success here lies in the coach's informed, flexible handling of the model (Grant, 2017). In the qualitative survey by Wastian & Poetschki (2016), it was found that working with goals dominates the entire coaching process. The evaluation of goal progress ranges from the initial interview to the end of coaching and any follow-up measures (Wastian & Poetschki, 2016).

It therefore makes sense to use maritime metaphors and terms that one would assume a pirate would use or that are familiar from novels or films. Some terms are mentioned here as examples (see table 2). In his 2018 book "The Pirate Principle", Manfred Schmid also linked elements from business with pirates and recommended using this intersection (Schmid, 2018).

**Table 2:** Examples of terms in pirate coaching

Term	Pirate Coaching
Success	Prey
Frame	Guardrails
Business trip	Capture
Conflict	Combat
Team	Crew
Asset	Treasure Island
Schedule	Sea Chart
...	...

Considering values also makes absolute sense in pirate coaching, as coachees can assume certain values in pirates. Values can provide coaches with a supportive frame of reference for developing case concepts in their coaching practice (Grant, 2017). Values have an influence on ethical behavior and social responsibility. The latter has been increasingly demanded in recent years. Not least because of numerous examples about accounting scandals, bribery payments or the "Me too" debate, ethical action is important and urgently needed nowadays (Schreyögg, 2016). In the context of piracy, a real example of pirates of the Baltic and North Seas in Europe can be brought up. The so-called "Vitalienbrüder" around their leader Klaus Störtebeker divided the booty according to heads, so that each pirate received an equal share. For this reason, the Vitalienbrüder were also called 'Likedeeler' (meaning equal divider) (Wójcik, 2017).

Another recommended tool for the process is 'reframing'. Reframing is based on the idea that nothing has any meaning except the one you give it. We never react directly to what is happening outside, but only to what we ourselves make of it. The approach here is not to see everything positively, but to examine what positive aspects might exist (Huttary, 2014). Interestingly, the dialogues from the "Pirates of the Caribbean" film series contain elements that can be clearly assigned to the topic of coaching. A dialogue from the first part between Commander Norrington (CN) and Captain Jack Sparrow (JS) serves as an example of reframing. CN: "Just a bullet, no gunpow-

der, a compass that doesn't point north, hmm.... Amazing you'd think it was made of wood. You are without doubt the worst pirate I have ever heard of!" JS: "But, you've heard of me!"

Another adaptive building block for pirate coaching is mental training. Mental aspects are well-known from top-class sport. It also applies to pirate coaching, mental training forms can be used to learn, change and improve cognitive skills. Skills are actions that are used to routinely master recurring tasks. In addition to motor skills, there are also skills that have to do with perception, thinking, imagining and remembering (Eperspächer, 2012). Here, coaching can definitely be linked to the skills of a pirate and applied in business and management.

Another recommendation is to apply elements of Neurolinguistic Programming (NLP) to pirate coaching. NLP integrates insights from different disciplines and can prove useful for coaches. It allows them to respond appropriately to their own experiences and those of their clients (Tosey et al., 2005; Linder-Pelz & Hall, 2007; Sachsenmeier, 2009). From the perspective of transformative learning, integration makes perfect sense.

## 5 Conclusions

As has been worked out, the topic of pirates offers many different points of connection to established coaching methods. For this reason, the research question formulated: "Can the topic of pirates be integrated into existing coaching methods for the area of business and management? From the author's point of view, integration is possible because almost everyone has a positive association with the topic of pirates.

What is important for pirate coaching is that the coach has the appropriate qualifications. This is because there is still no uniform and standardized understanding of the competences of a professional coach (Merz & Frey, 2011). In order to meet the demand for quality in coaching, high-quality training in coaching is obligatory (Wastian & Poetschki).

Why this is so important can be seen in the example of asking questions. Asking questions and using key terms in coaching conversations can lead to a change in the way people talk about certain situations. This can lead to changes in the coachee's assessment of the situation. This can form the basis for medium- and long-term cognitive and behavioral changes (Jautz, 2018). A large part of the success of successful coaches' work with questions and conversation sequences is the use of "sub modalities". These are based on the so-called representation system with its VAKOG factors (VAKOG stands for visual, auditory, kinesthetic, olfactory, and gustatory) (Sachsenmeier, 2009). Each type of state can thus be described accurately and ensure a good transfer of learning.

Furthermore, emotional competences are elementary for coaches. It is very important to be able to face up to emotional demands, such as role multiplication or emotional work. A coach must know his or her own limits

and, for example, be able to recognize psychological disorders in coachees in order to reject them (Niedermeier & Schaper, 2017).

The call for quality assurance in coaching is becoming louder and louder. One form of work for this is supervision. It has its origins in the social work, therapeutic and psychosocial fields and serves to reflect on the coach and promote him or her as a person (Kotte, 2017; Rauen, 2014, Schreyögg, 2016). Therefore, the instrument of supervision is also useful for coaches who intend to apply pirate coaching.

Finally, a term for pirate coaching should be named. Coaching tools that take up the contents of this article can be called "Pirate Tale".

## 6 Boundaries for further research

From the author's point of view, this work can be understood as a first approach to combine the topics of pirates and coaching. In the following (see Figure 2) six further aspects from coaching and coaching tools are mentioned in order to enrich pirate coaching with further contents.

The coaching tool "anchoring" describes the process of associating an inner reaction. This should be associated with the environment or a mental trigger. The aim is that a possible reaction can be recalled quickly (Mukherjee, 2012). Certain movements or symbols can be used as anchors. The latter could be represented by a small toy pirate figure or a shell that the coachee places on the desk, for example.

The obligatory maritime semantics could also be used in the terminology for coaching tools. For example, one could offer the coachee to write down any learning success in a "logbook" (a learning diary). Under the same aspect, one could set up a "letter of marque", which stands for the coaching agreement between coach and coachee.

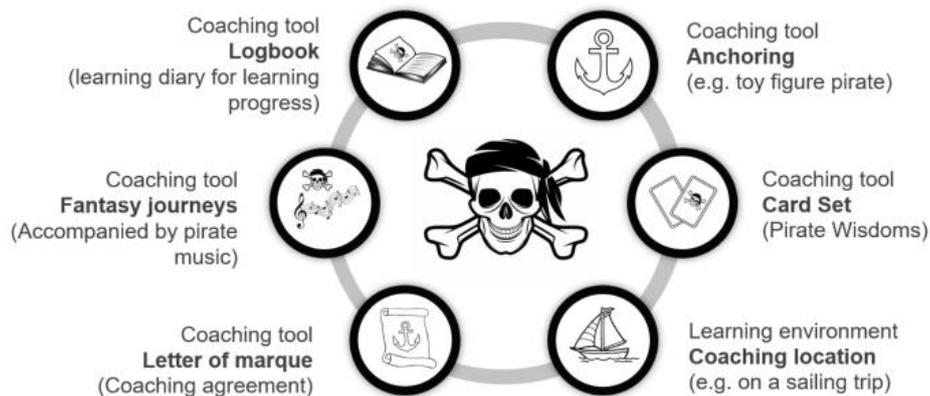
Fantasy journeys are a coaching tool that combines elements of trance and metaphors. Fantasy journeys are important prerequisites for creativity, during which the consciousness should be in a state of relaxed attention. They can be used to establish contact with unconscious desires and ideas and thus expand consciousness. The state of relaxation and the imagery induced as an inner film with eyes closed can deepen what is learned and activate many levels of perception (Bastel, 1998). This format would also be suitable for pirate coaching, e.g. with accompanying music such as the sound of the sea or the soundtrack of Pirates of the Caribbean.

Another coaching tool could be special pirate coaching cards with supposed pirate wisdom on them. Coaching cards are already part of successful coaching work. Coaching cards provide food for thought, e.g. through questions, motives or inspirations. Thus, coachees can draw cards and, depending on the card, bridges can be built to the personal situation.

An appealing learning environment is ideal for pirate coaching in order to offer the coachee a suitable ambience. Coaching can take place in a specially equipped seminar room with a small treasure chest, for example. But it can also take place in a location by the sea, in order to be able to use the

sound of the sea to create an unmistakable atmosphere. For some coachees who do not get seasick, coaching on a real sailing ship can be very effective.

**Figure 2:** Own representation: Further aspects for a pirate coaching



Finally, it can be stated that there is further room for maneuver in the conceptual design. Furthermore, a possible piloting is recommended in order to subject the theoretical approach to a practical test. An evidence-based approach can be described as a research gap, as the study situation has not yet taken up a combination of the topics of piracy and coaching.

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