A Coaching Portal for IT Project Management

Yuriy Taranovych
Technische Universität München, Germany

Simone Rudolph
Technische Universität München, Germany

Helmut Krcmar
Technische Universität München, Germany

INTRODUCTION

Current investigations of numerous institutions (Genus & Dalcher, 2003; RAE, 2004; Sauer & Cuthbertson, 2003; The Standish Group, 2003) demonstrate that about 75% of all IT projects fail. The reason for such a high rate of IT project failures is mostly a lack of professionalism and competence in IT project management (RAE, 2004). IT companies often do not have enough resources for filling in the competence gap, especially under conditions of time pressure in IT projects. Project coaching is a possibility for acquiring the required competencies (Rauen, 2002b). A search for suitable project coaches is often a challenging and time-consuming task, and usually limited to the local area. Even if an appropriate coach is found, their availability is still uncertain. Furthermore, professional project coaching is associated with high costs. This article proposes that Internet technologies can help to overcome these difficulties, considering that Web-based project coaching can reduce the time of problem solution, and due to its virtual character, can be offered without geographical limitations. This article focuses on the concept of Web-based project coaching and its practical experiences, and points out the benefits of using portal technology for its implementation.

BACKGROUND

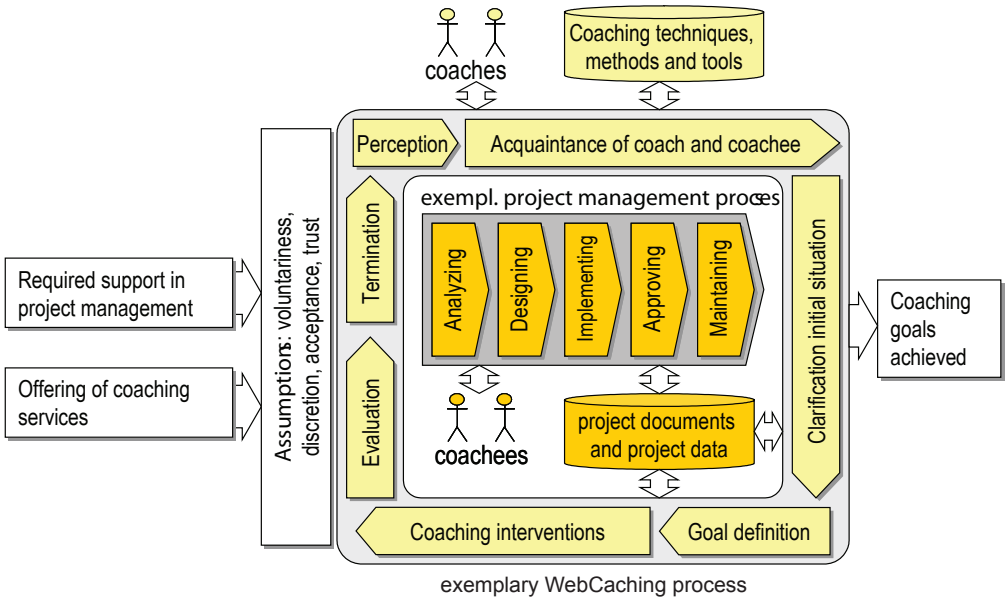
Based on the work of Rauen (2002b), we define project coaching as a professional, individual support and consulting of project teams in order to improve their project management. Under Web-based project coaching, we understand this as a project coaching supported by the Internet technology. Alternatively, to the term Web-based project coaching, we propose to use the term "project Web coaching" or just "Web coaching." The intention of the Web coaching concept is not to transfer an entire coaching process into a virtual environment. The Internet technology should be used for supporting the coaching process where it is reasonable and applicable. In most cases, a coaching success depends on the competence and professionalism of the particular coach, as stated before.

Web coaching opens new potentials in providing coaching services. The most significant benefit is overcoming geographical limitations. A coach and coachee (the coached person) are no longer required to meet face-to-face, but rather, in a virtual location, a so-called virtual office or room, which contains all the necessary tools and materials for providing coaching services. Consequently, a number of face-to-face coaching meetings can be reduced for some activities, saving time and expenses. Further benefits of Web coaching include enabling ad-hoc coaching requests and more efficient coach search. Coaches may use the Web coaching as an additional channel for providing their coaching services. Furthermore, Internet technology can contribute to a formation of a network of coaches and coachees to share knowledge and experience in IT project management.

Figure 1 illustrates the concept of Web coaching and so called WebCoaching model (Taranovych, Rudolph, Förster, & Krcmar, 2004). It demonstrates an interrelation between the coaching and project management processes as well as their actors and necessary materials.

A starting point for a coaching event is an existing coaching proposition and a coaching demand. Additional conditions are a voluntary request of a coachee to be helped by a coach, ensuring discretion in the coaching process, acceptance and trust to each other. The illustrated project management process (Greunke, 1999) symbolises IT projects. The surrounding Web coaching process (according to Rauen, 2002a) has a task to provide a coaching support for these projects. Depending on the project situation, a coach can be involved either in the concrete phase or in the entire project. After a perception of the coaching demand and a first acquaintance conversation, the coach and coachee clarify an initial situation and outline a project structure. For this purpose they use the necessary project documents and data in order to thoroughly analyse the situation and identify the problems. Based on these results, the coach and coachee elaborate coaching goals and define necessary coaching interventions. The coach uses various coaching techniques, methods and

Figure 1. WebCoaching model (own illustration)



tools to support this process. A very important aspect is an evaluation of the coaching effectiveness. The Web coaching process is considered as successfully terminated when the coaching goals are achieved.

WEBCO@CH PORTAL: A COACHING PORTAL FOR IT PROJECT MANAGEMENT

The project coaching portal (WebCo@ch portal)[1] is an instrument for providing Web based coaching services. The WebCo@ch portal provides a coach-matching mechanism for searching and selecting appropriate coaches, as well as a coaching collaborative environment in order to enable distributed communication, collaboration and coordination between coaches and coachees. The coaching services are initially limited to five project management domains according to the identified problem areas (Rudolph et al., 2004). The coaching process is additionally supported by a number of reference documents, coaching guidelines and project diagnosis tools. Figure 2 illustrates the concept of the WebCo@ch portal.

Figure 3 provides an overview of the tools of the WebCo@ch portal and their application in the coaching process. Due to the fact that communication has a central position in the entire interactive coaching process, communication tools of the WebCo@ch portal play a particularly important role. The use of collaborative tools for shared work on coaching materials (documents, plans, etc.) reasonably starts with the phase "clarifying initial situation" until the "termination" of the coaching process. Coordination tools support planning and coordination of coaching activities and tasks basically in the phases 3-5. The use of project analysis tools is expedient, especially at the beginning of the coaching process in order to analyse an initial project situation and to identify possible improvement potentials. Furthermore, they can be applied for evaluation of the coaching effectiveness. Initially, coach-matching tools can be used for a coach search, as well as a coach rating at the end of the coaching process. Reference documents and coaching guidelines to project management topics can be used as a support material in the phases 3-6.

The working environment of the WebCo@ch portal is structured into virtual rooms (Henderson & Card, 1986). Every room contains various tools for communication, coordination, collaboration, matching and other activities. The access to rooms as well as a number of tools depends on the room context (Schwabe, Hertweck, & Krcmar, 1997). Virtual rooms can be used for coaching sessions, collaborative project work, knowledge and experience sharing, individual purposes, and so forth. The room concept of the WebCo@ch portal has three room types with different privacy levels (Figure 4).

1. **Personal Rooms:** Every user of the WebCo@ch portal has his/her personal room "myWebCo@ch" by default. The permission to use this room is granted to only