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In the Six Cultures of
Contemporary Organizations*

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Coaching and Leadership In the Six Cultures of Contemporary Organizations

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Over the past twenty years, one of us [Bill] has recognized the need for cultural analyses of organizations from the perspective of those who lead and work in these organizations. (Bergquist, 1993; Bergquist, Guest and Rooney, 2003, Bergquist and Pawlak, 2007) He assumed that those inside the organizations might welcome an understanding of organizational culture, because many organizations seem to be particularly resistant to influence and change. The dynamics of contemporary organizations are often difficult to understand. Any framework that can help bring order to the complexity of these organizations will be greatly appreciated. One of us [Vikki] has recently conducted a series of interviews with leading practitioners in the field of coaching. She has discovered widely divergent perspectives on the field and believes (with Bill) that these differing perspectives relate to differing organizational cultures and, in turn, to differing notions about effective leadership and coaching in each of these cultures. This article represents a blending of the conceptual work and research done by both authors.

SIX ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURES

It has become increasingly fashionable to describe organizations as cultures. Anthropologists, management consultants, organizational psychologists, and other social scientists have become enamored of this concept and have helped to popularize the notion that cultural analyses yield important insights about the life and dynamics of an organization. The definitions of organizational culture and the methods used to study organizational cultures are as diverse as the disciplines involved (for example, Pettigrew, 1979; Peters and Waterman, 1982; Schein, 1985, 1992, 1999; Kotter and Heskett, 1992; Deal & Kennedy, 2000; Alvesson, 2002; Martin, 2002; Cameron & Quinn, 2006). Here we will use Philippe Rosinski's (2003) view that "a group's culture is the set of unique characteristics that distinguishes its members from another group" (p. 20). Rosinski's definition encompasses visible and invisible manifestations and sees culture as a group phenomenon as opposed to an individual reality. While Rosinski is primarily focusing on the "Big C" (cultural differences across national and ethnic boundaries), his analysis (as Rosinski himself suggests) also applies to the "Small c" (cultural differences within organizations and other social groups). The purpose of this article is to provide an analysis of culture with regard to organizational coaching strategies. Rosinski (2003) states that "once differences can be seen as cultural, there is the possibility of understanding and developing skills to manage, or better yet leverage, those differences" (p. 17).

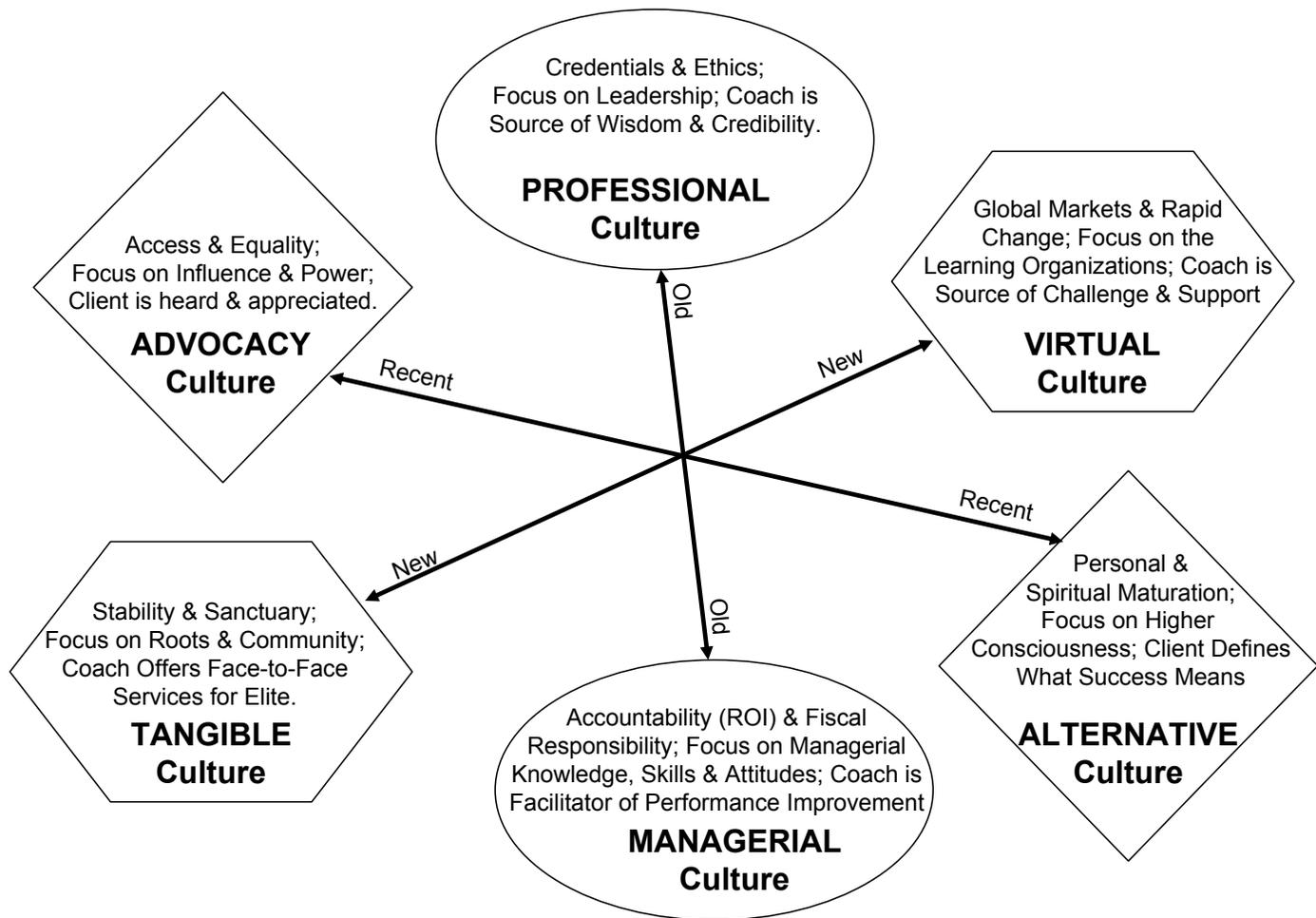
Four different, yet interrelated, cultures of leadership and coaching are often found in contemporary organizations. These cultures have a profound impact on ways in which leaders and coaches view their current work, as well as ways in which they perceive the potential for personal benefit and organizational improvement. These four cultures also influence how those outside the organization perceive the purposes and appropriate operations of organizations, and how they believe they themselves should interact with these organizations. Two of the four leadership and coaching cultures can be traced back several centuries. They are the professional culture and the managerial culture. The other two have emerged more recently, partially in response to the seeming failure of the two original cultures to adapt effectively to changes in contemporary organizations. The first of these more contemporary cultures is referred to as the alternative culture and the second is referred to as the advocacy culture.

There are additional external influences in our global culture that are pressing upon the contemporary organization, forcing it in some ways to alter the way it goes about its business. Two new leadership and coaching cultures are emerging in organizations as a result of these global, external forces. These two cultures interact with the previous four, creating new dynamics. The first of these two cultures, the virtual culture, has been prompted by the technological and social forces that have emerged over the past twenty years. The second culture, the tangible culture, has existed in some form for quite some time, yet has only recently been evident as a separate culture partly in response to emergence of the virtual culture.

Four different, yet interrelated, cultures of leadership and coaching are often found in contemporary organizations. These cultures have a profound impact on ways in which leaders and coaches view their current work, as well as ways in which they perceive the potential for personal benefit and organizational improvement.

We propose that these six distinct cultures (each with its own history and values) yields a specific perspective with regard to organizational coaching and, in turn, assumptions about the way in which to work most effectively with organizational leaders. (See Figure One)

Figure 1. Six Leadership and Coaching Cultures



The Professional Culture

Coaches and the users of coaching services who are aligned with this culture conceive of coaching as a “profession” and seek to build its credibility through establishing a code of ethics, professional organizations [such as International Coach Federation (ICF), Professional Coach and Mentor Association (PCMA), European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC) and International Consortium for Coaching in Organizations (ICCO)] and publications [such as the International Journal of Coaching in Organizations (IJCO) and International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring (IJEBC&M)] and research and scholarship regarding coaching. In many cases, the established professions (in particular, psychology and business consulting) have claimed that they alone can certify coaches or, at the very least, that the field of coaching should be closely monitored and controlled. The motives behind this professional concern are laudable: concern for quality of service and for an adequate foundation of theory-based and evidential research to support coaching practices. However, underlying these legitimate motives is often an unacknowledged thirst for control of the field (with its potentially rich source of money and capacity to influence personal and organizational lives).

“Professional associations play a variety of roles, including addressing “a need for status, a sense of commitment or calling, a desire to share in policy formation and implementation . . . a feeling of duty, a wish for fellowship and community, and a zest for” coaching. (Houle, 1980, p. 171; Merriam and Brockett, 1997, p. 224) In debating the professionalization of adult education, Cervero (1992) suggests that the debate over professionalizing is basically a moot issue because the field has already done so. Cervero believes that adult education must turn its efforts toward finding a model of professionalization that best reflects the values and philosophies of practice. Coaching is in the same situation and has the same opportunity as adult education to “avoid a more traditional model of professionalization and instead move toward a view that questions authoritative assumptions about the field and reduces overdependence of professionals.” (Merriam and Brockett. 1997. p.221)

While those aligned with this culture support research on coaching, they are inclined to identify coaching as an “art” rather than a “science,” and cringe at any efforts to quantify (and therefore constrain or trivialize) the specific outcomes of coaching. In his book *Coaching to the Human Soul*, Sieler (2003) supports both practice and theory when he says “according to an ancient Chinese expression, ‘theory without practice is foolish; practice without theory is dangerous’” (p. xi). He presents “a robust theoretical and practical framework for dealing with the inevitable intersection of organizational and personal concerns” (p xiii). Coaches who associate with this culture often embrace many untested assumptions about the dominance of rationality in the organization. They conceive of the coaching enterprise as the generation, interpretation, and dissemination of knowledge and the development of specific values and qualities of character among leaders in the organization—and they tend to differentiate between managers and leaders. As “professional” coaches they are inclined to associate their work with leadership, rather than the more “mundane” (in their view) operations of managers in the organization.

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The Managerial Culture

Coaches and the users of coaching services who are aligned with this culture conceive of coaching as a vehicle for the improvement of managerial performances. Management, in turn, is often identified with a specific set of organizational functions and responsibilities. Viewing management from a professional culture orientation, Warren Bennis (1989), suggests that managers administer, ask how and when, focus on systems, do things right, maintain, rely on control, and have a short-term perspective. Bennis also suggests that managers tend to accept the status-quo, have an eye on the bottom line and imitate. They are the classic good soldier and are a

Those aligned with [the managerial] culture tend to value fiscal responsibility and the quantifiable measurement of coaching outcomes (for example, Return-on-Investment).

copy. Given Bennis's limiting perspective on management, the role to be played by coaches becomes quite clear. They are to assist managers in performing these organizational functions. While Bennis is somewhat biased in his professional culture perspective on management, many of those aligned with the managerial culture who have written about coaching seem to agree with him. For example, Fournies (1978) proposes that "the coaching process is a technique that helps managers more successfully bring about performance achievements in business that relate directly to the survival of that business" (p. vii). Megginson (1979) similarly indicates that "coaching is a process in which a manager, through direct discussion and guided activity, helps a colleague to learn to solve a problem, or to do a task, better than would otherwise have been the case." (p. 5) Peltier (2001) identifies management coaching as a "set of day-to-day skills exercised by managers at all levels of the organization." (p. xv).

Many other definitions of coaching from the late 1970s through the 2000s are similarly oriented toward the management culture. Coaching is seen quite widely as a vehicle for improved managerial performance. Coaches aligned with this culture are often engaged in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of a manager's work—this work being directed toward specified goals and purposes. They often perceive few, if any differences, between management and leadership. Those aligned with this culture tend to value fiscal responsibility and the quantifiable measurement of coaching outcomes (for example, Return-on-Investment). They tend to believe that management (and therefore leadership) skills can be specified and developed through a blend of training and coaching. Coaches who associate with this culture often embrace many untested assumptions about the capacity of an organization's managers (leaders) to clearly define and measure its goals and objectives. They conceive of the coaching enterprise as the inculcation or reinforcement of specific knowledge, skills, and attitudes in the men and women they are coaching, so that they might become successful and responsible managers (leaders).

The Alternative Culture

Coaches and the users of coaching services who are aligned with this culture conceive of coaching as a vehicle for the creation of programs and activities that further the personal (and often the spiritual) growth of all members of the organization (or even more broadly the entire community). Flaherty (2005) says "coaching is a way of working with people that leaves them more competent and more fulfilled so that they are more able to contribute to their organizations and find meaning in what they are doing" (p. 3). Sieler (2003) supports this assertion:

"The human soul is the hidden side of business. Coaching to the human soul is about supporting people to be at their best in living, learning and working. Coaching to the human soul makes good business sense, for when people are at their best, organisations benefit from their enhanced performance, productivity and creativity." (p.xiii)

Those leaders who are aligned with this culture turn to coaches who value personal openness and service to others, as well as the integration of mind, body and spirit (also in this issue of IJCO). Both coaches and leaders often do not accept an “artificial” distinction between personal and organizational coaching. Coaches who associate with this culture often embrace many untested assumptions about the inherent desire of all men and women to attain their own personal maturation. Both coaches and leaders wish to assist the development of others in the organization (or even the broader community). They conceive of the coaching enterprise as the encouragement of potential for cognitive, affective, physical and spiritual development among all members of the organization—not just the formal leaders.

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The Advocacy Culture

Coaches and the users of coaching services who are aligned with this culture conceive of coaching as a vehicle for the establishment of equitable and egalitarian policies and procedures regarding the distribution of resources and benefits in the organization. Rosinski (2003) views this as the equality end of the “hierarchy/equality” continuum and at the universalist end of the “universalist/participant” continuum. Rosinski (2003) defines equality as the organizational arrangement as “people are equals who often happen to play different roles” and universalist as “all cases should be treated in the same universal manner, adopting common processes for consistency and economies of scale” (p. 54). Those aligned with this culture often have been associated in their past life with the formulation and/or enforcement of HR (human resources) policies and procedures (serving as “policy police” in a large corporation or government agency). Leaders who are aligned with this culture turn to coaches who value confrontation and equitable, enabling and empowering strategies that bring all stakeholders “to the table.” Leaders turn to coaches who recognize the inevitable presence of (and need for) multiple constituencies with vested interests that are inherently in opposition. They believe that coaching is essential to this engagement. Coaches (and leaders) associated with this culture embrace many untested assumptions about the ultimate role of power in the organization. They frequently identify the need for outside mediation and conceive of the coaching enterprise as the surfacing of existing (and often repressive) social attitudes and structures, and establishment of new and more liberating attitudes and structures.

Leaders who are aligned with [the advocacy] culture turn to coaches who value confrontation and equitable, enabling and empowering strategies that bring all stakeholders “to the table.”

The Virtual Culture

Coaches and the users of coaching services who are aligned with this culture conceive of coaching as a vehicle for the engagement and use of knowledge and expertise that is being produced and modified at an exponential rate in our postmodern world. This organizational arrangement, labeled “change” by Rosinski (2003), “values a dynamic and flexible environment, promotes effectiveness through adaptability and innovations, and avoids routine which is perceived as boring” (p. 54). Those aligned with this culture tend to value a global perspective and make extensive use of open, shared, and responsive learning systems. They are participants in what Thomas Friedman (2006) describes as a “flat world” which has abandoned organizational and national boundaries.

Leaders who are aligned with [the virtual] culture turn to coaches who speak about learning organizations.

Leaders who are aligned with this culture turn to coaches who speak about learning organizations. As Peter Senge (1990, p. 4), one of the early proponents of the learning organization has noted: “The organizations that will truly excel in the future will be the organizations that discover how to tap people’s commitment and capacity to learn at all levels in an organization. Learning organizations are possible because, deep down, we are all learners.” Furthermore, as learners, we do not avoid taking risks and making mistakes, yet we do avoid repeating the same mistakes and taking the same unsuccessful risks. We learn from our mistakes and (the appreciative inquiry advocates would suggest) our successes. Coaches and leaders associated with this culture embrace many untested assumptions about their ability (both coaches and leaders) to make sense of the fragmentation and ambiguity that exists in the postmodern world. Coaches and leaders conceive of the coaching enterprise as linking the leader’s learning needs to technological resources that enable the leader to access a global market and learning network.

The Tangible Culture

Those aligned with [the tangible] culture tend to value the predictability of a value-based, face-to-face coaching process.

Coaches and the users of coaching services who are aligned with this culture conceive of coaching as a vehicle for the identification and appreciation of an organization’s roots, community and symbolic grounding. This organizational arrangement is at the opposite end of the continuum of the virtual culture. Labeled “stability” by Rosinski (2003), it “values a static and orderly environment, encourages efficiency through systematic and disciplined work, and minimizes change and ambiguity which is perceived as disruptive” (p. 54). Those aligned with this culture tend to value the predictability of a value-based, face-to-face coaching process. Leaders who are aligned with this culture turn to coaches who focus on deeply-embedded patterns (traditions) in the organization. Cultural-change is either considered impossible or unwise. A strong emphasis is placed on the full appreciation of the existing and often long-standing dynamics of the organization—this emphasis being most fully articulated by those embracing an “appreciative approach” to leadership (Shrivasta, Cooperrider & Associates, 1990) and coaching (Bergquist, Merritt & Phillips, 2004). Coaches and leaders associated with this culture embrace many untested assumptions about the ability of organizations to “weather the storm” of faddish change. They conceive of the coaching enterprise as the honoring and reintegration of learning from the existing sources of distinctive wisdom located in their specific organization.

Although most organizational coaches and leaders tend to embrace or exemplify one of these six cultures, the other five cultures are always present and interact with the dominant culture in an actual coaching session. The dynamic interaction among these six cultures is critical. We would suggest that each culture has an “opposite” on which it depends and with which it shares many features and assumptions. Thus, the alternative culture, which has evolved primarily in response to faults associated with the professional culture, is nevertheless dependent on it and shares many values and perspectives with this culture. Similarly, the advocacy culture grew out of opposition to the managerial culture, yet looks to it for identity and purpose—and shares values and perspectives with it. We similarly suggest that the tangible culture has reared its head in opposition to the virtual culture’s lack of acknowledgement of the value of face-to-face or historical contact, and that tangibility and virtuality need one another.

CULTURE AND MEANING

A culture helps to define the nature of reality for those people who are part of that culture. People belong to multiple groups and cultures, which provide the lenses through which members interpret and assign value to the various events and products of this world. Culture is composed of artifacts and products (visible and conscious manifestations), norms and values (group's collective answers to universal challenges) and basic assumptions (invisible and unconscious beliefs about universal challenges). (Rosinski, 2003, pp. 21-28) If we are to understand and influence men and women in their daily work inside contemporary organizations, then we must come to understand and fully appreciate their implicitly held models of reality. Schein agrees with this view: "The bottom line for leaders is that if they do not become conscious of the cultures in which they are embedded, those cultures will manage them. Cultural understanding is desirable for all of us, but it is essential to leaders if they are to lead." (Schein, 1992, p. 15) Equally critical is for coach practitioners to understand the particular norms, values, and basic assumptions that shape their perspectives.

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Ultimately, culture provides guidelines for problem-solving, decision making, influencing, establishing mindsets and directing behaviors. (Rosinski 2003, p. 42) More generally, culture (both Big C and small C) serves an overarching purpose—a dimension that was often ignored in cultural analyses and traditional coaching prior to the publication of *Coaching Across Cultures* by Rosinski in 2003. A culture is established around the production of something valued by its members. A culture does not exist for itself; rather, as Lessem (1990) notes, it exists to provide a context "within which the production and consumption of needed, worthwhile, and quality products and services can take place." At a deeper level, culture is the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes members of one group or category of people from another. The cultures of organizations must thus be understood within the context of each organization's purposes. The ceremonies, symbols, assumptions, and modes of leadership in an organization are usually directed toward the organization's purposes and derive from its cultural base. Precisely because of its subordinate (though critical) role, culture is a phenomenon so elusive that, unless it is explicitly targeted, it can often be seen only when an organization is struggling with a particularly complicated or intractable problem—as often is the case with contemporary organizations.

CULTURE AND LEADERSHIP: THE CONTAINMENT OF ANXIETY

Beyond the understanding of the cultures themselves and how they are formulated, it is important for organizational coaches to consider how cultures serve the purpose of containing the anxiety and fear that is faced by organizational leaders. Anxiety is created in relation to the work of the leader and the formal and informal processes of evaluation and monitoring that are associated with this work. Anxiety is also created at a second level, as the assumptions of one culture collide with those of other cultures. A group creates assumptions and thus develops a culture as it learns to adapt to external circumstances and establish internal integration. The group feels better because the culture provides a solution – a way of perceiving, thinking, and feeling about the challenges it faces.

Organizational cultures do not change easily (as those aligned with the tangible culture tend to emphasize). This is for a variety of reasons. Not the least of these reasons is the ability of culture to assuage the anxieties and fears that develop as we adapt to external influences and seek internal integration. If the assumptions and beliefs upon which our culture is based are challenged through either external or in-

ternal situations, or through an organizational change process, we will tend to resist the challenges. We seek cognitive and emotional stability. We avoid fear and anxiety of instability because they provoke pain and we avoid pain. So we avoid change. Edgar Schein (1992, p.23) specifically suggests that anxiety is released when basic assumptions are unstable. The human mind needs cognitive stability. Therefore, any challenge to or questioning of a basic assumption will release anxiety and defensiveness. In this sense, the shared basic assumptions and beliefs that make up the culture of a group can be thought of as psychological defense mechanisms that permit the group to continue to remain viable.

Anxiety and Culture

We long for an existence that is comfortable, even joyful, and certainly free from anguish or surprise. Instead, we find ourselves living a contemporary life in a world that is filled with the demands for change and the accompanying demands for learning. To the extent that the hazards of learning are unknown and unpredictable, specific fears translate into a diffuse anxiety about that which can't be clearly defined. Culture provides a container. It establishes roles, rules, attitudes, behaviors and practices. It prescribes ways for people to feel safe. Culture provides predictability and ascribes importance to one's actions and one's presence in the world. It says that when you participate in this culture you are not alone. There are specific roles and responsibilities.

Psychologists tell us that when we become anxious, we tend to regress to a more primitive state of mind and feelings. We become more like we were as children. In particular, we are likely to become dependent, and look forward to being taken care of by a person who in certain respects is superior. This anxiety and resulting dependency often serves us well. Anxiety, however, is a source of major problems with regard to learning. Anxiety not only keeps people from embracing major new learning in their lives, it contributes to the inability or unwillingness of leaders to learn about their own organization and to learn about ways they must confront the emerging challenges of our postmodern era. We propose that anxiety blocks the personal and organizational learning required in our contemporary systems. When we as coaches and leaders come to understand the nature and effect of this anxiety and its interplay with organizational culture, we will begin to unravel many of the Gordian knots associated with resistance to learning and change.

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Organizational Culture as a Container of Anxiety

The fundamental interplay between the containment of anxiety and the formation of organizational cultures was carefully and persuasively documented many years ago by Isabel Menzies Lyth (1988). She wrote about ways in which nurses in an English hospital cope with the anxiety that is inevitably associated with issues of health, life and death. Menzies Lyth noted how the hospital in which nurses worked helped to ameliorate or at least protect the nurses from anxiety. She suggested that a health care organization is primarily in the business of reducing this anxiety and that on a daily basis all other functions of the organization are secondary to this anxiety-reduction function.

It is specifically the culture of the organization that serves as the primary vehicle for addressing anxiety and stress. The culture of an organization is highly resistant to change precisely because change directly threatens the informal system that has been established in the organization to help those working in it to confront and

make sense of the anxiety inherent in health care. Menzies Lyth's observations have been reaffirmed in many other organizational settings. Anxiety is to be found in most contemporary organizations and efforts to reduce this anxiety are of prominent importance. Somehow an organization that is inclined to evoke anxiety among its employees must discover or construct a buffer that both isolates (contains) the anxiety and addresses the realistic, daily needs of its employees.

How exactly does anxiety get addressed in organizations? Menzies Lyth (1988) suggested that it gets addressed through the "social defense system"—that is, the patterns of interpersonal and group relationships that exist in the organization. Other organizational theorists and researchers similarly suggest that the rituals, routines, stories, and norms (implicit values) of the organization help members of the organization manage anxiety inside the organization. Yet, these rituals, routines, stories, and norms are not a random assortment of activities. Rather, they cluster together and form a single, coherent dimension of the organization. This single, coherent dimension is known as the "culture" of the organization. As Edgar Schein (1999) has noted, the culture of an organization is the residue of the organization's success in confronting varying conditions in the world. To the extent that an organization is adaptive in responding to and reducing pervasive anxiety associated with the processes of organizational learning and related functions of the enterprise, the existing cultures of this organization will be reinforced, deepen and become increasingly resistant to challenge or change.

REDUCING THE ANXIETY

Perhaps contemporary organizations can best reduce the fear of their leaders, employees and other stakeholders through bringing together the diverse perspectives that the six cultures bring to the organization. Taken in isolation, each of the six cultures provides a vehicle that is only partially successful in reducing the fears and anxieties of people about their own learning. Furthermore, even when successful, each culture alleviates only the symptoms of the anxiety—not its ultimate source. Fear and anxiety will only be fully addressed when people feel that they are being freely served with the skills, knowledge, strategies and resources of all members of the company—regardless of culture.

We propose that it is crucial to appreciate each of the cultures so that one can operate effectively within and among them. With this knowledge one can also more effectively influence and improve the quality of change that is required in contemporary organizations. With this sense of appreciation, each culture can become a force for improvement rather than destruction in our organizations. Each culture can contribute to the learning of leaders rather than reinforcing limiting and inflexible assumptions about the nature and direction of the enterprise in which these leaders are engaged.

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Professional Culture

The primary vehicles for containing and eliminating anxiety in the professional culture are the demonstration of wisdom and credibility on the part of the coach. If she can exhibit extensive knowledge of the particular business in which her client is working or if she can exhibit a broad-based knowledge of how organizations work and how leaders lead, then her client is likely to feel more at ease and less vulnerable to the leadership challenges that he faces. If a coach can show that she is credentialed (such as ICF certification) or if she can relate her client's leadership issues to a specific theory (e.g., a model of leadership) or specific research findings (e.g.,

leadership competencies) then she gains credibility with her client and is likely to be influential in her coaching interactions with him.

Managerial Culture

When a leader and coach interact under the auspices of this culture, anxiety is likely to be contained and eliminated if the coach can provide services that yield measurable results – the leader improves her performance in a specific way (such as being able to increase revenues in her department by 30%). The coach is likely to be particularly effective in reducing his client's anxiety, if the performance improvement is linked to specific rewards. Thus, it is not only important that revenues increased by 30%, it is also important that this leader receive a substantial bonus, salary increase, increased responsibility, or promotion in recognition of her improved performance. The coach who is aligned with the managerial culture holds an advantage over coaches aligned with the other five cultures with regard to the reduction of anxiety, because he can commit to specific goals (and this commitment is itself anxiety-reducing). On the other hand, with explicit coaching goals, there is always the danger that if these goals are not met, the anxiety of both leader and coach will be increased, not diminished.

Alternative Culture

The leader and coach who are associated with this culture tend to feel less anxious when the client “feels better,” feels more aligned with some greater purpose or higher level of consciousness, or feels that he has access to some higher (spiritual) source of energy or inspiration. In many ways, this culture offers the most accessible and intimate vehicles for the reduction of anxiety: the leader senses that he is physically

“more alive,” he is experiencing “less stress,” or he is “energized “by some external power or presence.” There are no standardized criteria for determining the success of coaching in this culture. Success in each case is defined by the client or by the particular community of belief and values in which this specific coaching process is engaged.

Advocacy Culture

This specific culture is often filled with anxiety, given that it inevitably involves some confrontation and some tension between the “haves” and “have nots.” The client (or client system) that is receiving the coaching is likely to feel less anxious when he feels “heard” and “appreciated.” He will feel even less anxious if he believes he has been influential in the area(s) of greatest concern to him. As in the case of the managerial culture, anxiety is often reduced in the advocacy culture if the coach and client can be explicit about their coaching goals. An advocacy-oriented coach is likely to help her client identify specific ways in which (and times and places when) he can be more influential. If “influential” can be stated in measurable terms, then the advocacy leader and coach can celebrate victory (yet also risk the increased anxiety associated with defeat).

Virtual Culture

The leader and coach who operate out of this particular frame of reference are involved in a balancing act with regard to the reduction or elimination of organizational anxiety. On the one hand, the coach is often in the business of challenging his client with new information regarding her postmodern world or with new points of access into a dynamic network of relationships. On the other hand, the virtual coach is also trying to be supportive of his client, providing her with some sense of coherence in a world that is filled with complexity, unpredictability and turbulence. (Bergquist and Mura, 2005) The virtual coach faces a difficult task in helping his

Perhaps contemporary organizations can best reduce the fear of their leaders, employees and other stakeholders through bringing together the diverse perspectives that the six cultures bring to the organization.

client make sense of her world – it is not only a matter of digesting a large amount of information; it is also a matter of thinking and acting at a very high level. Kegan (1994) suggests that we, of the postmodern era, are “in over our heads” (certainly a source of profound anxiety) and it would seem that coaches to these virtual, postmodern leaders are particularly needed to help their clients address these major postmodern challenges.

Tangible Culture

Given the postmodern challenges facing contemporary leaders, it is obvious that the tangible coach is potentially of great value—for leaders long for coaching strategies that are directly aligned with the tangible culture. They want to be able to meet with their coach face-to-face; they seek out a time and space that is safe. When effective, the coach who is aligned with the tangible culture will help create a “sanctuary” in which her client leader can talk about anything and feel deeply. This coaching client may have no specific agenda, nor does he necessarily want to improve his performance, find a higher level of consciousness, or become more influential. He mostly wants to find a place where he can “be himself,” “talk to someone who holds no agenda other than being there for him,” or “simply be listened to by someone who cares about my personal welfare.” These needs are not easily articulated in a formal coaching contract. However, as in the case of the alternative culture, the coaching strategies associated with the tangible culture may be immediately effective in helping to reduce postmodern anxiety – though this type of coaching is often reserved only for those with sufficient power, wealth or opportunity to meet in person with a coach (often in some retreat site). Thus, the tangible culture – more than any of the other five cultures – is often associated with coaching services that are reserved for the elite.

BEYOND AND BENEATH THE ANXIETY

Our analysis would suggest that there are not only many sources of anxiety associated with leadership of a contemporary organization; there are also many different ways in which coaches can help to alleviate the leader’s anxiety. Many psychological theorists suggest that human service providers should not be in the business of reducing anxiety—for anxiety is a signal that something is wrong in the life of the person being served. The anxiety we are talking about here is a normal (and collective) reaction to stress that helps one deal with a tense situation in the organization—not the disabling anxiety disorder that becomes an excessive, irrational dread of everyday situations (NIMH, 2006). Just as pain is an important source of information for the health care provider regarding the nature of an injury or illness, so anxiety might be a source of information about the “malady” facing an organizational leader regarding his own behavior or some broader systemic problem. Thus, an organizational coach might wish to examine the ways in which her coaching strategies and perspectives help not only to alleviate anxiety, but also to reveal the underlying problem(s) that have helped to generate the anxiety. In this article we have identified several of the strengths associated with each culture and the coaching strategies aligned with each culture. We have also identified some of the potential blind spots. We encourage coaches to explore their own untested assumptions, while encouraging their clients to explore what lies beyond and beneath their anxiety.

There are not only many sources of anxiety associated with leadership of a contemporary organization; there are also many different ways in which coaches can help to alleviate the leader’s anxiety.

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