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How is Coaching Impacting Systemic and Cultural Change Within Organizations?

Sunny Stout-Rostron

This article is an overview of how practitioners are using a coaching approach, including cutting-edge coaching methodologies, to address systemic and cultural change in business, education, and government. The author interviewed eminent consultants, leaders, and practitioners who are using coaching to manage and develop people, to educate leaders in their business schools, or to introduce systemic coaching interventions within their client organizations. The interviews focused on the following questions: 1) How is coaching positively affecting some of the substantial organizational, economic, and political issues of our times, particularly with regard to leadership? 2) Who is doing what in the coaching space to impact change at a global, systemic level? and 3) What are the common emergent themes from this work? This article reflects innovative approaches and provides an overview of what is happening in the worldwide ‘systemic change’ organizational arena.

INTRODUCTION

This article stems from an idea of Dr. Christine McDougall, founding member of the Stewardship Team of The Constellation group and Director of Synergy, who wanted to look at the impact of coaching on leadership that aimed at large-scale systemic change. Christine’s focus is on change within the social arena. This is the subject of a separate article by her. The original purpose of this article was to ask how coaching is being used to build sustainable policies and systems, and specifically, how coaching is contributing to change globally within a visionary organizational context. As people look to their leaders for more accountability, integrity and authenticity, I have asked what impact coaching is having on systemic change within business, education, and government. What is emerging in terms of developing sustainable and responsible leadership? All the interviews have focused on large organizations and institutions within the public, private, and educational sectors. The interview questions are outlined in the Appendix at the end of this article. In addition, at the end of each interview I asked whom else I should be speaking to. Although not everyone interviewed has been included in this summary article, there are also still many more voices to be heard.

From my range of interviews emerged the importance of innovative and authentic leadership, working with personal narrative for deep growth and learning. Those interviewed emphasized the need for values-driven leadership that allows for individual independent thinking; personal, professional, and spiritual alignment; and an acceleration of “deep dive” work for personal transformation. Interviewees also emphasized the importance of inter-disciplinary

teams, action research projects, and a personal commitment to change. Collectively, tipping points for change revealed the need to develop coaching practice at the highest level, embracing a new perspective on real change in leadership coaching for transformation. This means working collectively where there is energy to stimulate reflection, original thought, and innovative collaboration. What emerged was that the level of maturity of the leader and the interdisciplinary collaborative approach of the team were critical aspects for success.

THE VISIONARY ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT - EVOLVING APPROACHES TO LEADERSHIP COACHING

There is a vital need for bold, visionary leadership that will shape our future; not just the future of organizations and institutions, but also of our increasingly complex and inter-dependent cultures and societies. My questions aimed at eliciting how leaders are currently being developed around the globe – and, crucially, how coaching is being used to develop leaders who can build sustainable policies and impact systemic change. I have asked what are the behaviors, competencies, and expertise that leaders need in order to manage organizational and societal complexity. These challenges and demands – especially in terms of knowledge, communication, conflict, and infrastructure – are greater now than at any time in history. Leaders face similar problems today in all spheres, from business to government to society.

I have spoken to a variety of leading organizational and coaching consultants, and to leaders in organizations and educational institutions in the USA and Canada, the United Kingdom and Europe, the Middle East, South America, the Asia-Pacific region, and South Africa. My intent was to examine some of the changes now underway in developing leaders, organizations, and communities for the future. More particularly, I have looked at what role coaching plays in this dynamic process. People are looking to their leaders, organizations, and communities for more accountability, integrity, and authenticity. I wonder what is emerging in terms of developing sustainable and responsible leadership? I have also asked what kind of impact is coaching actually having on systemic change within business, education, and government?

Some of the responses I received can help us to develop new thinking about how we, as practitioners, educators, business and political leaders, can develop the leadership needed for an emergent global reality. This new reality is not just a globalized workplace. It is a newly diversified workplace driven by sustainable values (such as trust, integrity, bringing heart into relationships, health and work/life balance, and making a difference), an emerging consciousness of global issues, a need to effectively manage change and complexity, and the desire of people to ensure that their work

makes a positive contribution and difference to their community. The questions are these: Are we as coach practitioners and leaders consciously developing the talent and potential of our human communities? Are we pioneering the way forward to create a new level of consciousness that will help us to work together collaboratively with authenticity, innovation and less conflict?

LEADERSHIP CONSCIOUSNESS AND DOMAINS OF LEARNING

The interviews below suggest that coaching is something potentially very profound and radical – not just a prop to sustain the *status quo*. They suggest that we need a new vision, a new way of thinking and working, and a new level of trust to run organizations in the private, public, and non-profit sectors. As a critical means of support, coaching can assist leaders to chart a new way forward in their organizations. But it requires a shift in consciousness, a shift in how leaders *be* leaders, and how they inspire leadership in others. The following stories represent a range of perspectives, from business leaders and educators to coaching practitioners and leadership consultants worldwide. They are enabling a shift in consciousness and evolving a new approach.

Richard Hames of The Constellation, a global collective of artisans from diverse disciplines, including coaching, believes that leadership can best be explained by taking into account the level of consciousness of the leader. In undertaking research over a period of ten years for his most recent book, *The Five Literacies of Global Leadership* (2007), Hames is convinced that our fixation on leadership competencies is, at best, a peculiarly occidental distraction and, at worst, confusingly irrelevant.

While management is clearly about discrete skills, processes, and methods employed consistently within the context of organizing, leadership has become more of a collective phenomenon applied within a specific social context. It therefore stands to reason that the complexity of today's external environment provides a very different context for leading. Ego and charisma matter less while intangibles like momentum, energy, resonance, attention density, social identity, scale, and learning metabolism all come into play. Talking about leadership "performance" or leadership "competencies," as if it were merely a discipline that can be learned in a workshop, betrays a shocking naiveté vis-à-vis the dynamically complex nature of leadership today. (R. Hames, personal communication, June 12, 2010)

Hames argues that most orthodox beliefs about leadership, which assume that "leading" is an advanced or more sophisticated form of management, are flawed, misleading and ultimately nonsensical in terms of contemporary realities and the consequent task of leading. He contends that if leadership competences do exist (and

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not merely as outworn clichés in lieu of a more precise term), they manifest within shifting domains of learning which comprise yet-to-be-embodied knowledge. He refers to these domains of learning as “literacies.”

Hames maintains that a far more intelligent expression of contemporary leadership is to be had by discarding the entire notion of leadership competencies, viewing leadership instead as an evolving, collaborative, integral praxis, in which “leaders” intimately represent the social identity and overarching purpose of a particular group. They deliberately set about amplifying and accelerating a new consciousness of possibility amongst the group’s members.

The challenge posed by the premise of leadership as a suite of literacies, aligned to changing social and environmental factors, asks us to reframe leadership from

- an explicitly US-Eurocentric view of the human condition to that of a world-system view;
- an individual slant on what matters to a diversity of collective perspectives; and
- an appreciation of leadership development as a linear psychological path to more of an emergent, all-encompassing philosophy.

In this context, according to Hames, the notion of leaders possessing clearly defined competencies simply continues to exacerbate the confusion between leadership and good management (R. Hames, personal communication, June 12, 2010).

Garth Towell, Managing Director of Kimberly-Clark South Africa based in Johannesburg, says that in order to impact large-scale systemic change within their own organization, they profess and live to four values: authenticity, accountability, caring (for colleagues, for the community, for your work, and for your company), and innovation.

Towell also talks about developing expertise within a business, rather than taking a default consultancy approach. He explains that the traditional corporate approach is to work through appointed change agents, with the executive team talking about change. But Towell doesn’t believe that working with consultants is necessarily the best way forward. He says that if you want to galvanize resources behind a dream, the dream has to be credible, and you have to demonstrate the hallmarks of a role model. He thinks this is what is missing in politics today (G. Towell, personal communication, June 15, 2010).

Some of the responses I received can help us to develop new thinking about how we, as practitioners, educators, business and political leaders, can develop the leadership needed for an emergent global reality.

LEADERSHIP AND VALUES-BASED TRANSFORMATION

We can't talk about leadership without talking about "who" you are and "how" you be a leader. One of the most important answers to the question "What is leadership?" is that leaders need to learn from their own experience – developing self-awareness and being willing to listen to and learn from others. This means that leadership is about change. Leaders are expected to be true to their core personal *values*, including a search for authenticity and integrity. If you are going to coach leaders or aspiring leaders, it is important to understand your own core personal values and align them with how you be who you are.

Suzanne Lines, Director with Abamentis in the UK, shared her perspective on the increasing importance of living values and authenticity in working with leadership and change.

I am getting a sense of a change in acceptable behavior for leaders; more of a values-based approach, a different drive to really live the behaviors of the organization; to ask and to listen to feedback and then, more importantly, to act on that feedback. I believe that creating a safe environment where one can test thoughts, ideas, be supported and challenged, and as one client described it, "to be challenged with empathy," enables us to really look at how we are working and the impact we are having. Sustainable change that will harness the potential of what we can offer as individuals, teams, and organizations is a key driver for me. Having a greater awareness enables us to have greater choices and greater flexibility in how we lead both ourselves and others. (S. Lines, personal communication, July 26, 2010)

Lines says that she works primarily in the business field underpinned by learning and growth.

What is the quickest and speediest route in? Using an organizational leadership framework, I will draw on a range of philosophies or methodologies to suit the client. I don't use one methodology or one model all the time. I focus, from a strategic perspective, on identifying and getting clear about the *current state* and the *future state*, and what that looks like. From those two states, we define very specifically what success looks like, what will the evidence and the impact be, the pros and cons, and the resources required – from the individual in terms of their commitment, and from the organization and the wider system of which they are a part. (S. Lines, personal communication, July 26, 2010)

Lines advocates *alignment* professionally, personally, and commercially as critical to sustainable success. She believes that the mind, body, and spirit are inextricably linked, using the latest in scientific developments to understand neuro-science. What

Hames argues that most orthodox beliefs about leadership, which assume that "leading" is an advanced or more sophisticated form of management, are flawed, misleading and ultimately nonsensical in terms of contemporary realities and the consequent task of leading.

she makes explicit, however, is that personal, professional, and commercial alignment need to be linked to the organization's goals. "My interest is in having a sustainable approach. This requires working with the leaders in a top-down approach to support and model behaviors for the rest of the organization." Her work begins with the top team to ensure sustainable impact across the organization.

When an organization is looking to develop its people, either transitioning to a new role (CEO to Chair, Director to Partner), developing a new business, transitioning from one very successful career to another, or developing their skills and authenticity as leaders, we work with top teams and top leaders. (S. Lines, personal communication, July 26, 2010)

Lines says that although she will work with less senior managers, if they are asked to work from the bottom up, they will encounter a barrier unless work is also done at the top.

Based on feedback from clients, Lines believes their best work is when they work with the values and beliefs of the leaders and teams within the organization which enable sustainable transformation. She takes a "*strengths-based* approach to ensure we create a really strong foundation from which to refine the changes a client is looking to achieve." She helps them to "become true to themselves" believing that *authenticity* provides a strong base from which to listen, offer feedback, and challenge in a way that nurtures and sustains growth both for the individual and the wider organization and environment (S. Lines, personal communication, July 26, 2010).

Many business schools have been moving toward leadership development in the last ten years with an approach that is more applied and less academic. When I asked Richard Lyons, Dean of the Haas Business School at the University of California at Berkeley, what values and beliefs inform their work, he explained their four-dimensional approach to learning, coaching, and leadership development. They have increasingly adopted a *manager as coach* model, thinking about what "people development" really means in terms of the coaching opportunities for their own staff.

A second dimension has been to transition their culture from an *implicit* to an *explicit* learning culture, embedding coaching into all of their business processes. A third dimension is that of *students always*, meaning that what really matters is social learning – creating bonds for learning. Lyons says that the marketplace has been telling business schools that they are producing too many students in the category of "I don't learn from you" versus the second critical category, "I can learn from you."

Professional coaches have been invited to Berkeley-Haas to work directly with their students. "This happens in what we call our

He says that if you want to galvanize resources behind a dream, the dream has to be credible, and you have to demonstrate the hallmarks of a role model.

Leadership Development Series (LDS), which we launched when we recognized that there were a lot of applied leadership skills that were not getting delivered enough” (R. Lyons, personal communication, September 24, 2010).

The fourth dimension underpinning Haas’ learning culture approach is that of *peer-to-peer* coaching, which is more focused on the students. The question it addresses is this: How do we get students to behave like coaches for one another? At Berkeley-Haas, Lyons has launched their Team Performance Module to work more deliberately around coaching skills in the team context.

Teams are always important for getting work done. Far too often we were hearing students say things like, ”That was a great applied course in international business development, but we spent three weeks spinning our wheels as a team.” That is not productive. Our Team Performance Module gets teams to work more effectively from the get-go, coaching one another, giving feedback, providing frank appraisals.

Because every business school is saying these days that their mission is to develop leaders, the question becomes: What type of leader do you produce? How do you do it? What profile of a leader are we producing and what do we want to produce? We started with our *place*, our *people* and our *culture* to produce a more ”path-bending,” or innovative leader. And although the term ‘innovative leader’ isn’t itself innovative, we have spelled out a competency model that we can coach to, measure and put metrics around. It includes specific skills like *problem framing*, *experimentation*, *revenue model innovation*. On the coaching and interpersonal side is *influence without authority*, *managing ambiguity* and *conflict*. As it gets concrete, the overlap with coaching gets higher. (R. Lyons, personal communication, September 24, 2010)

Lyons believes that change in most academic environments, and increasingly in commercial environments, has to be an inclusive process. “One often needs to get input and fingerprints from nearly everybody.” He says there is little room to play the authority card in a modern university as change is a *distributed process* – with legitimacy built person-by-person, conversation by conversation. From an academic perspective,

the urgency for change needs to be an intellectual one. In a university, one needs to capture the mind. Most are here because it is matters of the mind that caused them to choose the university. Emotional appeals can be useful, but if you don’t have the intellectual basis you will lose critical change participants. (R. Lyons, personal communication, September 24, 2010)

Lines advocates alignment professionally, personally, and commercially as critical to sustainable success.

Lyons talks about the strategic direction of the business school as a major process of transformation, which has injected coaching not just to engage the change process, but to manage the ambiguous “distributed authority” environment.

For example, if I were to announce to the faculty as a group that we are going to start a process of “reforming our core curriculum,” that would be the end of it right there! Faculty would say, “This is foundational, classic stuff; we can’t keep going back to change it; it’s withstood the test of time.” But, if instead you go one-on-one to a faculty member and say, “I have read your syllabus and when I think about what a ‘path-bending’ leader is, and I project that onto your syllabus, this is what I see. Do you agree that this is what comes out?” Now you are starting on their intellectual home turf; you are in their zone and *speaking into their listening*. And when you do that, you can implement much greater change because you’ve started with the unit of change in their world. That’s just one example. No CEO in the private sector would think to go about change in that laborious way. It’s not particularly efficient, but it can be necessary in a university context. (R. Lyons, personal communication, September 24, 2010)

Lyons believes that, at some level, universities are about coaching, about developing people. The historical coaching function that universities have played in the past has become an applied function, closer to how the marketplace thinks about coaching.

INDEPENDENT THINKING – MOVING AWAY FROM THE EPIDEMIC OF OBEDIENCE

Nancy Kline, President of Time to Think Inc., develops coaching consultants in the UK, USA, South Africa, Ireland, Sweden, and Australia. In our interview, Nancy expressed her passion for the transformational power of Thinking Environment® work.

When we teach the Thinking Partnership® program and the Thinking Environment coaching and supervision programs, we are using coaching expressly. But I think that any time two or more people are thinking together, with all Ten Components of a Thinking Environment present, there is a coaching element in the conversation. This work was embraced by the coaching world because it generates independent thinking in people. (N. Kline, personal communication, February 10, 2010)

The question Kline thinks coaches need to be asking themselves is, “What more can we do to help people to think for themselves?”

Kline’s methodology is based on the “chosen philosophical view that human beings are by nature good: intelligent, loving, powerful, multi-talented, emotional, assertive, able to think through anything,

imaginative, and logical.” Kline says that “behavior to the contrary is seen as the result of assumptions generated over a lifetime by events, conditions, and attitudes in a person’s environment” (Kline, 2005, p. 4). One of the key theories which determines how we work with clients in the “coaching conversation” is that of “positive philosophical choice” (Kline, 2005, p. 168).

Kline spoke to me about three requirements for systemic change.

First, I think that in order to effect organizational and societal change, coaches, and all professionals, need to understand that *listening to reply* is different from *listening to ignite*, and that most people listen to reply. This means that they are shaping their response far too soon, preventing the emergence of the client’s best thinking. I think that attention is an act of creation. It is not a process of waiting to speak. I think we won’t create a truly human world until we listen to ignite the human mind in front of us, knowing that attention is an act of creation.

The second thing is to redefine “expert.” We need to understand that when the client enters the coaching space, there are two experts in the room. I think that we have to give up the idea that the professional expert is the one with the answers; instead, I think we need to see that the professional is the expert who brings out the expert in the client. Only when necessary does the professional expert interject information or analysis.

And third, I think that organizational and societal change is throttled by leaders who live in a triumvirate of addiction. These are addictions to control, urgency, and certainty. When those three addictions are at the helm of an organization or a society, there is an almost automatic diminishment of independent thinking. A thinking environment is by definition free of control, urgency, and certainty. In other words, those three addictions cannot survive a thinking environment. And the leader with those addictions will dismantle the thinking environment to get their fix. I think we can trace back most of the road blocks in societal change to leaders who were driven by these three addictions. (N. Kline, personal communication, February 10, 2010)

She says that in terms of the issue of change,

the joy in all of this for me is that people can decide in any given moment to create a thinking environment around them ... When they do, they will generate better thinking wherever they are. That is to me a profoundly hopeful phenomenon. (N. Kline, personal communication, February 10, 2010)

Because every business school is saying these days that their mission is to develop leaders, the question becomes: What type of leader do you produce? How do you do it?

Kline says that from the beginning her work has been motivated by a passion for a world that works beautifully for everyone, a world in which human dignity is the reference point for policy, and where equality is the center piece for human organizations and the decision making structures within them. She would like to see a world in which every human being knows that they matter, that their thinking and their contributions are central to our success as a society, and a world in which every human being lives well.

I reasoned that because everything depends on the quality of the thinking we do first, creating structures in which people could think for themselves might have a chance of helping to bring about some significant, human changes in society. The question that arises from this observation is, "How can we help each other to think for ourselves with rigor, imagination, courage, and grace?" I was drawn to this work also because of an increasing awareness that most of what wasn't working in human life and in organizations could probably be traced to the conformity, inaccuracies, and the inhumanity of people's thinking. I wanted to contribute to a core level of change by seeing if independent thinking could make a difference. I soon found myself growing interested in organizational and societal transformation. (N. Kline, personal communication, February 10, 2010)

Kline's work in organizations for long-term change teaches teams how to make the Ten Components of the Thinking Environment® the culture of their dialog and of their meetings. They equate leadership with the ability to help people at all levels of the organization to think well for themselves.

This means moving away from coaching the "sophisticated victim" and the "epidemic of obedience." In Kline's words it means to question and explore every issue, including the very systems that people work in; she says this is rarely a coaching objective.

I think that in organizations and in society we are seeing an epidemic of obedience. Almost all human-made crises are created by people with influence who look autonomous, but who are actually obeying the person, or system, that rewards them. This happens because inside these complex systems of human decision-making there is no systematic request for independent thinking, not even at the top. Sometimes independent thinking is punished, even among leaders, when it is offered. (N. Kline, personal communication, February 10, 2010)

Kline explains that coaches are unwittingly developing the "sophisticated victim" in their executive clients. Often coaches are hired by third parties who don't want their colleagues and employees to be thinking for themselves or thinking at the cutting edge. They want a particular kind of performance to increase or

a particular kind of leadership to emerge; but to question and explore every issue, including the very systems that they work in and lead, is rarely a coaching objective. What coaches do without realizing it, in order to be acceptable to the third party payer, is to lead these clients in a direction that will at any cost support the policies and practice of the organization, rather than question it.

Kline also believes that coaches, in very subtle ways, make their clients victims of the coach's "directiveness."

The accepted coach's mantra is, "The client has the best answers." But too often in practice, the coach regards their work as successful only if they produced the "killer question" or the key insight for the client. In that sense, coaches, too, like to be "obeyed." I think that as coaches we need seriously to ponder what it would take to stop the epidemic of obedience, to accelerate true independent thinking of all of our clients at all levels of the organization. I think this is the broader responsibility of coaching. I think it is one that almost shivers with the need to be explored. (N. Kline, personal communication, February 10, 2010)

A COMPASS FOR LEADERS - AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP

Leaders are expected to be true to their core personal values, including a search for authenticity and integrity. There is a kind of compass for leaders, which is to find their own authentic self and their own voice, and to help others find theirs. This search for, and development of, authentic and innovative leaders has become strongly integrated with coaching, particularly in the business schools. It takes a lifetime of learning to develop your potential with a willingness to learn to integrate all aspects of your life in order to lead a more balanced life. A first step is to understand and demonstrate a passion for your purpose, develop long-term sustainable relationships that support you, and to begin to understand your own internal and external motivators.

Dr Mark Rittenberg is an award-winning actor and director, and President of Corporate Scenes, Inc. Rittenberg teaches at the Haas School of Business at the University of California at Berkeley where he has recently launched the Executive Coaching Institute. He insists that to achieve change in any system it is crucial to embrace authentic leadership, developing leaders to be innovative as well as authentic. Rittenberg explains that

it basically comes down to the way the new leader is going to behave, using EQ, IQ, and SQ to run the organization. We need to create leadership development programs for leaders who will truly be leaders of the people. (M. Rittenberg, personal communication, June 19, 2010)

I think that organizational and societal change is throttled by leaders who live in a triumvirate of addiction. These are addictions to control, urgency, and certainty.

Having been an actor and director for 30 years, in 1984 Rittenberg won an award at the Jerusalem Festival for a play he directed. Invited to Harvard University, Rittenberg recast the play with Harvard students, including MBAs.

One evening, when they asked if they could speak to me, I immediately thought they were going to quit the rehearsals which were grueling. My assumption was that the rehearsals interfered with their studies. In fact, they told me that this was the most profound leadership development they had ever undergone, despite their current classes. Their request was that I do similar theater-based work with their peers and colleagues at the Harvard Business School, as for them this work was really about authentic leadership. (M. Rittenberg, personal communication, June 19, 2010)

The students liked the idea of being coached as actors in voice, body, and the holistic area of an individual's leadership. They said to Rittenberg,

You're not afraid to go deep, yet somehow you create a safe space for each individual to find their own authentic, true voice. We have all changed as a result of being in this rehearsal process, and believe that this work will have great impact on leaders who want to be more authentic, to motivate and be inspirational leaders for their work groups. (M. Rittenberg, personal communication, August 22, 2010)

Rittenberg has spent 20 years designing intensive theater-based Active Communicating® programs at several business schools throughout the USA. He continues to work with emerging and inspiring leaders who want to grow and develop themselves and their own work group. Rittenberg recommends one-on-one coaching to help impact work groups and peers, emphasizing the power of each individual to be a force for "systemic" change within the workplace. He feels that this work is ideal for leaders who are willing "to operate from the head and the heart, and as a result of the holistic coaching program to become more in touch with themselves and others" (M. Rittenberg, personal communication, August 22, 2010).

Two other dynamic, pioneering leaders in the field of authentic leadership, whose programs are strongly integrated with coaching, are Nick Craig, Head of the Authentic Leadership Institute (ALI) based at Harvard, and Carol Kauffman, Assistant Professor of Psychology and Head of the Institute of Coaching based at Harvard/McLean Medical School.

Craig says the programs they engage in with large corporate leaders take them to an extremely deep level within a couple of days, explaining that the equivalent would take six months with traditional executive coaching.

Almost all human-made crises are created by people with influence who look autonomous, but who are actually obeying the person, or system, that rewards them.

Clarity, transparency, getting the ego out of the room, getting into their deepest voice of wisdom—in the process of doing it they help each other get there. For each group of six, there is a coach with them for three to four days, and they tell stories they have never told anyone in their life. (N. Craig, personal communication, June 27, 2010)

Craig explains that these budding leaders are on a journey which is as deep as anything they have ever gone on, and that they have been identified as potential “heirs apparent” within their organizations. Each individual will soon be one of the top five people in their multibillion dollar company. Craig insists that within two days of this “deep dive” coaching work, each individual is at a place where they would be up to after a year of “traditional” coaching. With this particular model, systemic change is accelerated moving into very powerful transformational conversations within a week on the program.

One of the reasons this work is so powerful is that “We are constantly on our own learning curve.” The work is fast and efficient, and Kauffman says this works so well because it is part of a gigantic cultural change movement throughout the entire company. Kauffman explains that during the program’s first four days, both the CEO and the company’s second-in-command meet with the corporate leaders and talk about the importance of *purpose* in the organization.

This is very powerful for these people; their CEO is going to come and talk to them. They have already developed their purpose and their life statement. The CEO personally reads their leadership development plans and gives them feedback. (C. Kauffmann, personal communication, June 27, 2010)

Kauffman says that the stakes and support are so high that this is considered to be a powerful, system-wide intervention.

Craig explains that they have spent four years of getting to the point that this program just sings, working across cultures with large multinational corporations such as Unilever. He says that “It is a well developed model for *dramatically accelerating the journey* for a bunch of executives, and if coaching can be connected to a system-wide intervention like this, it is much more powerful.” Currently working with a \$40 billion multinational, Craig says that the coaching is more powerful and the systemic change more powerful because of the coaching (N. Craig, personal communication, June 27, 2010).

WORKING WITH LEADERSHIP SYSTEMS AND ORGANIZATIONAL NARRATIVE

Coaching is being used to develop leadership resilience and sustainability in the light of constant change in organizational life

Rittenberg recommends one-on-one coaching to help impact work groups and peers, emphasizing the power of each individual to be a force for “systemic” change within the workplace.

today. Working in this way with leaders means working from the inside out – from within their political and organizational systems to impact the communities in which they live and work. These executives constantly face economic and political crises which require resilience in dealing with systemic change in financial, educational, and government institutions. Also facing the need to develop resilience to change are large corporate and family entrepreneurial institutions – who are using individual and team coaching to shift organizational culture with a new narrative around meaning and purpose.

Recently retired as an executive coach and management consultant with the Federal Consulting Group of the US Department of the Interior in Washington, DC, Lee Salmon currently runs his own private practice, Learning for Living, and was a member of the Board of Directors for the International Consortium for Coaching in Organizations (ICCO), a group of senior-level coaches who are committed to working in public and private organizations to have a positive impact.

He asks, “How can we build resilience within executives who are faced with crisis in their institutions?” He observes that today a great deal of political capital is being spent on maintaining existing structures that don’t work any longer. He helped to orchestrate the June 2010 ICCO Symposium and Colloquium to create a space for intimate, yet edgy, conversations to move the field of coaching forward worldwide. The theme for the Symposium was “building sustainable coaching programs in organizations.” He explains that there is a life cycle for coaching programs and organizations, and he asks, “How do we build programs to serve future direction in our organizational leadership and move towards creating resilience that allows for proactive change to occur?” He adds,

Coaching programs may be at a point where they are no longer of value, and need to be reincarnated into something different – integrated into the way the organization does business – in the way leaders are grown and the way culture and coaching support continuous learning and growth. (G.L. Salmon, personal communication, July 2, 2010)

Salmon explains that ICCO was formed because there is an emergent need if coaching is to evolve globally. ICCO sees coaching as an area of sustainable human development which can influence the kind of leadership required to sustain the world globally. The theme of the one-and-a-half-day ICCO Colloquium was “designing and building a sustainable coaching community of practice for organizational program managers.” Salmon explained that the approach was to take people inside organizations to build, design, and run a coaching program, creating a community of practice and learning from each other. The Colloquium was looking at how to make practitioners’ programs sustainable; every

year they invite people from diverse sectors and existing coaching organizations using scenario building to determine what types of programs can be built for the future.

ICCO is looking to discover

How can we create vibrant organizations that are alive and that have a sense of larger social responsibility for their place in the world? How are we creating programs that are going to impact and change the world and make it sustainable and live on a planet that is not destroying itself? (G.L. Salmon, personal communication, July 2, 2010)

Salmon explains that ICCO forums are looking at coaching from a larger stewardship perspective, working with the values of health, humanity, stewardship, and sustainability.

Richard Narva, a lawyer and head of Narva & Company based in Boston, Massachusetts, works with family entrepreneurship as a profound engineer of change.

It drives economic growth; it drives values; it drives change. What people don't understand is how *integral* family systems are to entire ventures. Entrepreneurship is crucial to social development in emerging nations and is often nurtured by the entrepreneur's family, contributing access to financial capital and labor resources. (R. Narva, personal communication, June 16, 2010)

Narva primarily works with families who control large enterprises. He says that the drive of family shareholders and family control group members is often constrained by deficits in leadership and management skills. These block their relationships, personal development, corporate growth, and enterprise success. He advises his clients around three concurrent issues: sustaining the growth of the enterprise, continuing the family's control of the enterprise, and continuing and enhancing the quality of family relationships within the family control group. He does this in an interdisciplinary team, typically where there is at least one advisor who is experienced and skilled in advising business, and another skilled in counseling families.

Narva starts from several assumptions: (1) the family is the source of strength, and the source of culture in a values-driven organization, and their performance can be measured and enhanced; (2) great companies are family controlled, and the best companies to work in are family, values-driven companies; and (3) families can be liberated from the myth that they are short-lived, and work instead from the premise that they sustain job growth, sustain coherence in the community, and offer tremendous fulfillment in their jobs.

Narva says that, in terms of values, it is important to understand the family culture so that you can understand these values-driven

He says that the drive of family shareholders and family control group members is often constrained by deficits in leadership and management skills.

enterprises. Family systems offer propellants and constraints on the leadership development of family members and non-family executives who lead the enterprise. Narva explains that through individual and team coaching they help the family to construct a new narrative by eliciting from the principals a consciousness of their values and enhancement of their family relationships; in that way the family can articulate corporate strategies. This work requires great respect for the power and complexity of the family system, rigorous ethical standards and helping the clients to develop a narrative of their future (R. Narva, personal communication, June 16, 2010).

Khatija Saley, previously Head of Standard Bank's Coaching and Mentoring Unit based in Johannesburg, South Africa, says that "the team coaching journey offers an opportunity to reassess the meaning of life, looking at how to do things differently in the broader society and communities" (K. Saley, personal communication, February 22, 2010). Saley and coaching consultant Lloyd Chapman shared an interesting case study on the Bank's development of team coaching. Team coaching has been integrated with individual executive coaching to emerge and strengthen leadership transformation, team bonding, and succession planning. Their team coaching model is based on an integration of learning methodologies and research with an emphasis on the Integrated Experiential Coaching Model developed by Chapman (2010).

According to Chapman, if you facilitate change at an experiential level, change happens both at an individual and team level. I asked Chapman what makes the Integrated Experiential Coaching Model different from other team coaching models.

Honoring people's experience is moving away from a pathology-based approach. Working with the strengths of the team to work with complexity is moving away from the myth that there is an individual leader who can guide us through this complexity in the world we live in. My recent experience of other people trying to do team coaching is that they come in with a predesigned intervention, working with process and not with content. (L. Chapman, personal communication, May 10, 2010)

Saley says that team coaching is providing "a way to optimize an entire team's performance by offering the benefits of one-on-one coaching to a team, linking coaching to business performance and building the credibility of coaching." Saley indicates that the work they are doing offers individuals in the organization a renewed sense of meaning and purpose.

We offer personal, interpersonal, and intrapersonal skills so that individuals can have better relationships with their colleagues. So, whilst we are making profits, we can make the world of work a better experience. Introducing

Working with the strengths of the team to work with complexity is moving away from the myth that there is an individual leader who can guide us through this complexity in the world we live in.

coaching has been a way to lead and manage counter culture. Fundamentally, it is about putting good people practice at the heart of the organization. (K. Saley, personal communication, February 22, 2010)

Charles Mudiwa, Managing Director (MD) of Stanbic Bank in Malawi, worked with Saley and Chapman in a team coaching process over a period of 18 months. There were initial concerns about the Bank's overall business results for the country, and the MD identified that some team members were actively sabotaging the success of the business. The outcomes of the team coaching have been a threefold improvement in profits over a six-month period. The MD and the team attribute the shift to the team coaching intervention, and are now partnering with an external institution to support the development of financial skills in the country as a corporate social investment (CSI) initiative.

Mudiwa believes that it is essential to share knowledge and for people to improve their creation of the process.

For me, the role and the importance of values is critical; we are able to agree on a common value system and put it into practice. The second thing that was important is that you create a new sub-culture that you super-impose on the organizational culture. You look at how you can impact the broader community and impact cultural change. This might come through your CSI process – CSI from the point of view of creating a whole new thinking and philosophy about how people see themselves in the context of their culture. We started to see a new bank and the ideal values and ideal team that we wanted to have. We started to turn around statements from present to future; moving from Number Two to where we wanted to be, Number One. (C. Mudiwa, personal communication, May 10, 2010)

Mudiwa emphasized commitment of leadership:

I don't think you can achieve this without almost total commitment from the top level. The amount of hours that people spent, taking part in meetings, doing their homework, became critical. Secondly, commitment and buy-in are critical. The third thing is the storytelling, to have a storytelling culture. One thing that strikes me now with hindsight is the lesson about stories. The Walt Disney story and his vision; we are only catching up with Walt's vision today. (C. Mudiwa, personal communication, May 10, 2010)

Hundreds of millions of people around the world have grown up with the magical world of Walt Disney – a world that began with the dream of a single individual: "If you can dream it, you can achieve it" (Golan & Shani, 2010). According to Mudiwa,

For me, the role and the importance of values is critical; we are able to agree on a common value system and put it into practice.

That is profound. I am seeing the value of storytelling. If we don't tell our stories, we cannot pass on our heritage. African stories are part of our culture, and all of our learnings are about culture. It's a typical African tradition, and all of our major breakthroughs were around storytelling. (C. Mudiwa, personal communication, May 10, 2010)

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THE BENEFITS OF COACH SUPERVISION FOR SYSTEMIC INTERVENTIONS

I heard during many of my interviews that huge investment is often made in executive development programs, sending executives off to expensive business schools who are often unsure of what they need to develop as leaders. On their return to the organization, however, the environment is not supportive enough to allow them to nurture any newfound or critical leadership capabilities. In addition, coaches often work in isolation with their executives, not aware of the systemic issues within an organization. They eventually become another “cog” in blocking systemic change due to their own lack of systemic knowledge. This is why supervision of coaches is crucial within any systemic change process which involves coaching.

While supervision has long been a fundamental underpinning of psychotherapy, it is not yet a given for the coaching industry. The term “supervision” describes the process by which the work of the practitioner is confidentially overseen and guidance is sought. Supervision ensures that the coach maintains the highest standards of competence; best serves the needs of the client; is professionally trained and skilled in the practice of coaching; and is committed to a program of continuing ethical and professional development throughout their years of practice.

However, without lead coaches/supervisors overseeing the entire coaching intervention within an organization, there is no way of harnessing the “systemic” issues or systemic trends that are emerging. “Silo” coaching has become the norm, and even though the International Coach Federation (ICF), the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC), and Coaches and Mentors of South Africa (COMENSA) are providing policies for supervision within their own professional bodies based on the evidence of their member practitioners, the benefits of coach supervision are not yet regulated, due to coaching's status as an emergent and not yet fully-fledged profession.

Ultimately, there are multiple benefits for the individual practitioner in supervision, as well as for the team and the client organization. The coach practitioners have a chance to meet with the supervising coach, ensuring that all practitioners have a sound understanding of the organizational systems at play. Coaching supervision is an important regular meeting where the coaches can connect with each other, and can begin to understand the connections between

their individual clients, particularly if they are working within one organization. It is an important meeting where the individuals in the group learn from each other (Stout-Rostron, 2009, p. 289).

RESEARCH SUPPORT FOR SYSTEMIC CHANGE

One of the primary emerging disciplines in coaching is research. Its role is to determine the competences necessary to educate and develop coaches worldwide, as well as to create a definition of coaching that the global community will accept. Another way to describe it is “ongoing critical appraisal” of your own coaching practice (Stout-Rostron, 2009, p. 317).

The escalating demand for coaching has motivated a wide range of providers and consumers to advocate the professionalization of the industry in order to safeguard the quality, effectiveness, and ethical integrity of coaching services. In turn, a growing awareness of the potential benefits to the industry of professional status has led to an interest in international dialogs, such as the Global Convention on Coaching (GCC), which was established with the explicit aim of exploring the professionalization of coaching.

The work of the Research Agenda at the Global Convention on Coaching (GCC) in Dublin, July 2008, defined research as

the life blood of practice. It feeds our continuing development and brings fresh perspectives to our work. It can be the place to visit in our dilemmas and in our successes. In valuing research we are valuing our work, as one is the exploration of the other. Engagement in that exploration sustains our practice and fuels our own development. (GCC, 2008, p. 11)

A profession is defined by its shared body of knowledge, and that in turn is defined by its research. Coaching is at the stage of an emerging discipline, and the development of coaching-specific theory and evidence-based practice is a major challenge (GCC, 2008). To further progress coaching research, in September 2008, the International Coaching Research Forum (ICRF), consisting of internationally recognized researchers, coaching professionals, and other stakeholders, met at Harvard to produce 100 research proposal outlines to advance coaching as an evidence-based discipline (Kauffmann, Russell, & Bush, 2008).

For the past three years, Dr. Gordon Spence, of the Coaching Psychology Unit at the University of Sydney, has been working on one large leadership research program testing a new model of leadership. Working with two industry partners, a law firm, and a public health service on the design and importance of leadership development programs, the Unit has been testing a new model of leadership: perspective-taking capacity, mindfulness, purpose, and positivity – the latter being the interpersonal/socio-cultural

In approaching developmental coaching on the back of this model, we have supervised our coaches to help their coachees approach tensions wherever they exist, and to explore what bigger perspectives it might be possible to take on their circumstances.

dimension of their leadership model. The project is headed up by Dr. Michael Cavanagh, with Drs. Gordon Spence, Paul Atkins, and Tony Grant as co-investigators. The project team has designed a program around this model. Spence explains that it has given them the ability to assess how much impact training had on each leader's performance and subjective experience, as well as looking at the incremental additional benefit coaching brought to the development of the leader.

We have been using developmental coaching to help leaders take a perspective on themselves, others, the environment, and the system, and to do so in a particular way. In approaching developmental coaching on the back of this model, we have supervised our coaches to help their coachees approach tensions wherever they exist, and to explore what bigger perspectives it might be possible to take on their circumstances. The project has taken an approach to developmental coaching which is about supporting people to understand the tensions in their circumstances, and understanding those tensions more fully. It's growing their ability to increase their perspectives, but to deal more effectively with complexity. (G. Spence, personal communication, June 29, 2010)

Throughout the project, the researchers have been interested in working simultaneously with two dimensions of development – vertical development (related to the mindset and perspectives needed for effective leadership) and horizontal development (related to the skills and techniques needed for leading). Coming from a “research study perspective,” the individuals in these cohorts are encouraged to address real issues through cross-functional teams. There has been positive feedback on the systemic impact of the leadership coaching project with results soon to be published (G. Spence, personal communication, June 29, 2010).

CONCLUSION

The purpose of these interviews has been to hear the voices of those who are working at the cutting edge of coaching for systemic and cultural change in organizations and institutions within a business context. There are rich connections in these stories, as well as a wide range of perspectives, examining what is innovative and collaborative in the coaching community at an organizational and institutional level. If leaders represent the social identity and overarching purpose of a particular group, these stories explain how coaching has the power to transform organizations into human communities united by a common purpose. We have heard about the importance of independent thinking, values-driven leadership, the level of consciousness of the leader, and the significance of storytelling.

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Coaching is being used in a variety of ways to develop leaders around the globe, to build sustainable institutional and organizational policies, managing cultural change and societal complexity. In some ways, these interviews illustrate how coaching is influencing the coach's ability to take risks. They also illuminate how to develop edgy conversations that get to the heart of issues and concerns that create change at a systemic level. So what are the questions we are left with as reflective practitioners if we are to coach effectively?

David Lane, Founder of the Professional Development Foundation in the UK, suggests that we need to answer three questions. First, "What is your purpose as a coach and what is your purpose in engaging with each of your clients?" Second, "What perspectives inform your work as a coach, including the expertise and experience you bring, and what your clients are bringing to the coaching conversation?" And third, "What is the process of working with your client like – what do you actually do and how are you drawing out your client's compelling stories?" (D. Lane, personal communication, July 18, 2010; see also Corrie and Lane, 2010). Hopefully the questions and perspectives outlined in these interviews will help you to think about what story – or stories – are emerging from your own coaching practice to help you move with your clients through their systemic change and transformation.

RESOURCES

Global Convention on Coaching: www.coachingconvention.org

Points of You: www.points-of-you.us

The Institute of Coaching: www.instituteofcoaching.org

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APPENDIX: RESEARCH SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. Can you describe what work you (and your organization/institution) do - and the values and beliefs which inform your work?
 2. How has your organization/institution used coaching to develop leadership competence and human development?
 3. How have you personally used coaching to develop your own leadership competence and ability to manage change?
 4. What positive and/or negative changes are a result of systemic coaching interventions, and can you tell me a story that relates to this?
 5. What other processes and methodologies does your organization/or client organizations use to achieve change?
 6. What are the current trends for coaching within your organization/institution or the organizations you provide service to (e.g., coaching circles, team coaching, or developing your own internal suite of coaches)?
 7. What impact has coaching had on large-scale systemic or cultural change within your own or client organizations? Can you give me an example or tell me a story that relates to this?
 8. If you could apply your process of change anywhere around the world, and to any system, what would you choose to focus on and why?
 9. Where do you see the tipping points occurring in your local or the global community (i.e. the systems or pressure points that may have the most leverage or impact)?
 10. Is there anyone else you know that is working in this area of systemic change and transformation as a result of coaching?
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