



The Philosophical Foundations of Organizational Coaching

Issue 2 2008

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John Lazar and William Bergquist

“...[E]very time that we are able to openly experience a phenomenon without aiming to explain it, it is an enormous learning experience. But we rarely look at phenomena; we are hooked in the assessment or explanation of phenomena. That step is very seldom broken because we confuse the assessment of the experience with the experience itself, or the explanation of the experience with the experience itself. So, when we go to a program and we talk with people, we say, “What is the experience of that?” For example, the woman I spoke of earlier said that the challenge for her was not being listened to. That was her experience. Now, the other man may point to another experience—why didn’t he tell the boss his experience of him? Because he was scared to death to tell him. If we run too quickly to explain it or assess it, we don’t reveal it. So, when I remember beginning to take a look at all phenomenologists, one of the things was to discover the power of the experience itself. In daily conversation, we do not talk about experience. We try to explain the experience; we assess the experience. In our programs, we challenge the need to assess and explain in every interaction we have.”

From “An Interview with Julio Olalla”
[Conducted by William Bergquist]



FROM THE DESKS. . .

Of the Co-Editors

Usually one of the four issues of *IJCO* each year is devoted to the interplay between the field of organizational coaching and a specific, emerging discipline or unique perspective on an existing organizational improvement initiative. During the past several years, for instance, we have explored interplays between coaching and new findings in the neurosciences, between coaching and human capital development, and between coaching and the appreciative perspective on organizational functioning. In the current issue we turn to the interplay between organizational coaching and philosophy—the “queen” of the sciences and the parent of all other disciplines. We are using the term “philosophy” in its traditional sense as a way to look at all knowledge (epistemology) and the nature of being (ontology). We are not addressing philosophy in its broader application as a statement of personal values or approaches to problems (for example, as a “philosophy of life” or as a “philosophy of coaching”).

We want first to acknowledge the important role that Kim Gørtz, one of our authors (and Editorial Board members), played in the initial conceptualization of this issue. Second, we wish to acknowledge that we have built this issue of *IJCO* around the philosophical perspectives of a particular person, Julio Olalla, who is founder of the Newfield Network (a premier coach-training program). Julio has already done considerable work examining ways in which specific philosophical traditions and disciplined thought can be applied to the field of professional coaching. We begin this issue with a transcript of the interview that one of us conducted with Julio, and follow this interview with three commentaries that are precipitated by Julio Olalla’s insightful perspectives.

The first of these commentaries is offered by David Drake, who builds on a brief story offered by Julio about his childhood background in Chile, as well as Julio’s broad-based perspective on the world’s conditions. Drake offers his own perspectives on cosmology, ontology, epistemology and ecology as they relate to the practice of coaching. A second commentary is authored by Sue Bethanis, who adds to Julio’s list of world crises by identifying the crisis of connection and meaning. Sue presents a coaching case study to exemplify this crisis and describes ways in which coaching can help organizational clients address this crisis. A third commentary is offered by one of us [WB] who conducted the original interview with Julio Olalla. Collaborating with his Norwegian colleague, Kristin Teresa Eggen, Bergquist focuses on Olalla’s comments regarding ontology (the study of being). Bergquist and Eggen suggest four ways in which to view one’s world from an ontological perspective and in which to work with one’s organizational clients from each of these perspectives.

Two additional contributions to this issue of *IJCO* are made by Robert DeFilippis and Kim Gørtz, who both engage the challenging prospect of applying philosophy to the practice of organizational coaching. DeFilippis turns to several fundamental philosophical issues regarding mind and body, the conscious and unconscious mind, and the role of metaphor in abstract thought. He identifies ways in which coaches can help their clients confront their own presuppositions concerning these fundamental issues. Gørtz (our first Danish author) adds yet another philosophical perspective in drawing on the work of two French philosophers (Foucault and Deleuze). He explores the “power issue” inherent in the coach-oriented relationship that exists between managers and employees, and between coaches and their clients.

We turn next to a regular feature in *IJCO*: a provocative musing offered by our resident “columnist,” Mike Jay. As usual, Mike offers us much to ponder as he asks whether the coach as philosopher is now a thing of the past and if the new tools for assessing levels of cognitive complexity are the thing of the future for coaches and their clients.

Finally, we are very pleased to announce the beginning of a major new series of articles in *IJCO*. As we have noted during the past year, *IJCO* is becoming a “hybrid” journal that features not only articles that have solicited by the co-editors of each issue, but also articles that have been submitted to the journal for peer review. The first two of these peer-reviewed articles appears in this issue of *IJCO*. One is written by Sraban Mukherjee (our first author from India), who offers a review of behavioral change processes as they relate to professional coaching and the coaching relationship. The second article is written by Frode Moen and Ragnvald Kvalsund (our first Norwegian authors, along with Kristin Teresa Eggen). They link executive coaching practices to theory and describe two of the most powerful techniques and skills of executive coaching (attending and influencing). We congratulate Mukherjee, Moen and Kvalsund for successfully engaging the peer review process and await other articles in the future for peer review.

As you can see, this issue of *IJCO* offers diverse perspectives and challenging insights into the world of organizational coaching as this world interweaves with various philosophical perspectives, presuppositions and interpersonal dynamics (including the use of power, attempts to change behavior, and skills of attending and influencing). This issue of *IJCO* also exemplifies the fuller realization of a commitment inherent in the title of this journal—it is truly international in scope.

William Bergquist
John Lazar

Themes for 2008 Issues of IJCO

Issue Three: Adult Development and Organizational Coaching [An issue honoring the contributions of Frederick Hudson]

Issue Four: Contracting for Organizational Coaching Services

Themes for 2009 Issues of IJCO

The *IJCO* Editorial Board has selected the following themes for 2009 . . .

Issue One: The History of Organizational Coaching : A Multidisciplinary Perspective

Issue Two: Organizational Coaching and Communications: The Leading Edge

Issue Three: Coaching to the Unconscious: Implications and Challenges for Organizational Coaches

Issue Four: Organizational Coaching in Financial Institutions