

Executive Coaching: Crafting a Versatile Self in Corporate America

by

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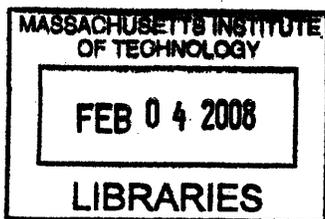
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Abstract

In recent years, coaching has become a major form of personal and professional development service offered to executives to help develop leadership skills, enhance performance, and remediate patterns of problematic workplace behavior. This dissertation examines the emergence and development of executive coaching in the United States as a new form of professional expertise. Drawing on eighteen months of ethnographic research, the majority of which took place in New York City, this study analyzes the ways in which executive coaching brings together theories of individual psychology and of organizational efficiency in order to increase functionality and productivity at work.

Executive coaching is: a) a new form of professional expertise, b) a management tool to increase productivity and efficiency at work, c) a window to changing notions of the self and personhood in America and, finally d) an access point to the corporate world. This study explores these four dimensions of executive coaching.

I argue that the emergence of coaching is a product of and a response to a fast changing business environment where continuous improvement is required to adapt to the volatility of changes. Change in the larger context (corporate settings and business environments) is not to be resisted or criticized but to be enabled through the change of the self. This dissertation illustrates and explains the grounds of a shift away from systemic approaches and systemic criticism towards individualistic approaches. Coaching emerges in and becomes an illustration of a neo-liberal economy that emphasizes constant retraining of a self that is versatile, pragmatic and fragmented.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The Coaching Field and the Fieldwork: Coaching and Anthropology as Mapping

Introduction

Over the past two decades personal coaching has become a new field of expertise that provides clients with action-based guidance in their daily lives and at work. A survey conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers International Survey Unit estimates that there are 30,000 coaches practicing globally. Around three quarters of survey respondents are based in the United States, making it the country with the largest presumed number of coaches.¹ There are currently several discrete fields of coaching with different histories and methods, including coaching for executives, graduate students, and even ordinary people who seek coaches to help them with the mundane tasks of everyday life.

In recent years, coaching has become a major form of personal and professional development service offered to executives to help develop leadership skills, enhance performance, and remediate patterns of problematic workplace behavior.² This dissertation examines the emergence and development of executive coaching in the United States as a new form of professional expertise. Drawing on 18 months of

¹ International Coach Federation commissioned PriceWaterhouseCoopers' International Survey Unit to undertake a global survey of the coaching profession. The survey was launched in September 2006, with close to 30,000 coaches invited to participate. 5,145 respondents from 73 countries had participated in the survey, more than 1,500 of whom were non-ICF members. The survey was sent to 13,142 coaches based in the United States. Assuming as a prudent threshold that there are 30,000 coaches worldwide it is estimated that the revenue generated by the coaching industry globally is close to \$1.5 billion.

² According to the PriceWaterhouseCooper's (PWC) survey, three main areas in which coaches indicated to have specialized were executive coaching (18.8 percent), leadership coaching (18.3percent) life coaching (15.7 percent) and business/organizations coaching (9.6 percent).

ethnographic research, the majority of which took place in New York City, I analyze the ways in which executive coaching brings together theories of individual psychology and of organizational efficiency in order to increase functionality and productivity at work.

Executive coaching is: a) a new form of professional expertise, b) a management tool to increase productivity and efficiency at work, c) a window to changing notions of the self and personhood in America and, finally d) an access point to the corporate world. This study explores these four dimensions of executive coaching. Coaching reflects cultural beliefs in individual power and will in determining and improving one's life and career. The emergence of executive coaching is a product of and response to a fast changing corporate environment where continuous self-improvement is required to adapt to the volatility of markets.

What is coaching?

The manager and her coach: what a strange couple! Is the coach the Mephistopheles to the manager's Faust, the Sganarelle of Don Juan, the Sancho Panza of Don Quixote, the man Matti of Herr Puntila, or Friday to the manager's Robinson? Is the coach a jester, an *éminence grise*, a scapegoat, a confessor, a confidant, an intellectual guide, a mentor, a maternal figure, a severe father, a therapist? Would coaching thus be a modern version of the Socratic dialogue? (Brunner 1998: 515)

Professional coaches have different and often conflicting opinions about the definition of coaching and the kind of educational and professional background necessary to practice as a coach. Who constitutes a successful coach or a genuine coaching client, how coaching works, what coaching is for and how subfields of coaching are different from each other are all points of debate.

During my fieldwork, I have heard more than one hundred definitions or formulations of what coaching is and what coaches do. Definitions ranged from the most general to the most specific. Coaches made references to the first use of the word “coach” in English to define a particular kind of carriage and argued that today’s professional coaches support their clients and convey them “from where one was to where one wants to be” (Witherspoon and White 1996). In personal conversations coaches told me that they help their clients construct a map for where they are going, keep them guided and focused on this map, hold them accountable and devise measures for identifying when the destination has been reached. They said they listened, supported, challenged and helped their clients to move up a level, by expanding a skill, boosting performance, or changing the way a person thinks or behaves. They served as their client’s “strategic thinking partner” or “active learning partner” helping ordinary folks do extraordinary things and “provided sturdy shoulders to stand on so one can see farther than they might see on their own” (Goldsmith et al. 2000: 12).

More often than not coaches have defined coaching by what coaches *do not* do and how they do not do it rather than what they do and how they do it. They have emphasized that

what they do is not consulting, not psychotherapy, not teaching and not mentoring. In efforts to claim and maintain expertise in a new area, coaches claimed to be doing something new and unique. Surprisingly a variety of professionals identified themselves as coaches. Psychotherapists, psychiatrists, teachers, academic advisors, pastors, consultants and guidance counselors with whom I met over the course of my fieldwork argued that part of their profession involved coaching and challenged the originality and uniqueness of executive coaches' expertise, casting it instead as merely a form of re-branding.

Inside the coaching field, questions regarding the definition and boundaries of coaching were not resolved either. Coaches divide their profession into two major distinct groups: life coaching and executive coaching. Life coaches argue that this distinction is built on the client base and claim that when they coach an executive they are practicing as executive coaches. However executive coaches argue that they have extensive educational and professional expertise specifically suited to executive coaching. They see a big divergence between the two groups. An executive coach, for example, criticized life coaches for denying the hundred years of tradition of executive coaching and for turning coaching into merely a moneymaking tool. Another coach that I interviewed in the early stages of my fieldwork suggested that, as an anthropologist, I should look at the division and hostility between these two tribes. To him, this conflict was one of the most important and fascinating aspects of the coaching field.

The social dynamics are very interesting in coaching. What are the customs that different coaches have? What do they believe? What are their values? What do they do? There is a strong sense of division within coaching. It is almost tribal. ICF's (International Coach Federation) annual meeting is a fascinating place for example. You will get a very touchy feeling, hugging etc. The two tribes have so much in common yet the closer you look the more differences you will see ... The hostility between these two groups is amazing.

These differences are not only visible in the ways in which coaches talk about their educational and professional background but also work practices, relationship to clients, society memberships and publications. Moreover, executive coaches make explicit references to "professionalism" and claim a greater sense of it. Conflicts arise with regards to the development of professional standards. International Coach Federation (ICF) has begun developing professional standards but some executive coaches argue that the ICF does not necessarily represent the field of coaching and that the American Psychological Association (APA) should become involved in regulating executive coaching practices. Life coaches object to APA involvement and raise concerns that it would exclude coaching subfields other than executive coaching that the ICF represents.

Coaches also have different views about when coaching emerged and how it evolved. Life coaches talk about personal coaching as a profession that has existed since the late-1980s and trace its origins back to Thomas Leonard. They credit Leonard for founding coaching as a profession by instituting CoachU, the first formal coach training program in

1992 and Professional Coaches and Mentors Association, a professional association for coaching in 1994, now known as the International Coach Federation (ICF). Executive coaches argue that Thomas Leonard did not invent the field of coaching but popularized it. Some trace the origins of coaching to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when the first business schools and consulting firms were founded and the first formal psychological tests were created for the army. Others argue that coaching emerged in the late 1980s and is just a repackaging of practices once done under the umbrella of consultation and counseling, and suggest that it was an attempt by psychologists to replenish their income after the damaging effects of managed care (Tobias 1996).

Executive coaches also debate who constitutes a coaching client. According to a survey of coaching practices at leading American companies, executive coaches Witherspoon and White (1996) argue that those coached in business “may be anyone from a \$60,000 middle manager up to the CEO.” Another executive coach, Kilburg (2000) argues that recipients of executive coaching have managerial authority and responsibility in an organization. Others question whether lawyers, doctors and other professionals could be regarded as recipients of executive coaching and ask whether it is the clientele or the process that makes executive coaching unique (Kampa and Anderson 2001).

When all the many possible definitions of coaching and distinctions are considered--between coaching and other fields and between subfields--coaching looks amorphous. A coach wryly described the situation of drawing tribal distinctions as “coaching is not coaching is not coaching.”

Coaching as a new form of professional expertise

Sociologists have argued that professions struggle and compete against each other to gain control over undefined and unclear tasks and identify the limits of one kind of knowledge in order to expand their jurisdictional power (Abbott 1988; Abbott and Wallace 1990). They can then present their work as different from that of other experts and in turn they can claim expert status on par with other groups. Similarly, Gieryn (1999) introduced boundary work into the analysis of expertise by arguing that diverse groups create cultural maps on which authoritative knowledge can be assigned or denied to knowledge producers according to where they are located--whether they are 'insiders' or 'outsiders.' Coaches continuously make distinctions between coaching and other professions such as management consulting and psychotherapy and draw boundaries between them.

In my second chapter *Tribal Conflict: Boundary Making in Coaching*, I tell the story of coaching by paying attention to the kind of work it takes to keep it apart--conceptually, professionally, and socially--from psychotherapy. The distinctions that circulate in the field are multiple and involve methods of intervention, payment structures, ethical guidelines, legal liabilities, and outcomes. Coaches argue that coaching is more issue-focused than psychotherapy. They present differences regarding timing, location and frequency of contact. Coaching occurs in a broad array of contexts including face-to-face sessions, meetings with other people, observation sessions, by telephone or e-mail, and in a variety of locations away from the client's workplace. Coaching sessions can last anywhere from a few minutes to a few hours, whereas therapy typically occurs in a series of 45-50 minute sessions at regular intervals. Unlike psychotherapists, coaches collect

data from many sources including the individual executive, his or her superiors, peers, subordinates, and family members. Some coaches find these differences to be only logistical and argue that the main difference between the principles of therapy and executive coaching is the depth to which issues are pursued and processed. I lay out these multiple distinctions and tell the story of how coaching exists in the midst of them. The multiplication of these distinctions reveals the existing anxiety over keeping coaching and therapy as two separate fields. The distinctions are used to make coaching seem like anything but psychotherapy. And yet when they are juxtaposed with what actually happens in the field, the distinctions become more permeable and malleable.

The official distinctions between coaching and psychotherapy are with reference to the coaching client, using DSM-IV (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders) diagnosable disorders and functionality. These distinctions have become especially important for psychotherapists who have shifted their practices to focus on coaching. The shift from psychotherapy to coaching highlights psychotherapists' challenges in working with managed care. It raises questions regarding the legal and ethical regulations that themselves help construct and create boundaries for this emerging body of expertise. And finally it illustrates and explains the grounds of a shift from depth models of psychology to flexible, segmental, and pragmatic notions of self. Coaches wield their expertise to draw clear distinctions between the healthy and functioning population which would benefit from coaching and dysfunctional people who require therapy. Coaches believe that they can draw clear boundaries between fragments of life and between the self and its disorders.

Abbott argues that the birth of professions coincided with the rise of personal problems (Abbott 1988). Brint (1994) calls these professionals “human services professionals” who apply formal knowledge in the treatment of problems that afflict individuals and in the service of the minimum standard that society deems necessary for a person to be able to live a normal and productive life. Similarly, Aronson (1982) shows how the first generation of nutrition scientists in the United States linked nutrition to a social problem (labor) and presented nutritional science as a tool to improve the conditions of the working class without raising wages. Personal problems became important to existing or new professions when these problems generated symptoms and signs that could be “classified”, “diagnosed” and “treated” (Abbott: 40). In *Sociology of the Caring Professions*, Abbott and Wallace argue that social workers and nurses create both the object of their intervention, such as the neglectful mother, and make them the targets of intervention (1990). When individuals are defined as clients, they are seen as being or having problems which require the professional knowledge of caring expertise.

Coaches claim that they are dealing with something that is neither an irregularity in relation to a norm nor a pathological dysfunction. They maintain that many dysfunctions in life may be problems of poor self-management not problems of pathology and offer ways to act on this re-description through engaging in expert help. They present coaching as suitable for individuals with no problems that can be diagnosed, classified or treated and insist that “mental health” and “functionality” are prerequisites for a coaching intervention. By doing so, coaches shun psychotherapy and remove the stigma associated with having a mental disorder. Yet by arguing that coaching is for people who are doing

well but who want to do better they make development a baseline and present coaching as suitable for everybody.

Coaching as management tool

Since the 1920s, psychologists have worked in corporations, where they have used psychometric tools to assess potential and current employees and pointed to the importance of psychological and social factors in managing work environments and productivity. In the third chapter, *Executive Coaching in the World: Histories, Visions and Ethical Dilemmas*, I trace the history of the field by situating ethno-histories of executive coaching in the history of earlier interventions that aimed to increase efficiency at the workplace. This history dates to F.W. Taylor's scientific management principles articulated in the 1910s and Mayo's studies of the 1920s and 1930s that showed the importance of human relations at the workplace. Human resource departments recognized the importance of psychological motivation and gave more attention to differences among individuals. While executive coaching draws on these approaches it is also distinctive in its choice of psychodynamic frameworks and its exploration of behavior and thought patterns that are traced back to childhood and its emphasis on self-awareness and self-knowledge.

Whereas previously efficiency was posed as an organizational problem, executive coaching shifts the emphasis towards the idea that efficiency is a matter of psychology. To be sure there are also consultants who specialize in organizational work practices, workflow, and so on, but coaches uniquely take the individual as their main focus.

Coaches enlist a set of techniques to increase their clients' efficiency in increasing self-awareness and becoming a different person. Coaches and coaching clients talk about a work ethics that emphasize increased knowledge about the individual and the social in which the individual operates. Increased self-awareness, self-discipline, and self-control are encouraged both to increase personal happiness and satisfaction and enhance productivity and functionality.

Executive coaches are usually called into corporations in situations where a mid- or high-level manager is "faltering" in some way or not performing up to expectations. Here coaching becomes a "remedial" tool to enhance performance and effectiveness through eliminating unhelpful patterns of behaviors. The executive coaching process might also be a part of succession planning processes or executive development initiatives. In these "developmental" situations a coach is hired to help the executive to function more effectively on the present job or to be well-positioned for future career stages, tasks, or responsibilities. I argue that the distinction between "remedial coaching" and "coaching for development" is subtle and insignificant. In both cases, there is lack, excessiveness or misuse of a character trait, skill or habit. Executive coaching helps executives gain what they lack, lose excesses, and learn or unlearn a habit.

In the majority of cases, an executive's boss, governing body, human resources department or the department of executive development initiates and sponsors the coaching engagement. Coaches often have conflicting commitments (to the company that hired him; to the executive he is coaching) and are subject to shifting implicit

contracts as their knowledge deepens about their clients. They face ethical dilemmas because there are no clear and generic answers to questions such as: What is coaching? Who is a coaching client? What is the problem? How is to be addressed? I characterize these ethical dilemmas in terms of what Michael Fischer (2004) calls “reflexive social institutions” where things are changing and institutions are required to iteratively and recursively assemble information from multiple places and process it in a more-or-less continuous feedback manner to adapt to changes. It is also a struggle to differentiate the personal and the social, the (measurable) rational and the (un-measurable) irrational and the tensions between individuals, small groups (work teams), larger organizations and what Foucault called disciplinary societies.

Executive coaching is a conjuncture where psychotherapy and management consulting practices come together. As psychological principles permeate into the workplace the principles of efficient management permeate into the psychological methods that coaches deploy. By studying this conjuncture I shed light on both traditions as they shape each other and contribute to the history of psychotherapy and management practices in America.

A major tradition in sociology, best known through the works of Philip Rieff (1966), Richard Sennett (1977) and Christopher Lasch (1978; 1984), examined contemporary shifts in post-World War II American notions of self (Riesman 1950; Whyte 1956; Marcuse 1964; Slater 1970). These scholars produced despairing commentaries on what they saw as a culture of narcissism and the rise of a new type of inward looking

personality in America. Drawing on empirical studies conducted by social researchers in the 1970s, these authors argued that a new type of narcissistic form of self was replacing the social and public self as a result of the rise of therapy culture. They believed that the therapeutic culture was a response to the loss of meaning in society but was in turn producing meaningless (Lasch 1984) and empty relationships and selves (Cushman 1990, 1995) devoid of family, community and tradition (Zaretsky 1976; Taylor 1989; Levin 1987).

While touted as empowering individuals, critics of American ideologies of self-empowerment and self-reliance have seen them (ego psychology, psychoanalysis, family therapy) as part of a growing system of normalizing and channeling individuals and their conceptions of self. The earlier critiques of Rieff, Lasch and Riesman, grew into more targeted critiques of psychiatry, social work and the psychological professions as the avoidance of broader questions of structural violence and deformations of social structure (Szasz 1961; Zola 1972; Illich 1976; Donzelot 1979).

Coaching is an emerging field that takes the self and its reflexive capacities (self-perception, self-presentation, self-improvement) as its main objects. Coaching illustrates that there is a shift away from depth models of psychology to flexible, fragmented, and pragmatic notions of the self. This shift in notions of the self is illustrative of shifts taking place in larger cultural worlds: of the ways in which psychologists practice their profession and the ways in which the healthy/pathological and functional self is talked about. At both levels the self is divided into manageable fragments that are impermanent.

Coaching as a window onto notions of self and personhood

Science Studies scholars have contributed to the literature on the self by studying the ways in which people have been measured, standardized and categorized (Hacking 1986; Porter 1995; Rose 1989; Star and Bowker 1999; Lemov 2005). A complimentary anthropological strand of STS work draws on medical anthropology which examines categories of the self (healthy/ill, normal/abnormal) as they change across cultures, places and time (Canguillhem 1989; Cohen 1998; Petryna 2002; Franklin and Lock 2003; Dumit 2004; Martin 2007) and how new ideologies of self are formed particularly in American culture.

Coaches adapt various methods and tools from human resources practices and invent new ones. They use psychodynamic approaches and relate problems of efficiency and productivity to individual psychology and social relations. Based on these psychodynamic theories they conceptualize, theorize, and systematize relationships between the executive and his or her past, and between the executive and his or her organization. They see unhealthy patterns of feelings and behaviors resulting from unresolved unconscious conflict as impediments to executive and organizational performance. For these coaches, psychodynamics becomes a tool for analysis, a model for explanation and a method of intervention. The fourth chapter, *The world in Executive Coaching: From Scientific Numbers to Scientific Narratives* lays out methods and tools used by coaches in their engagement with their executive clients and provides an analysis of theories in the field that relate problems of efficiency and productivity to individual psychology and social relations.

Coaches struggle to make the intra-psychic and inter-psychic forces visible, legible, and measurable and prove a cause and effect relationship between intra-psychic and inter-psychic forces and business performance. They desire to make coaching “scientific” or at least, a marketable expertise. On the one hand coaches emphasize the importance of making coaching scientific and rely on statistical data that is collected through psychometric tools, and on the other hand they want to have access to underlying cognitive and psychological structures through the collection of stories. Furthermore they want to make the method of story collection more scientific. But most of all, they need to have tools that can be practically applied: to provide useful cues, be effective, and be relatively time-efficient. I argue that coaching illustrates not only the permeation of psychological principles into the workplace but also the permeation of principles of efficient management into the psychological methods they deploy.

Weber argued that the development of capitalism depended on the emergence of one’s duty in a calling where “the individual is supposed to feel and does feel towards the content of his professional activity.” The devotion to labor as a calling, the most characteristic elements of the capitalistic culture, was “rational” on the basis of rigorous calculation, directed with foresight and caution towards the economic success and “irrational” from the perspective of self-interest (Weber 2003: 78).

Business with its continuous work has become a necessary part of their lives. From the viewpoint of personal happiness, that sort of life is irrational where a man exists for the sake of his business, instead of the reverse. He gets nothing out

of his wealth for himself, except the irrational sense of having done his job well.

(Ibid: 70)

Executive coaches deal with the following dilemma: if organizations are founded on rational principles and are expected to run on these principles, how is the irrationality of people to be negotiated with the rationality of corporations in an unpredictable marketplace? They ask: Is it a problem to allow irrationality show up in rational setting? Is there a rational irrationality? Is there a particular mechanism of the irrational that is not pathological? They acknowledge irrationality as part of human nature and even more so a part of the executive's nature. But in certain circumstances they find the irrationality of the executive to be "too irrational," or "irrational in a useless way." I suggest that, in effect, executive coaching codifies irrationality as natural yet problematic, depathologizes its seeming disorders, errors, and illusions and undertakes psychodynamic analyses accompanied by observations, visual maps and scales to make the irrationality visible and manageable. The principle of executive coaching is found in the practical carving out of a field of what I call "useless irrationality" or "surplus irrationality."

Coaching as an access point to contemporary workplaces

In *Flexible Bodies* Emily Martin traces across several domains what she describes as a "worldview that encompasses notions about how persons, bodies and organizations are put together and how they function in health and illness" based around the notion of flexibility (Martin 1994: 43). She argues that ideas about flexible systems are adopted in popular, scientific, economic, and political discourses and reflect the "peculiarly

American cultural attachment to individual growth and development” (Ibid: 243). The human resource managers, consultants, and authors advocating the notion of “flexibility” insist that the corporation must be “fluid,” and “ever changing” and corporate bodies must become “agile” and “flexible” to survive in this fluid environment. Coaching is one of the instruments of the “flexible self.” Coaches are flexibility trainers.

Darwinian thinking is pervasive in the coaching field and is used to explain or justify continuous changes in the business world. Adaptation is thought of as natural and inevitable in direct analogy with Darwinian models of adaptation. Coaches make references to a corporate jungle explicitly and implicitly when they describe pre-contexts of coaching for developmental (adapting to a new position or a new context) or remedial purposes (failure to adapt to new circumstances). They use metaphors of the jungle to explain patterns of derailment (skills that are overused or misused become flaws). As they transfer the principles of a natural jungle to the corporation they make the corporation jungle look natural. They use the Darwinian metaphors to bring out what they imagine to be a productive and adaptive self in today’s corporations. Coaching is a product of the so-called Darwinian environment and a response to it. Chapter five, *A Versatile Executive in the Darwinian Workplace* explores the prominence of concepts of versatility and Darwinian metaphors in executive coaching by looking at the efforts of a group of coaches to make measurement tools more versatile.

The strength and power of coaching with regard to the versatile corporate place comes from several interrelated features: 1) coaches present change as inevitable and

continuous; 2) they tightly link change of the of self and of the corporate world; 3) they present coaching as a technology of change; and 4) they thus make coaching inevitable and continuous. The individual here is improvable with respect to two norms: that of the efficient organization and that of the adaptive individual. As the adaptive and non-adaptive behaviors of executives are linked to business performance the necessity of assessing and improving versatility become possible and understandable. What appears through the juxtaposition of change of the self and the corporate world is a set of expert knowledge about the executive self and its adaptation so as to benefit the corporation. Coaching not only provides lenses through which we can see today's versatile workplace in a different way, it also participates in and co-constructs this workplace by offering professional help to executives dealing with the versatility of the workplace.

Coaches continuously need to change and adapt to changing corporate settings and business parameters. Coaching is an individualistic approach that moves away from systemic critiques and programs for change. Instead, coaching has emerged in and become an illustration of a neo-liberal economy that emphasizes a constant retraining of the self.

The fieldwork

I started my fieldwork in May 2005 and conducted my first interview with a life coach working in Boston. In June 2005, I attended a workshop in Emeryville, California organized by MentorCoach, an organization that trains mental health practitioners to become coaches. Following this workshop, I observed two other MentorCoach

workshops in New Jersey and New York in 2006. At these workshops, I met with several psychotherapists who were in the process of shifting from psychotherapy to coaching. I interviewed several of these psychotherapists, who have either added coaching to their psychotherapy practices, or in many cases, quit their careers as psychotherapists and become full-time coaches. I have closely followed one psychotherapist who, after doing executive coaching for five years, started working as a psychologist in a public mental health institution. To compliment this data on the shift from psychotherapy to coaching, I talked to mental health professionals about the mental health care system in America and concepts of mental health, pathology, and functionality. I traced the ways in which coaches who made this career shift did so in part to move away from medical discourses and the stigma associated with mental disorders.

In summer 2005, I attended the American Psychological Association Annual Meeting in Washington, DC and met members of the Consulting Psychology Division (Division 13) most of whom practice as executive coaches. I followed this group closely for two years at conferences, workshops and informal meetings and interviewed several executive coaches from this group. Of this group, I worked closely on three coaching engagements with one coach who I will call James, who shared three interviews that he conducted with executive clients who had been fired from their positions. We co-analyzed these interview materials, and came up with a chronology of events, and maps of organizational structure, relationships, and important themes. We used these maps to explore what might have contributed to the “crisis” situation of firing. I also participated as a research subject in the pilot phase of a new measurement method that James was

working on with the aim of shortening the amount of time he spends on data collection and analysis.

In total, I interviewed 58 informants (23 executive coaches, 15 life coaches, 9 mental health practitioners, 7 psychotherapists/coaches and 4 coaching clients). As almost all life coaches have been coached, the interviews with life coaches also provided the perspectives of clients. I talked to several more coaches at meetings that I attended including MentorCoach one-day training workshops (Emeryville, New Jersey and New York), The American Psychological Association Annual Meetings (Washington DC and New Orleans), the Fifth Positive Psychology Conference (Washington DC), and the Consulting Psychology Division, Mid-Winter Conference (Miami, Florida). I also attended monthly meetings of the International Coaching Federation New York Chapter and introductory workshops organized by coach training institutions.

To learn more about the subfields of coaching, I attended weekly Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) coaching teleconference calls over the course of four months. I organized three teleconference calls with ADHD coaches from two different ADHD organizations. Some of these conversations involved creating ethical and professional standards for the coaching field in general and ADHD coaching field in particular. To trace the history of coaching, I talked to pioneers in the field of life and executive coaching and conducted interviews in the field (some of these were conducted in an oral history format). I interviewed founding members of prominent organizations including Center for Creative Leadership, International Coach Federation, and leading

companies in the field of management consulting and executive coaching such as Personnel Decision International and RHR International.

I also surveyed articles and books about coaching. Of this literature, I focused on publications that widely circulate in the field and those that are written by coaches that I studied. Among other trade and professional journals (*Fortune*, *Harvard Business Review*, *Journal of Management Executive*, *Organizational Dynamics*), I did a thorough analysis of articles published in the *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research* between 1996 and 2006. I also reviewed articles on executives published in the *New York Times* between September 2005 and December 2006, in order to analyze how executives have been represented in the news media.

Finally in May 2007, three coaches invited me to sit in on their coaching sessions with managers of a hospital that has been going through a restructuring and development process. I met with these coaches the night before sessions and learned about the history of the hospital and their role within the hospital. With the permission of the CEO of the hospital and the managers, I observed five coaching sessions led by three different coaches. They have sent me copies of all the tests they used to collect data from their clients and some of their results.

During the course of my fieldwork, I felt that there was a two-way struggle to make sense of the field. An executive coach pointed to the overlapping styles of mapping a social field and relations in anthropology and coaching, underlining how both fields were trying

to make sense of social worlds. Coaches compared my interview methods with theirs and criticized me for the type of questions I have asked, for the ways I asked them, and for the ways I recorded (or failed to record) our conversations. One coach thought I was not asking the “anthropologically important” questions, while another warned me that I might be missing details when I record my interviews with a tape recorder. He asserted that the best way to capture the complexity and subtlety in a conversation is by taking notes.

For two years, I traced the multiple definitions, contradictory arguments, ever changing perspectives and blurry distinctions circulating in the coaching field. I followed coaches as they have redefined, disputed, and negotiated definitions of coaching and distinctions between coaching and other fields. They have given different names to the same methods, tools and theories. It felt to me that coaches were struggling to come up with clear definitions not just to explain coaching to others but also to themselves. In follow-up conversations they had thoughts about new definitions and distinctions that they had never before considered. They began to think differently about what they do and how they do it.

Anthropological fieldwork and executive coaching deploy overlapping styles of mapping social fields and thus provide mutually enlightening perspectives on social relationships. The mapping techniques used by executive coaches can help anthropologists understand the corporate world, changing notions of self and personhood, and how fields of expertise form, define, and defend themselves as distinctive professional practices. In return,

hopefully the comparative and theoretical mappings of anthropology can provide a reflective space for executive coaches and their clients.

It was this fluidity in the field that helped shed light on my understanding of the changing nature of the self and organizational expectations in America. Coaching has become a) a profession of professions, b) a tool to manage the individual psychology to manage the corporation, c) an illustration of the shift towards flexible and pragmatic notions of self, and d) a product of and a response to volatile workplaces.

Chapter 2

“Tribal Conflicts”: Boundary Making in Coaching

Introduction

The emergence and development of coaching as a new field of expertise has been contentious among mental health practitioners, especially regarding the increasing numbers of mental health professionals who have shifted their practice to coaching. This shift tested the boundaries of professional identity and expertise, and raised questions about the status of psychopathology as an object of coaching. In this chapter, I tell the story of coaching by paying attention to the kind of work that it is taking to keep it apart--conceptually, professionally and socially--from psychotherapy. The official distinctions between coaching and psychotherapy are made about the coaching client, with references to DSM-IV (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders) diagnosable disorders and functionality. Other distinctions that circulate in the field are subtle and involve differences in methods, type of intervention, and outcomes. The multiplication of these distinctions reveals abiding anxieties over keeping coaching and therapy as two separate fields. The distinctions are used by various actors to make coaching seem like anything but psychotherapy. And yet when coaching and psychotherapy are considered in terms of what actually happens in the field, it is clear that the distinctions are much more permeable and malleable.

During the course of my fieldwork some of these distinctions remained the same despite some contradictions. They were reinforced by my observations of multiple training

workshops, presentations, personal conversations with coaches and coaching clients, and websites. Yet new distinctions emerged in my one-on-one conversations with coaches. The certainty with which these distinctions had been formulated often disappeared towards the end of interviews. In my group conversations with coaches the distinctions became points of discussion where coaches disagreed as to which of these distinctions were viable.

In the first section of this chapter, I talk about the landscape in which a shift is taking place from psychotherapy to coaching. I then delineate several differences between psychotherapy and coaching as they currently circulate among practitioners and show how these are mutually reinforcing and context dependent. The increasing interest in coaching is illustrative of a number of issues. First, it highlights psychotherapists' challenges in working with managed care. Second, it raises questions regarding the legal and ethical regulations that claim jurisdiction on this emerging body of expertise. And finally it refers to a shift from depth models of psychology to flexible and pragmatic notions of the self.

In the following section, I introduce Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) coaching as a contentious sub-field of coaching that combines a DSM disorder and coaching. I argue that the existence of a coaching subfield that addresses a DSM disorder is made possible by a segmental view that separates pathology from its everyday symptoms and divides the self into fragments that can easily be defined and improved with the help of coaching. Coaching relies on the possibility of drawing clear distinctions

between segments of self and making these segments quantifiable and thus improvable. Coaching draws boundaries between psychotherapy and coaching in the process of becoming a profession. But boundary making in coaching is not just a matter of professionalization. Coaching thus eliminated the fuzzy boundaries upon which psychotherapy relies. Thus, boundary making is the innovation of coaches through which they carve divisions between healthy and functioning populations and those in need of therapy, between fragments of life, and between the self and its disorders.

“Coaching: Is this psychotherapy?”

The International Coach Federation (ICF), the professional association of coaching, estimates that there are 30,000 coaches practicing worldwide, three-quarters of them in America. The number of accredited coaches is around 6,000 and forty percent of these accredited coaches are psychotherapists, who have either added coaching to their psychotherapy practices, or in many cases, quit their careers as psychotherapists and become full-time coaches. An October 2000 survey published by Psychotherapy Finances, a monthly newsletter targeted to behavioral health care professionals, found that 23% of mental health clinicians are taking active steps to leave their practices. And roughly 20% of practitioners now list coaching along with other offerings in their therapy practices. Some psychotherapists have described such career changes or added skills as the signs of a “paradigm shift”.

Based on an ethnographic study of managed care on the experience and practice of clinical psychiatry, Alasdair Donald argues that managed care in psychiatric settings has

become the management of symptoms in a standardized and efficient manner. The principles of management that are introduced to clinical settings do not only change the way in which psychiatry is practiced but also the cultural and social landscape in which mental disease is understood as a specific entity that can be treated efficiently and effectively. This managerial approach, he argues, generates a moral ideology in which the notion of personhood is suitable to business and consumer culture (Donald 1999). Based on their ethnographic fieldwork at the psychiatric and substance abuse service of a community health clinic in a large Northeastern city, Kirshner and Lachicotte (1999) list the changes that managed care brought to mental health practice as follows: intrusion of non-professionals into the process of deciding who gets treatment and how much they are allotted and the dictum that clinicians must offer a much more careful accounting of the particulars of service provision than ever before. Mental health practitioners feel the necessity of staying within the bounds of treatment guidelines set by insurance companies. The terms and limitations of managed care are perceived by mental health clinicians as dissonant with their sense of psychotherapeutic treatment (Kirshner and Lachicotte 1999; Lührman 2000).

During my fieldwork, psychotherapists who shifted to coaching cited difficulties with working in managed care as one of the major reasons for their decision. They complained about delays in getting reimbursed from insurance companies and the time they had to spend on paperwork to communicate with more than one insurance company each of which might have a different model. However, they did not talk about whether the managed care system was dissonant with their sense of psychotherapeutic treatment,

they did not criticize the ways in which mental health is understood, diagnosed and treated in a managed care system. Rather, most talked about the effects of managed care in their own lives, the way they were (not) able to manage and leverage their own time and have economic and professional satisfaction.

Coaching is an appealing alternative for psychotherapists partly because it is self-paid and partly because it provides them with a more flexible work environment where they can deliver services to patients across the country over the phone.

But the benefits of virtual coaching extend beyond facilitating long-distance support. If, like me, you have logged thousands of “chair miles” in your office, an undeniable perk of teleconference coaching is the freedom to work wherever you please. With the aid of a hands-free headset, you can coach while brewing tea in your kitchen, walking around the house or relaxing on your deck. You can coach on your favorite beach or mountaintop. You can coach in cut-offs or sweats or, as one of my colleagues prefers, a faded pair of Batman pajamas. (MentorCoach website.)

MentorCoach organizes one-day workshops to introduce coaching as an alternative career path to mental health practitioners. Mental health practitioners get continuing education credits for attending these workshops. If they choose to become coaches they sign up for MentorCoach training programs that are certified by the ICF. Ben Dean founded MentorCoach in 1997 and started collaborating with Martin Seligman (one of the

founders of positive psychology) in 2003. Since then, MentorCoach has trained 1,000 mental health clinicians in the theories and methods of positive psychology.

I attended a workshop organized by MentorCoach in Emeryville. During this workshop psychotherapists raised questions regarding licensing requirements, legal liabilities and ethical regulations. The relationship between coaches and coaching clients is not protected by the law as are client relationships between psychotherapists and their patients. Also coaches do not have a duty to report a client who is likely to harm himself/herself or others. The ICF has an ethical code that it expects its members to abide by and requires its members to report such cases, but it is only a professional standard and not a legal statute. Such issues become especially important for mental health practitioners who are also practicing coaches: when they practice as coaches they are exempt from legal statutes that bind their relationship to their psychotherapy patients. A court case in Colorado illustrates the complicated dynamics between different actors including coaches, mental health practitioners, the State and professional organizations of coaching.

In June 2001, the administrator of the Colorado Mental Health Board, Amos Martinez, wrote an opinion in the board newsletter titled “Coaching: Is This Psychotherapy?” in which he argued that coaching, especially personal coaching meets the broad definition of psychotherapy in the state of Colorado.³ Questions arose as to whether coaches in

³ There are four determining factors the Board used in assessing whether personal coaching is psychotherapy. First, does a professional relationship exist between the personal coach and client? Second, is there an expectation by the client for the coach to provide any assessment or counseling to assist the client in understanding conscious or unconscious motivations; to resolve emotional, relationship, or

Colorado had to register as unlicensed psychotherapists and follow Colorado's Mental Health Act regulations. Lloyd Thomas and Patrick Williams, members of ICF's regulatory committee, met with Martinez to discuss the work of coaching and the standard ethics of the ICF. No regulation change came out of the meetings. In 2003, the Department of Regulatory Agencies of Colorado charged an ICF certified coach living and working in Colorado with practicing psychotherapy without a license even though all her clients lived out of the state. The case was dropped as frivolous but it was demanded that the coach registered as an unlicensed therapist, which she refused to do.

The ICF insisted that coaching is not in the realm of mental / behavioral health and thus should be exempt from the legislature oversight. After eighteen months of lobbying by the Colorado Coalition of Coaches, lobbyists hired by the coalition, individual coaches, the ICF, the International Association of Coaches and the Association of Coach Training Organizations, the legislature approved an amendment to the Mental Health Act and exempted coaching from the legislature's oversight. The law stated that the provisions of the Mental Health Act did not apply to coaches who have had coach specific training and who serve clients in the capacity of coaches. Similar concerns that coaches might be required to register as unlicensed psychotherapists were raised in Minnesota, Florida, New York, Washington and California. Today there is no requirement for coaches to register or license in any state in the United States.

attitudinal conflicts; or to modify behaviors that interfere with effective emotional, social, or intellectual functioning? If the coach is not a licensed psychotherapist, is the client compensating the coach for his/her services? And last, under what circumstances or for what purpose did the client employ a personal coach? If the coach was employed to attain a promotion or for career enhancement purposes, this practice is generally considered exempt under the "employment or rehabilitation counseling" provisions of the Mental Health Practice Act.

The Colorado case is important for its legal, cultural and economic implications. First, it puts coaching outside of managed care and its payment structure. It establishes that coaches are exempt from legal liabilities that apply to psychotherapists. By establishing coaching outside of the mental/behavioral health realm it eliminates potential stigma associated with mental disorders. Finally, it illustrates the professional boundary maintenance between coaching and psychotherapy.

The healthy and functioning coaching population

Psychotherapists who have shifted to coaching continuously redefine, dispute and negotiate boundaries between coaching and psychotherapy. I have had several conversations with mental health practitioners, clinical, social, organizational and consulting psychologist who were also practicing as coaches about how they distinguished coaching from therapy. Most of them agreed that the boundaries were permeable. Others told me that during our conversation they had thought about new distinctions that they had not thought through before. It felt to me that coaches were struggling to figure out these distinctions not just to explain coaching to others but also to themselves. In a conversation about these distinctions an executive coach coming from social psychology put his struggle in the following way:

I am trying to be careful and at the same time I am trying to represent as closely as I can what I actually believe to be the case. I am trying not to give you a party line. I am trying not to give you a formula. I want you to realize that you are asking awfully good questions, but a lot of time I do not actually know what the

answer is, or the answer, in my own mind or in the field, is evolving. If you ask today, you are going to get one answer, if you ask a year from now on, you may get a very different answer.

This coach drew a 2x2 grid to clarify where coaching stands. He put therapy on top of the vertical axis and non-therapy to the bottom of the axis, and consulting on the horizontal axis to the right and not-consulting to the left. He argued that the right quadrant around the midpoint is where most coaching engagements play: “A little bit on the therapeutic side and a lot on the consultative side.” Harry Levinson, who is considered to be one of the pioneers of consulting psychology and executive coaching, objects to such distinctions and argues that an intervention with anyone is therapeutic and coaching always has a therapeutic component to it.

Sociologists have argued that professions struggle and compete against each other to gain control over undefined and unclear areas of tasks, and identify the limits of particular kinds of knowledge in order to expand their jurisdictional power (Abbott 1988; Abbott and Wallace 1990). Professionals can then present their work as different from that of other experts and in turn they can claim expert status on par with other groups. Similarly, Gieryn (1999) introduced boundary work into the analysis of expertise by arguing that diverse groups create cultural maps on which authoritative knowledge can be assigned or denied to knowledge producers according to where they are located, that is, whether they are ‘insiders’ or ‘outsiders.’ These maps, just like cartographic maps, tell users what its boundaries are: where they can find credible knowledge and why they could not find it

outside of that place. When such boundaries are challenged, when others claim authority over this space, scientists get involved in boundary work to distinguish their work from other forms of knowledge production (Gieryn 1999). Other Science Studies scholars have looked at how scientists draw boundaries between different fields of expertise (Shapin 1982) and between themselves and lay people (Jasanoff 1998; Shapin 1995, Hilgartner 2000). Coaches continuously engage in “boundary maintenance work” by introducing distinctions between coaching and psychotherapy in all possible parameters: client base, methods used, payment structures, ethical guidelines, legal liabilities and outcomes. These distinctions are debated and negotiated yet they nevertheless exist and they multiply.

The most common distinction between psychotherapy and coaching is made with reference to the coaching (or coachable) population. During one workshop I attended, the division was defined according to a pathology model based on the DSM-IV (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders):

The main distinction between therapy and coaching is that therapy treats DSM-IV diagnosable disorders; coaching does not. Instead coaching involves helping another person to identify and take action toward centrally important professional and/or personal goals. Coaching presumes one is doing many things well and now wants to do even better. With coaching, one doesn't have to be broken or sick to benefit from the skills of a coach. (Taken from MentorCoach training workshop)

This quote identifies mental health with not having a DSM-IV diagnosable disorder and presents therapy as the method of treatment for people who have DSM disorders. By keeping coaching outside of the realm of DSM-IV disorders it presents coaching as a tool of self-improvement for mentally healthy and higher functioning individuals. It carves out a space for those who lack something that is neither medical nor psychiatric.

Having this distinction in mind, I turned to the psychotherapist sitting next to me and asked what higher functionality meant in the mental health field. She briefed me about the definition of GAF (Global Assessment of Functioning⁴) and explained that the idea behind of the GAF score is to determine how much one's disability or disorder contributes directly to the ability of the individuals to function in their everyday lives, at work, and in interpersonal relationships. People who are higher than 70 on a scale of 100 are considered as higher functioning.

When psychotherapists talk about functionality in the context of coaching, they refer to two things. First, they use functionality as a threshold to differentiate the higher functioning coaching population from lower functioning therapy populations. They present a picture in which all therapy patients are lower functioning. A therapist among the audience joked that she has been in therapy for so long that she doesn't remember what high functionality meant. Second, they refer to being emotionally drained by

⁴ Global Assessment of Functionality (GAF) is the fifth axis in the DSM system which is organized around five axes: axis I psychiatric diagnoses, axis II personality disorders, axis III general medical conditions, axis IV psychosocial and environmental problems, axis V the GAF. It is only within the DSM-III that functionality becomes one of the axis through which psychiatric diagnosis is made. The numerical scale for GAF was added in DSM-III-R. DSM-IV-TR includes three specialized global scales in its appendices: the Social and Occupational Functioning Assessment Scale (SOFAS); the Defensive Functioning Scale; and the Global Assessment of Relational Functioning (GARF) Scale.

working with “lower functioning people” in their therapy practice and emphasize that coaching provides them the opportunity to work with “higher functioning people” and brings higher professional satisfaction.

Even in the absence of references to DSM-IV disorders and numerical scales of functionality, references to pathology defined in terms of functionality remain prominent as the quote below taken from the *International Journal of Coaching in Organizations* illustrates:

“Therapy is vital for those with serious presenting problems – what we call pathology. Coaching is for those who are healthily functioning and already typically self-motivated.” (*International Journal of Coaching in Organizations*)

Regarding the distinction based on the existence of pathology, an executive coach/consulting psychologist told me that the educational and professional backgrounds that coaches are coming from would determine whether a coach sees pathology or not. He argued that someone with a clinical psychology background will look for pathology and will find it. An industrial and organizational or social psychologist will look for systemic or organizational issues.

If you look for it (pathology) you will find it. If you do not care and you are not looking for it you may stumble over it and it could be an extreme case, but you are not going to find it. If you are a clinician you can all you have to do is to open

your eyes and I am sure you will find it ... The more the coach comes out of the medical model and the model of pathology the more it is going to be fairly person-centered.

According to this coach the coach's training would also determine the focus of coaching, the definition of the problem and the ways in which it is addressed. A coach coming from a medical (diagnostic) method will have a person-centered approach and diagnose people's pathology and address it to help him be more effective. They will see people suffering from narcissism and borderline behavior. They will see pathology everywhere they look. A coach coming from organizational psychology will look at other places and see factors (organizational and systemic) other than the person's pathology.

This distinction between mentally healthy and mentally ill based on the existence of a DSM-IV disorder is criticized by mental health practitioners. Not all mental health clinicians use DSM-IV categories in their practice. They argue that a mental health diagnosis does not always mean that there is a diagnosable disorder. Insurance companies require clear boundaries across mental disorders. Pharmaceutical companies rely on the specificity of illnesses and their treatment. In some cases mental health practitioners diagnose the patient with a DSM-IV diagnosable disorder in order to get reimbursement from insurance companies and continue seeing the patient. But patients fear that this information will be part of their medical record and be used against them. The diagnosis then becomes a point of conflict and negotiation between clinicians, patients and insurance companies. Nor is there a consensus among the mental health

community about differentiating higher functionality from lower functionality. Some posit GAF as a central determinant of mental health, some argue that functionality cannot be reliably measured (especially over the phone). Other mental health clinicians point that they see many patients who are higher functioning as well as lower functioning. For them functionality is not the single criteria according to which they consider the patient as mentally healthy or mentally ill and eligible to be seen by a mental health practitioner.

Conversations with coaches and coaching clients reveal that that coaches work with clients who have DSM-IV diagnosable mental disorders such as depression, personality and anxiety disorders. Here, coaches make other subtle distinctions about the severity of the pathology, causes of it, its effects on the overall functionality of the individual and separate pathology and its symptoms in everyday life and at work. They ask, for instance: Is the depression major or minor? Does the depression happen regardless of situations or is it situational? How much does it affect the overall functionality of the individual? And finally, what are the everyday symptoms of it? If the depression is minor, situational and it does not affect the overall functionality of the individual, coaching can be used to address the everyday difficulties associated with the situation. If depression is major, is independent of situation and is impairing the functionality of the individual then therapy is required.

A psychotherapist who also practices as an executive coach, whom I will call George,⁵ contrasts an executive who is depressed because he is not getting enough work done at the office with a delusional schizophrenic person whose daily functioning is severely impaired:

Coaching is focused on helping a functional person become more functional, to mobilize specific strengths and specific situations to become more functional. Are there some overlaps? Unquestionably. I would suggest that. A good example. We focus on a lot what we call activities of daily living with severely mentally ill patients. So for instance, can the person remember to get dressed before leaving his room in the morning? That would be an activity of daily living. Can the person remember to brush their teeth? Those are definitely situations where we are mobilizing the individual's strengths to make them more functional in a given situation. And that is not so very different from sitting with an executive and helping the executive focus on the three things he needs to do in the morning to be effective during his day. So for instance, you might design a checklist. Here are three things that you need to every morning in order to be as effective as you want to be. There are some similarities in terms of the intervention that is being used but huge differences in terms of the population.

⁵ With the exception of prominent public figures, all the names ascribed to individuals in this dissertation are pseudonyms. A guarantee of anonymity was a condition of the protection of human subjects protocols under which this research project was executed.

In this quote, George defines coaching as a set of techniques that can be used with different populations from severely impaired to higher functioning. He presents both of these malfunctions (minor depression and schizophrenia) as problems of follow-through. Then he compares the same executive with a person with major depression.

The person who has depression who can't get out of bed, who can't function versus the executive who is depressed because he is not getting enough done at work. The executive traditionally would have been treated with psychotherapy but I think he is a wonderful candidate for coaching because you can help that executive through the executive coaching process to solve some of the efficiency issues and therefore help lift that situational depression.

George defines this executive as "a wonderful candidate" because the executive has situational depression and not major depression and because he is already high functioning and trying to improve his current functionality. He is also a wonderful candidate because George sees the executive's situational depression to be a result of his efficiency problems. He suggests that the executive is depressed because he is inefficient. Given this problem, one cure is to make the executive more efficient through coaching.

In this quote the difference in population determines whether coaching can be used or not. Coaching cannot be used with a major depressive person who first needs to be stabilized, whether through medication or therapy. In the case of the executive with

situational depression one can address the situation through coaching and change their way of functioning at work. These techniques can be as simple as teaching the client to “come to the office half an hour earlier and complete the three things –that get in the way- before they do anything else.” Sometimes there are more complicated and long-term interventions that involve changing communication and interaction styles that lead to these situations.

In practice coaches do not abide by DSM-IV and functionality criteria. They instead divide clients from within to “coachable” and “uncoachable” activities. They also make use of a concept built into the DSM, that mental pathologies may be “situational,” that is, that symptoms show up in some areas of life and not in others. Thus they present a picture in which there is no holistic pathology but rather fragmented symptoms of pathology. Coaches generalize this into a rationale for their specific effectiveness. Divided within the self, each part can be assessed as to whether it is coachable or not.

Let us talk about clients with personality disorders. In psychotherapy for example with people with personality disorders the therapeutic relationship becomes subject to a person’s pathology and transference and counter-transference. And the reason for that is that the subject of psychotherapy is the person’s entire life. That same borderline client ... put them in a business situation where an executive or a life coach is working with them on a specific task ... Put her in a business context with an executive coach where the focus is solely on relationships at work or on personal productivity. Even though the same

borderline pathology may be coming out at work a coach -because they are so focused on a narrow area may be very successful with that person whereas a psychotherapist working with the same person will report dismal failure because the focus is so different. It is a narrow focus versus a broad focus on the person's life. So it is partly the function of difference in population partly the focus of intervention.

Here a distinction is made between everyday manifestations of the pathology and the pathology itself. Psychotherapists address the pathology as a whole-person entity that affects various areas. Coaches approach the pathology as potentially a miscue between skills and situation and carve out that situation as a specific area of work. This distinction makes it possible for coaches to work with clients with DSM-IV disorders without addressing and diagnosing the pathology, or claiming to treat it. Also narrowing the area of intervention allows viability and a redefinition of success of treatment that is shared by the coach and the coaching client.

In this interview, George continuously complicated the distinctions he made between coaching and psychotherapy by adding nuances to already existing distinctions and introducing new distinctions. As someone who practiced as a psychotherapist for several years and a management coach for seven years he moved between examples from both of his practices. When I interviewed him the second time he had started working for a large nationwide behavioral health company that focused on the recovery model, on the idea

that there is no such thing as “hopeless mental illness.” Regardless of how seriously mentally ill somebody is, there is still the option for that person to be striving for health.

His distinctions brought together a homeless schizophrenic person and a stressed executive and set apart the same stressed executive whose depression is situational from a woman whose (major) depression happens regardless of circumstances. They first brought together then set apart a patient with personality disorder who has gone through five therapists with no success, and a high functioning executive with personality disorder whose productivity had increased thanks to his work with his coach. Each example provided a new set of juxtapositions keeping one part of the equation constant and changing others. George insisted, at the end of multiple juxtapositions, that he was coming back to the distinction he made between “relatively” healthy and higher functioning coaching population and lower functioning therapy population. In this conversation and many others with coaches, as the interview went on for more than an hour, the distinctions that were made in the beginning of the conversation disappeared or were replaced by new distinctions between different sets of mental disorders and between severities of disorders.

These distinctions circulate from workshops to websites, to personal conversations and ethical guidelines. They reflect and reinforce the assumption that clear lines could be drawn between functional coaching populations and non-functional therapy populations. More subtle distinctions illustrate how coaches are struggling with maintaining these distinctions. They preserve the ability of coaching to deal with positive goal

achievement, of obtaining more out of life, rather than helping a person to achieve a missing normality. It is this fragmentation that makes it possible to have a contradictory case: Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) coaching which combines a DSM-IV mental disorder and coaching.

Convergence of coaching and a DSM-IV pathology: ADHD coaching

The existence of ADHD coaching has been contentious since the early days of the field. Thomas Leonard who is considered as the founder of the field of life coaching, came up with client types for coaching such as “the manager,” “the CEO,” “the small business owner,” and “the restorative–just coachable (just out of therapy, starting a new life).” Another pioneer, Madelyn Griffith-Haydn (MGH), tried to convince Leonard to include ADDers as a new group of clientele and wanted to take the lead by writing modules for training coaches. Leonard decided against it, not wanting to put the field at risk by associating it with pathology and fearing that it opened up coaching to accusations of being untrained psychotherapists and physicians.

He (T. Leonard) didn't want to put the field at risk. His PR director said: ‘under no circumstance.’ When the article in Newsweek (on Leonard and CoachU) came out he hired a PR firm. And that was the biggest voice: ‘do not align yourself with ADD, or you will kill the field.’ If I had been in his shoes, I would have made the same decision ... If I had been Thomas, I would be thinking in terms of ‘let us get the field established securely before we subject it to anything that anybody could object to.’ (Interview with MGH)

When Leonard decided not to cooperate with MGH, she launched the ADHD coaching by herself, developing a curriculum to train coaches and trainers. ADHD coaching has now become one of the biggest sub-specialties in the field.

ADHD coaches list a number of ways in which they help their clients with ADHD: reminding their clients to open their mail, making their clients stick with their medication regimens, helping their clients get a planner, putting ‘things’ in it, looking at the planner, developing simple habits such as finding their keys when they leave home, increasing time awareness and coming up with time management systems. A coach/psychotherapist described this process as “introducing an external organizational system in replacement of an internal organizational system that ADHDers lack.”

Among ADHD coaches and clients, coaching is seen as one type of help among others. I attended ADHD coaching workshops over the phone for six months. Most of the participants on the call work with a physician who prescribes their medication, some with a physician and a psychotherapist and some also with a coach. I asked ADHD coaches how they would respond to the argument that coaching is for people with no diagnosable mental disorder. Some find this distinction to be “ridiculous” and “discriminatory” making an analogy between ADHD and other “physical differences” such as blindness: just like you don’t say someone is not coachable because they are blind you can’t say they are not coachable because they have ADHD. Similarly an ADHD coach coming from a psychotherapy background commented that equating mental health with not having a DSM-IV disorder was representing a “shrinking normalcy” where what is

considered as a normal population becomes “smaller and smaller.” If this coach is criticizing the distinction for the way in which it is describing the DSM diagnosed people as non-healthy and thus not coachable, another coach is arguing that in reality most coaching clients have DSM disorders but that coaches are not acknowledging it. In the following statement she insists that people with a DSM disorder are more common than not those without one and that the distinction ‘frictionalizes’ the person:

How many of those people do not have DSM-IV diagnosable disorder. I think that there are a large number of people in coaching that has DSM-IV diagnosis. That might not be what the coaching is focused on and my personal opinion is that I think as a coach we are really missing it if we ignore that part because the whole point is the whole person. But yeah, I know there is this kind of rule. If people were honest about the people they were coaching. I think a large portion of them would have DSM-IV diagnosis, depression or bipolar disorder or anxiety. They might not be having challenges with it because they may be treated but a lot of them are ... And that is more so with ADHD, which has a lot of co-morbid conditions. That also creates the tension or the difficulty with marrying the ADD coaching and quote-un-quote coaching community. That they are not supposed to have DSM-IV diagnosis. If coaches will really look at their clients, a large majority of them have another DSM-IV diagnosis.

Like many other coaches this ADHD coach makes a distinction between DSM disorders in terms of severity and the effects on the disorder on one’s sense of reality and everyday

life, differentiating disorders such as psychosis from disorders such as depression, anxiety and bipolar disorder (what some call higher-functioning disorders). This coach sees ADHD not different from grief, relationship issues, and business development—each of which can be reasons for the coaching client to seek coaching. Whether you can coach a person with a disorder without having to coach the disorder remains a question that is continuously negotiated.

It (ADHD) is simply what brings them through my door. It could be someone else who is struggling with relationship issues which quote-un-quote is not a diagnostic, or grief which is not a diagnos(tic)able DSM. But that is getting in the way, it is creating problems for them, they have come to me because they want to move past this. If ADHD also shows up with some anxiety and depression then I coach the same way I coach grief, or I coach relationship issues, or I coach business development or I coach, trying to think of all the other things that I coach, relationship or whatever.

With a disorder such as ADHD whose existence is contested, further distinctions are made between those with ADHD characteristics and those that have the disorder and experience the everyday symptoms as problems. It is not uncommon to hear from ADHD patients that their ADHD becomes an asset in certain situations and at certain jobs (that require multiple tasking, for example). It is only when it becomes a deficit or generates problems that it has to be addressed. An ADHD coach explains it by making the following distinction:

If you have ADHD related problems, you have ADHD. If you don't have ADHD related problems you don't have ADHD. Most people have ADHD characteristics. It is when it becomes a problem ... Disorder becomes a problem when symptoms get in the way.

Not all distinctions rely on defining the coaching population. Other distinctions involve method, focus, length and outcome of coaching and therapy interventions. For example, coaches differentiate the unconscious from the conscious and claim that coaching addresses the conscious self. Here coaching clients are seen as masters of their will and in full control over their thoughts, feelings and actions. The former head of the ICF Ethics Committee puts it in the following way:

I would say generally that the coaching client is someone who is at a functional level to be aware, to be responsible and make change. Awareness and responsibility are the key, their consciousness level. Not just that they are aware but now that you are aware what are you going to implement. Aware of self, aware of your situation, aware of your emotional intelligence, aware of your thinking process, aware of all the aspects of your life, aware of your ability to actually choose. All that. Therapy ... You might go to therapy maybe because you are not aware of certain things, brought more. You want to investigate, maybe your unconscious self, or your subconscious self. That is not something that the coaches will work with. Coaches work with the conscious self.

Here this coach emphasizes that coaches' intervention targets the conscious, voluntary and aware self. He makes a significant effort to address the conscious self as if it has no relation to the unconscious makeup of the individual. In Freud the irrational thoughts and behaviors inhabited people's consciousness. Unconsciousness affected everyday life, and pervaded people's thoughts and behaviors.⁶ In contrast, as described by this coach, a coaching client is someone for whom the hierarchy of the conscious and unconscious is clearly differentiated. The questioning and action are no longer oriented by irrational thoughts and behavior but rather by modes of rational, conscious thought and behavior. It is no longer a question (of confusions, projections, forgetting) at the level of unconsciousness but rather a question (of low productivity, efficiency) at the level of behavior.

In these cases, coaches move away from a pathological model of curing a person and instead adopt a pragmatic model in which everyone has a core "rational," "conscious," "effective," and "acting" part that can be coached into better effectiveness. As one coach describes it:

"The person might have panic attacks, he might have depression, he might have eating disorders. They might receive help from therapists to deal with it. But

⁶ In Freud's world, people have states that are "totally inaccessible" to them. There are secrets of our own being which we keep from ourselves. The Freudian self has parts of his/her own self that are consciously and intellectually unknown to him/her. "Parapraxes and dreams in healthy people, and everything described as a psychical symptom or an obsession in the sick; our most personal daily experience acquaints us with ideas that come into our head we do not know where, and with intellectual conclusions arrived at we do not know how" (Freud 1915: 167).

there is still a part that we might help them with. We are interested in right here and right now. There is the acting level and being level.”

Here the coach does not follow the distinction based on the absence of pathology. He is talking about coaching clients who have pathologies (panic attacks, depression and eating disorders), but he is differentiating these pathologies from the person who has them. He is dividing the coaching client into acting and being levels and arguing that therapists would deal with the being level and its pathologies and the coach with the acting level. The fact that the individual has problems regarding their being level does not mean that coaches would not be able to provide help with the acting level.

Temporality of coaching

Coaches claim to work on the “right here and right now” and introduce another main distinction: that psychotherapy focuses on the past and coaching focuses on the present and future. This is not a valid statement to make considering the vast constellation of different techniques in psychotherapy such as cognitive behavior therapy and rational emotive behavior therapy none of which are interested in looking at the past. But it is a common distinction used by trainers, coaches and coaching clients to mark their distinctiveness and present their non-therapeutic claim. Coaching trainers tell psychotherapists who are in the process of shifting to coaching that, “When the client talks about past memories, and brings up past, you should tell them that ‘you will not go there!’” This is especially difficult for psycho-dynamically and psychoanalytically

trained psychotherapists who essentially explore the roots of their clients' behavior and thinking patterns in their past.

The shift of attention from past to present and future is partly a product of the alignment between the coaching field and the positive psychology movement. In 2000, the *American Psychologist* (the flagship journal of the American Psychological Association) published a special issue devoted to positive psychology (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).⁷ Contributors claimed that psychologists and disciplinary psychology have focused on negative, pathological features and accounts of human functioning. This alleged negative focus, they argued, prevented the building of an understanding of positive features of human life such as “well-being, contentment, and satisfaction (in the past); “hope and optimism (for the future) and flow and happiness (in the present) (Ibid: 5). They required a “redirecting of scientific energy from treating mental and emotional ailments to studying positive emotions, positive experiences, and the subjective state of flow and happiness” (7). Psychologists came up with a variety of tests and scales that are used to measure clients current ‘satisfaction with life,’ ‘approaches to happiness,’ and ‘sensitive happiness index’ that reflected the sense of immediacy that positive psychology promotes. These tests rely on the assumption that individuals can know, define and quantify their values, character traits, goals, commitment around these goals as well as their level of progress towards achieving them.

⁷ The founder of MentorCoach Ben Dean started collaborating with Martin Seligman one of the founders of positive psychology in 2003 and training mental health practitioners in theories of positive psychology.

A commonly used test is called the “Pillars of a Balanced Life” and is used to help clients choose an area that they would need to improve and would like to work on. The pillars are listed on a sheet of paper in the following order: “professional,” “financial,” “physical,” “spiritual,” “social support,” “intimacy,” “family,” “learning/growth,” “home/office,” “play/fun,” “overall balance of life,” and “overall life satisfaction.” In the beginning of a mock-up coaching session at a workshop that I attended, the client did not have a specific project in mind and debated which pillar he should be working on. He wondered whether he should choose the financial pillar then decided that the issue was not so much money but the “overall balance in life.” The following conversation took place between him and his coach.

Coach: On a scale of 10, what would you give to this pillar?

Client: 5! I will give 5. I have been in this job for two years and feel very burnt down.

Co: Ok, great! Now I want you to imagine that you were in 2010 and that your score was a 10. What would it look like?

Cl: I would be independent.

Co: How would independence work for you? Private practice?

Cl: Not working for the county ...

Co: You can do anything in a 10. How much would you like to make in a 10?

Cl: \$100,000

Co: Is that enough? Remember this is a 10. You can do anything at 10. Is that going to come from individual clients?

Cl: Individuals, groups, consultations ...

Co: Are you doing anything on the side?

Cl: No, I guess.

Co: How many days are you working now?

Cl: 5 days 8 hours.

Co: Do you have an office at home?

Cl: No.

...

Co: If that is your 10, would you still say that it is 5?

Cl: I don't want to work at all.

Co: I knew you are holding something back. 5x8 is not very enthusiastic. So how many hours would you prefer working?

Cl: 30 hours. 4 days. Making over \$100,000 with private clients.

Co: What else could you be doing to make extra money?

Cl: I don't know.

Co: Is 5 still 5?

Cl: Now I see it as a 6 for some reason.

Co: What can you do to raise 6 to 6.5?

Cl: There is an application to get on a Kaiser panel.

Co: In the next four weeks, are you committed to get the form in?

Cl: Yes, I am.

This conversation is illustrative of a couple of points. The measurement tool is first dividing life into discrete segments/pillars then dividing each life segment/pillar into further measurable segments. Pillars do not only measure the client's goals, dreams, anxieties and commitment but also his imagination as to what kind of a life is possible and desirable. Here the client is higher functioning yet needs help as life can always get better and improvement is always a possibility. Also the coach is not interested in exploring the reasons behind what the client says but in achieving pragmatic results. When the client changed the value he gave on the scale from 5 to 6, the coach does not question why he did not know a 5 was actually a 6. The coach generates a new distance to work on.

Trainers tell coaches that a coaching relationship's success partly depends on the existence of clear distinctions between these areas and partly between the numerical segments within each area. As a result, clients work with the same coach at different times on different pillars or work with different coaches depending on coaches' specialty. Another psychotherapist/coach describes a similar method: she uses a wheel ranked on a scale of 1-10. If the difference between the current situation and the ideal situation is in the range of 6 to 10 they can turn the wheel (meaning they can make the change). If it is a greater distance they cannot change. She then asks her clients what would improve their life in a particular area. Together they decide on focus areas in this specific area, define goals, clarify steps to achieve these goals and identify what they would consider as accomplishment. Based on these clarifications they develop a time frame and come up with short-term and long-term plans.

Coaches/psychotherapists talk about ‘putting on different hats’ when they work with a psychotherapy patient versus a coaching client as they shift theories, approaches and methods. In shifting to coaching, they seem to move away from in-depth self-exploration and self-reflection and develop a new vocabulary to talk about the self and its pathologies. Coaching is instead a practice focused on action and pragmatic adaptation. The shift from theory to practice was described by an executive coach in terms of Weber’s theory of the sacred and the secular:

“You remember Weber, the distinction between sacred and secular; I would argue that coaching is applying sacred principles in a secular environment ... Coaching is the application of psychology in an organizational environment or the idea of the Parish priest coming into and the organizational environment and taking the sacred; the notion of divine teaching and applying it in a very secular organizational setting ... And that is really what the companies are after. They are after your psychological insight and expertise. They are after the fact that you are a social scientist. You ought to be able to do some reasoning about human behavior. But they do not want to hear the psychology. They only want to hear the outcome. So in other words, they do not want to hear about God, they just want to hear the right step to take. They do not want theory; they want practice about what they should do. They do not care about divine, they care about right now, what should they do. And the sacred in my field is always the theory, the elegance and the secular is always the application, a direct application. Think about sacred as strategic and secular as practical.”

Psychotherapy (especially psychodynamic psychotherapy) in America was cherished for its ability to diagnose the problem but criticized for its inability to provide a solution.⁸ Psychotherapists find measuring the outcome of psychotherapeutic intervention as incredibly difficult: enhanced psychological functioning is not simply measured by symptom elimination. More thorough examination of the efficacy of psychotherapeutic intervention requires asking about the intensity and type of stress that precipitates problems, the rapidity with which problems are addressed, and how intense and incapacitating they are. If the essence of the psychodynamic perspective was to understand the meaning of the symptom and undo its psychogenic causes by asking “what is behind the symptom?” in their new role as coaches, psychotherapists address the symptoms directly—either because they believe there is no pathology behind the symptom or because the pathology and its symptoms can be differentiated. Coaching specifically addresses the problem and provides pragmatic solutions rather than exploring the underlying causes of it. It provides a solution to the crisis of the failure of psychotherapy in a fundamental way: it works and its results are pragmatic, observable and measurable both for the client and the coach.

As all these distinctions are put together, the differences between coaching and psychotherapy look more vague and the categories of functional, healthy and normal become more confusing. In practice, coaching is similar to psychotherapy techniques such as cognitive behavior therapy. Psychotherapists use coaching like techniques, patients with DSM-IV diagnosable disorders work with coaches and psychotherapists and

⁸ In a successful psychoanalysis the transformation comes from making the unconscious conscious and becoming aware of resistance of the unconscious to knowledge (Galatzer-Levy 2000).

DSM-IV disorders are coached. What differentiates coaching and psychotherapy is neither the methods used nor the population addressed. What differentiates the two worlds is that coaching defines and is defined by a clear worldview whereas psychotherapy is dominated by fuzzy entities. As conversations with coaches are compared to conversations with psychotherapists, what is strikingly different is the belief in the coaching world that clear distinctions can be drawn between coachable and non-coachable populations, coaching niches, pillars of life, segments of self and the goals, outcomes and steps in a coaching engagement. Psychotherapists, such as the one that I quote below, have difficulties with drawing clear boundaries between mentally healthy and mentally ill, between mental disorders and their episodes and outcomes of treatment.

...Mental health care is different from physical care. With physical health you have an event. You have appendicitis or even if you break a leg there is an episode of event and an episode of care. It is very hard to transfer an episode of care from physical health to mental health. All depressions don't go away. People don't get rid of anxiety and depression or anxiety the same way. Because episodes are fuzzy.

As mental disorders are translated from patients' experiences to doctors rooms and insurance companies this fuzziness (between disorders and between episodes of disorders) has to be lost. Psychotherapists consider the need to make clear distinctions challenging, coaches find it appealing. Coaching emerges precisely because it insists on the existence of clear distinctions that can be drawn between the coachable population

and the therapy population, that is, between mentally healthy and mentally ill as defined by having a DSM-diagnosable disorder, between higher functional and lower functioning people, past and present, rational and irrational, conscious and unconscious, and between fragments of self as they present problems in everyday life and work.

Conclusion: Coaching as a profession of boundary work

I started this chapter by exploring the ways in which coaches are drawing boundaries between coaching and psychotherapy populations. This boundary relies on other boundaries that are drawn between seemingly distinctive categories of functionality and mental health. Examining the blurry boundaries between coaching and psychotherapy refers to overlaps across these categories. Despite the rhetoric, a more careful analysis of discursive strategies and practices in coaching shows that coaches are not just dividing mentally healthy and higher functioning coaching populations from mentally ill and lower functioning therapy populations. ADHD coaching exemplifies the separation of pathology from its everyday symptoms and the division of individuals from within to “coachable” and “uncoachable” fragments. This is reflected and reinforced in techniques and methods coaches use with their clients. These new technologies of measurement and planning divide the self and life into discrete and therefore manageable parts, each of which can then be monitored and improved.

Foucault (2003; 2003a; 2006) argues that psychiatry introduced norms not only as rules of conduct but also as functional regularities. Thus, psychiatrists started dealing with something that was an irregularity in relation to a norm, which must at the same time be a

pathological dysfunction in relation to the normal. Psychiatry has become a medico-judicial discipline, described social norms and rules, medically analyzed abnormalities and thereby essentially became the science of adjudicating abnormal individuals and abnormal conduct.

Psychiatry introduces the norm with the explosion of the symptomatological field. However by being rooted in organic and functional medicine, psychiatry is also able to exploit the norm understood in a different sense: the norm as functional regularity, as the principle of an appropriate and adjusted functioning; the 'normal' as opposed to the pathological, morbid, disorganized and dysfunctional.

Coaches claim that they are dealing with something that is neither an irregularity in relation to a norm nor a pathological dysfunction. They present coaching as the science of normal individuals and normal conduct. Coaches refer to the existence of a medically diagnosable problem that affects individuals and underline that coaching is for people who are living healthy and productive lives. Thus, they present "health" and "functionality" as prerequisites for a coaching intervention. By doing so, coaches stay away from psychotherapy and remove the stigma associated with having a mental disorder. Yet by arguing that coaching is for people who are doing well but who want to do better, coaches make development a baseline and coaching suitable for everybody.

Foucauldian scholars have rightly pointed to the power of new expertise and new technologies employed by them as new forms of governmentality. They have argued that

these experts and forms of expertise have generated new, pervasive forms of control where the individuals are subjected to new standards. Nikolas Rose, for example, argues that in neo-liberalism, individuals are seen as responsible for the management of their own fate by calculating the consequences of their present actions: “Failures of management of the self, lack of skills of coping with the family, with work, with money, with housing are now all, potentially, criteria for qualification as a psychiatric subject” (Rose 1998: 14).

Coaching shows that failure in everyday life is a criterion for qualification of a ‘subject’ but not a psychiatric subject. Coaching clients and psychiatric subjects are seen as mutually exclusive groups. Coaches provide a new formulation by suggesting that many dysfunctions in life may be problems of poor self-management not problems of pathology and offer ways to act on this re-description through engaging in expert help. Here, the individuals are seen as in need of help even when they are mentally healthy and higher functioning. They *have to* be mentally healthy and higher functioning to be able to benefit from coaching. The self that is addressed here is not pathological and in dire need of treatment but the healthy and normal individual whose efficiency and productivity needs to be improved. Ironically, this suggests that the healthier and functional individuals get, the more fragmented their selves become. Pathology gives the person the unity that health takes away.

Chapter 3

Executive Coaching in the World: Histories and Ethical Dilemmas

Introduction

This chapter traces the ways in which executive coaches tell how coaching has evolved from a history of earlier interventions that aimed to increase efficiency at the workplace. This history goes back to Taylor's scientific management principles (1910s) and Mayo's studies that showed the importance of human relations at the workplace (1920s and 1930s). There are a couple of things that are striking about the shift from Taylor (an engineering approach to human productivity) to human resources (a psychological approach of motivation), then to Drucker (effectiveness) and Levinson (psychological contract). Taylor believed that efficiency could be increased through mechanizing body movements. Through the Hawthorne studies Mayo and his followers recognized the importance of social relationships at the workplace. Human resources departments recognized the importance of psychological motivation and gave more attention to differences among individuals. Coaching continues this move, away from earlier approaches by putting the psychology of the individual at the center of corporate efficiency. It moves attention from organizational structures to individual psychology and its unconscious components.

Even though executive coaching might also be used as a developmental tool, more often than not corporations recruit coaches in remedial situations where the executive is believed to 'cause' problems that need intervention. I explore how these problems are

defined in executive coaching discourses and practices. In the course of the chapter, I identify these cases as “remedial,” “skills coaching for the current job” and “development coaching.” I argue that the distinction between “remedial coaching” and “coaching for development” is subtle and insignificant. In both cases, there is lack, excessiveness or misuse of a character trait, skill or habit. Executive coaching helps executive gain what is lacking, lose what is excessive, learn and unlearn a habit.

In the third section I move to the exploration of ethical dilemmas that are faced by executive coaches working in corporations. These ethical dilemmas are genuine puzzles and do not have generic answers. They are represented in two different ways: workshop scenarios and real life examples. Workshop scenarios are more open and structured precisely to draw out as many considerations as possible. They are meant to be debated as ethical puzzles and do not have standard answers. Real life examples have more specifications, details about the characters, their motives, their circumstances, the people they work with, the type of business they conduct, and the histories of various relationships. It is relatively easier to reach workable conclusions. I characterize these ethical dilemmas in terms of what Michael Fischer (2004) calls “reflexive social institutions” where things are changing (the business environment and the American self), and institutions are required to iteratively and recursively assemble information from multiple places (360 feedback and critical incident methodology) and process it in a more-or-less continuous feedback manner to adapt to changes (for example, in helping with a transition to a new job, doing remedial work, acting as a sounding board, etc.).

These ethical dilemmas are not only about the ways in which coaches are trying to define the boundaries, discourses and practices of a new profession in its initial stages of development. They also underline the ambiguity and confusion regarding the object, subject, methods and tools of executive coaching and the expertise that it relies on (Winum 2005; Judge and Cowell 1997; Berglas 2002). They show that there are no clear answers to basic questions such as: What is coaching? Who is a coaching client? Ethical dilemmas also present executive coaches' struggle to differentiate the personal and the social, the rational and the irrational, the measurable and the un-measurable and the individual and the systemic.

History

There are multiple histories of executive coaching that go along with its multiple definitions.⁹ Some define it as “mentoring” and argue that it has existed since Socrates. Coaches coming from a management consulting background argue that they used to do coaching but were not calling it “coaching.” To them, the history of executive coaching is also the history of management consulting now practiced on a one-on-one basis. Others argue that executive coaching is one of many techniques that can be utilized for executive development, thus its history goes back to the beginning of the 20th century when the first management schools were founded.

⁹ A comprehensive definition of executive coaching is proposed by Richard Kilburg (2000) as:

a helping relationship formed between a client who has managerial authority and responsibility in an organization and a consultant who uses a wide variety of behavioral techniques and methods to help the client achieve a mutually identified set of goals to improve his or her professional performance and personal satisfaction and, consequently, to improve the effectiveness of the client's organization within a formally defined coaching agreement.

Richard Kilburg—a prominent figure in the field of executive coaching—sees coaching as embedded in the practice of consulting psychology and dates its origins to the late 19th century:

People started getting into the business of advising leaders on how to lead and how to organize their organizations back in the middle part of the 19th century in the 1850s. Those early consultants were largely mining engineers in Europe who were in fact advising people on the construction of mines and they expanded and became kind of general consultants to industry and then the first business schools started in the late part of the 19th century and the first formal consulting in psychology started in the early part of the 20th century. The first formal consulting firms, which were largely testing companies, started in the late 19 teens, like 1918, 1919. It was the explosion of the creation of the first formal psychological tests for the army. The army alpha and army beta tests that really exploded consulting within the field of psychology. So in the 1920s consulting psychology became a pretty well known sub discipline within psychology.

The first management and strategy consulting firm McKinsey and Company was founded in 1926.¹⁰ Several tests of placement and performance were invented during World War II; the Army General Classification Test was used to classify 12 million soldiers into military jobs. Other modern consulting firms were founded after the war such as RHR

¹⁰ Booz Allen founded in 1914 is arguably considered as the first strategy consulting firm and McKinsey founded in 1926 is considered as the first management and strategy consulting firm.

International¹¹ in 1945, Price Waterhouse in 1946 and Boston Consulting Group in 1963. Kilburg distinguishes RHR from other management consulting firms and considers it the first consulting firm.

The first modern consulting firm, RHR for example, was started at the tail end of the Second World War and began to do what we think of as modern psychological consulting around the executive selection, executive development, leadership and management development. The coaching practices that we became familiar with evolved largely out of the practices of a couple of consulting psychology firms in the 1980s and out of the Center for Creative Leadership where a group of psychologists was clustered in was practicing leadership development and they began to combine the emergence of 360 degree feedback instruments with personality assessments and at TCL and then TDI in Minneapolis. They started also merging that with conventional assessment centers, which were invented in the 1950s at AT&T by Doug Bray and Bill Byham and a number of other people in the AT&T experiments. So you had the merger of three or four lines of technical development within psychology that then started to become called by David Peterson and Dale Thompson using the coaching metaphor. The first publications and the first dissertations started appearing in the 1980s using a rubric of coaching.

¹¹ RHR International claims to have pioneered the field of corporate psychology in 1930s. The founders of the firm conducted personnel evaluations during these years and later applied their knowledge to other facets of organizational behavior. <http://www.rhrinternational.com/about/cohistory.html>

For coaches who are also consulting psychologists, coaching was something that they did as part of their consulting work, “they just didn’t call it that.” Kilburg’s professional background is an example of this convergence. Kilburg was at the American Psychological Association from 1978 through 1985 working “very, very closely” with the leadership of the American Psychological Association. From 1980 through 1984, he directed the Professional Affairs Office where he developed an intensive program of leadership development for the members of State Psychological Associations who were rising to leadership positions and started the first formal leadership development program for State Association Leaders. “We were not formal executive coaches or consultants as they have come to be known in the latter part of the 1980s and into the 1990s. We were providing those services out of our staff jobs at the APA. We weren’t calling it coaching.”

During the 1960s and 1970s two figures introduced principles that would later be prominent: Peter Drucker in the field of management consulting and Harry Levinson in the field of consulting psychology and executive development. In 1967, Drucker wrote *The Effective Executive*, arguably the first book written on executive effectiveness. He defined executives as “knowledge workers, managers, or individual professionals who are expected by virtue of their position to make decision in the normal course of their work that have significant impact on the performance and results of the whole” and argued that executives have to focus on effectiveness (“doing the right things”) rather than efficiency (“doing things right”). He insisted that effectiveness can and should be learned; it can be broken down, analyzed and improved (2006).

Levinson has been trained as a clinical psychologist and is best known for applying psychoanalytic theories to organizational settings. He is one of the founders of psychoanalytic organizational psychology and is considered the pioneer in the leadership development and consulting psychology field.¹² In 1962, when he studied how work influences health, he identified the term “psychological contract” and defined it as the often unspoken contract between an individual and the organization that s/he works for. He argued that people unconsciously choose organizations to meet their psychological needs and organizations in turn choose people who will meet their unstated needs. These needs need to be mutually met for the organization to thrive and management needs to be aware of these needs. He shifted from studying mental health at the workplace (*Emotional Health in the World of Work* 1964) to studying management and leadership (*The Exceptional Executive: A Psychological Conception* 1968; *Executive Stress* 1970; *Executive* 1981 with Lang; and *CEO: Corporate Leadership in Action* 1984 with Rosenthal).

Based on a survey of peer-reviewed literature between 1935 and 2005, Grant and Cavanagh argue that the literature on coaching at the workplace dates to 1937 with Gorby’s report in the journal *Factory Management and Maintenance* (Grant 2006). In this report, Gorby (1937) describes how older employees coached newer employees in reducing waste and points to the importance of coaching in cutting cost and increasing profit. Grant and Cavanagh show that until the 1980s, reports, articles and academic

¹² Each year the American Psychological Association Consulting Psychology Division gives the Harry and Miriam Levinson award to a practicing consultant for his contribution to the field. In 2006 the award was given to Richard Kilburg.

research focused on internal coaching with managers or supervisors acting as coaches to their subordinates. The survey shows that the first set of articles that referred to coaching as an external service provided to companies by management consultants and coaches emerged only in the mid-80s.¹³

During the 1960s and 1970s there emerged an extensive literature on coaching in two other sub-disciplines of psychology: in sports psychology to develop athletics' performance and in educational psychology to work with students who had developmental delays or specific needs for remedial work. Kilburg argues that the terms "executive coaching" or "management coaching" started appearing formally in the 1980s when researchers at the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) and Personnel Decisions International (PDI)¹⁴ began to articulate a brand of psychological practice in which they collected a large amount of data on how a person in leadership position was performing, developed a set of goals and ideas about what the leader wanted and needed to do to improve performance and then started working specifically on a one-on-one basis with those people to do that.

The Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) was founded in 1970 as a non-profit educational institution focusing on leadership and leadership development. The Smiths Foundation provided the initial financial underpinning and has supported the CCL for the

¹³ The quantity of publications accelerated in the beginning of 1990s. Between 1995 and 2005 the number of articles published on coaching increased to one hundred doubling the number of articles published until 1995.

¹⁴ PDI is arguably considered as the first organization to introduce a formal executive coaching program.

past 37 years. Randy White was one of the researchers that worked at the Center during the 1980s.

It (the Center) is brought to you by Smith Richardson who brought you Vicks Vaporub, Formula 44, Vicks cough drops and all those kinds of things. He thought in the 1930s that the crisis in American Society was that we needed creative leaders and so he formed first the foundation (The Smiths Foundation) which still exists and in 1968 the Center for Creative Leadership became bricks and mortar...

Through the '70s the Center did a lot of experimentation with collecting and analyzing data about leaders and in the late '70s and '80s the Center produced "groundbreaking" research led by Morgan McCall. It became a home for many social scientists interested in studying and developing notions of leadership.

I always tease and say that I grew up at the Center for Creative Leadership and the style of coaching that we do which is very data based comes from a couple of different places but we used this technique. We originally used this technique on the basis of methodology of it as we collect the data for *Breaking the Glass Ceiling* and for the *Lessons of Experience*, those books that were done at CCL and some other work as well, that Bob Kaplan, my colleague also from CCL had used in a book called *Beyond Ambition*. So we were simply expanding on a critical incident methodology and we used that as the basis for getting narrative data.

That is point one. Point two, we all, several of us came from a tradition of trying to measure characteristic, attributes, behaviors of leadership. What does successful or effective leadership look like? What are the measures that correlate with it? So the other elements of our coaching enterprise has been bringing to their multiple measures, sometimes to measure the same kind of attributes. It is called multi-trait/multi-method and those things kind of came together in the mid-1980s, 1985, 1986, 1987, right in there, so what is that? It is about 20 years ago and that is when those techniques came together ...

The method that White refers to is called the “critical incident methodology.” It is an inductive process of collecting a wide array of data about a person on a series of questions from different people and putting together this data to try to get a picture of the person and explore the way they lead their teams and their strengths and weaknesses. The researchers then identify major themes that the person exhibits and the kinds of behavior that run across all of this data. White commented in another conversation that the critical incident methodology was based on Glaser and Strauss’s grounded theory (1967) and laid the basis for several of them to start their coaching practices.

The group started doing research at the CCL in 1981 and broke up in 1989. They published many books, technical reports and invented measuring instruments. *Breaking the Glass Ceiling: Can Women Reach the Top of America’s Largest Corporations* (1982) studies women in senior leadership roles and *The Lessons of Experience: How Successful Executives Develop on the Job* (1988) studies men at senior leadership roles. *Beyond*

Ambition (1991) studies the strengths of executives as they are overplayed and become flaws. All three books use the critical incident methodology of gathering data through the stories that people could tell the researchers about themselves or about other people. The center also produced instruments such as a 360-degree instrument called Benchmark, and developed versions of Job Challenge Profile, FIRO-B and CPI.

So what I would tell you is a lot like other science in the discovery process. There were many of us all working on different sorts of projects, but using, exploring, experimenting with this methodology and then it is sort of a light bulb going off, hey, you could use this with interventions with senior people. We did not go around calling it coaching at that point. In fact the history of coaching I think is very, very long and somewhat convoluted. It is not a recent phenomenon. It is a recent phenomenon that it is so popular and that there are probably lot of reasons for that, but we did not go around and call this coaching. In fact we saw it as a self-awareness program for executive excellence, for executive self-awareness and that is really the way we pushed it.

White continuously emphasizes that executive coaching is just “one technique in terms of executive development.” This is partly why he claims one would see the names of the CCL researchers (Morgan McCall, Mike Lombardo, Robert Kaplan, Joan Kofodimos, Ann Morrison, Randy White and Esther Lindsey) not in today’s executive coaching field but in the executive development field.

I see executive coaching as a management tool used to increase efficiency at the workplace and trace its origins to 1881 when Frederick Taylor began experiments at the Midvale and Bethlehem Steel Plant, which later led to the development of his “scientific management” philosophy. Taylor laid out scientifically designed methods for efficiency and emphasized the value of redesigning the workplace through time and motion studies in order to achieve higher output for the company (Taylor 1911). In *The Principles of Scientific Management* Taylor suggested that managers apply scientific management principles to planning the work and that workers simply perform their tasks according to these principles. In *Shop Management* (1911a) he explained the natural tendency of people to “take it easy” and the manager’s role in motivating workers to avoid “natural soldiering.” Around the same time Hugo Münsterberg published on the relations between efficiency and mental processes like fatigue, monotony, interest, learning and work satisfaction. He argued that a match between job and worker was crucial for generating satisfied employees and workplace efficiency (1913).

World War I became influential in the development of psychological measurement tools and methods. Army psychologists investigated soldier motivation, morale, classification and placement of enlistees, conducted performance evaluations of officers and developed job duties and qualifications. In the early ‘20s there was also the foundation of doctoral degree programs specializing in industrial psychology at U.S. universities including Ohio State, Carnegie Institute of Technology, University of Minnesota and Stanford University.

Between 1924 and 1933 managers at the Hawthorne works of the Western Electric Company (subsidiary of AT&T), in collaboration with Elton Mayo and his colleagues Fritz Roethlisberger and William Richardson at the Harvard Business School, conducted a series of experiments on worker productivity, job satisfaction and workplace organization. These experiments were among the earliest in the behavioral sciences and measured the effects of varying levels of lighting on the productivity of workers, and assumed that increase in lighting would result in higher rates of production. In effect, when light levels decreased workers' productivity dropped or remained the same contrary to the expectation of the researchers and common sense.

In the following phase of the experiment, six women were placed in a test room, where they were monitored. Production increased when working conditions were improved. But production continued to increase when special conditions such as rest periods or shorter working days were removed. It seemed that the workers' attitude to their work was as important as the changes in the work environment. Being separated from their fellow workers and given special attention by the researchers and supervisors had a bigger effect than the individual changes in working conditions. The workers' personalities, attitudes and sentiments they bring to the factory were shaping their reactions to their work environment.¹⁵ This later became known as the "Hawthorne effect" showing the importance of aspects of human behavior and emotions at the workplace. Historians argued that the link between supervision, morale, and productivity

¹⁵ Another experiment that involved close observation of a group of bank-writing workers revealed the importance of informal social groups among the workers. The researchers claimed that the productivity and behavior of workers were influenced by as much by personal attitudes and informal social organization as by formal lines of organization and authority.

that was made visible by the experiment became the foundation of the human relations movement (Wren 2005). Mayo published the results of the experiments in *The Human Problems of an Industrial Civilization* (1933) and Roethlisberger and Richardson in the *Management and the Worker* (1939).

Through archival research, Richard Gillespie shows that in fact the researchers predicted the importance of psychological and social factors from the beginning. The political effect of the experiments was a change in the management structure: special personnel management departments were created and responsibilities of personnel functions were moved from foremen in the shop floor to personnel managers. Personnel managers saw and used the experiment for increasing their control over middle managers; claimed a special expertise in understanding the organization of production and introduced supervisory training programs that taught supervisors how to deal with human relations in their work groups (Gillespie 1988).

Around the same time Morris Viteles's books, *Industrial Psychology* (1932), *The Science of Work* (1934), *Motivation and Morale in Industry* (1953) showed the importance of informal employee groups and employee attitudes on productivity but also emphasized the quality of supervision and management. Viteles wrote that, "the antagonisms of capital and labor; the acrimonious character of labor disputes; "slacking" or "soldiering" on the job, and other expressions of conflict between workers and management represent oftentimes not the faults of common "human nature" but the reflection of unintelligent leadership in industry" (1932: 613). These studies shifted the landscape of management

from Taylor's "scientific management" to a "human relations" approach to productivity¹⁶ understood in terms of social group dynamics, motivation and leadership.

Thrift argues that in contemporary business three "theoretical networks" are more critical than political economy and particularly economics: 1) bookkeeping, 2) written procedures, and finally 3) soft management skills like team leadership, creativity and emotional thinking (Thrift 1999: 59-63). Unlike economics, which is dedicated to more abstract issues, these three theoretical networks address the pragmatic, everyday life of capitalism and are visible in business schools, management consultancies, management gurus and business media. Other ethnographers pointed to how networking, access to insider rumors and information, and to other players and social relations remain vital in the New economy defined by advances in information and communication technology, management and production techniques, and global integration (Holmes and Marcus 2006; Ong 2006; Rudnyckij 2006; Zaloom 2006).

Critical theorists Sampson and Buck-Morss have argued that the rational company man of 1950s and 1960s has become the corporate social persona of the 1990s, skilled in the arts and presentation of "change management." The giant multinational corporation of

¹⁶ In Absolute and Relative Surplus Value, Marx writes that:

The only worker who is productive is one who produces surplus value for the capitalist, or in other words contributes towards the self-valorization of capital. If we may take an example from the outside the sphere of material productive, a school master is a productive worker when, in addition to belabouring the heads of his pupils, he works himself into the ground to enrich the owner of the school. That the latter has laid out his capital in a teaching factory, instead of a sausage factory makes no difference to the relation. The concept of a productive worker therefore implies not merely a relation between the activity of work and its useful effect, between the worker and the product of his work, but also a specifically social relation of production, a relation with a historical origin which stamps the worker as capital's direct means of valorization. To be a productive worker is therefore not a piece of luck but a misfortune.

the 1950s and 1960s now becomes a leaner, networked organization, a looser form of business that can act like a net floating on an ocean, able to ride the swell and still go forward. Thrift disagrees with some of the managerial discourse for exaggerating the importance of fluidity and points to the fact that many organizations remain monolithic and bureaucratic. He also criticizes the universal assumptions that these discourses seem to have. However he acknowledges the hegemonic power of the new managerialism discourse in its creation of 'new managerial subjects.' He writes:

Most importantly of all, perhaps, the new managerialist discourse has empowered its managerialist subjects by presenting them with an expanded opportunity to dream "global dreams" (Barner and Cavanagh 1995). New forms of managerial subjects are being produced through the application of an odd mixture of the "psy disciplines" (Rose 1998), New Age, and the like. Most particularly, these subjects are being taught to internalize the world as theirs in which to operate with self-concern and self-confidence (French and Grey 1996).

Coaching shows that managers are not able to dream "global dreams." Neither are they able to internalize the world as theirs and operate in it with self-concern and self-confidence. Coaching exemplifies that the new managerialist discourse is a utopian story. It emphasizes the importance of adaptation to the uncertain, complex, paradoxical, and chaotic business environment but insists that individuals too are uncertain, complex, paradoxical and chaotic.

Coaching delves into an executive's unknown psychic territory and poses questions such as: What does he think? How does he feel? Where do these thoughts and feelings come from? What do others feel and think about him? What does he think and feel others think and feel about him? How does this web of assumptions, feelings, thoughts and affects influence his effectiveness? It is only through the exploration of the irrational psychology of managers that the efficiency of the executive and the corporation can be improved.

Executive coaches assume that interpersonal problems in the workplace stem from people subconsciously gluing a family member's image onto a coworker. They see a direct relationship between what they consider as visible and unknown—the loss of millions of dollars for investing money in the wrong market at the wrong time—and invisible and yet known: the replacement of a father-son relationship with a boss-executive relationship. Executives cannot take risks because they have been substituting their bosses with their powerful father whom they could not confront. Women executives with abusive stepmothers have strong interpersonal challenges and a difficult time working with other women in positions with power. The unconscious—fear from demanding bosses substituted for fathers, sibling rivalry with peers—manages the workplace. Executives lose control over the company they are in charge of, over teams that they are supervising, over tasks they are responsible for. Executive coaches argue that in reality executives lose control and knowledge over their own fears, conflicts, impulses and desires.

If Taylor's studies were about the management of low paid, low skilled and easily replaceable workers, executive coaching is about managing high-paid, skillful, high-level managers whose replacement is extremely costly. If the former showed the importance of mechanizing bodies of workers, executive coaching shows the importance of exploring the non-mechanic and irrational mind of managers. Once the source of the problem has shifted from organizational to individual, the solution has to change as well. Managers need to be placed properly in their own psychic world before they can be placed in the world of the corporation and can place the corporation in the larger business world. The irrational inclinations, thoughts and behaviors of managers have to be managed first for the corporation to be managed in a rational and efficient manner. The manager is responsible for the whole company yet his management capacity and responsibility is obstructed because he is haunted by a past for which he is not responsible. The subject is responsible for everything and yet nothing.

Pre-texts for coaching

There are various reasons why a company hires an executive coach. Mostly, executive coaches are called into corporations in situations where a mid- or high-level manager is "faltering" in some way or not performing up to expectations. Here coaching becomes a "remedial" tool to enhance performance and effectiveness by eliminating unhelpful patterns of behavior. The executive coaching process might also be a part of succession planning processes or executive development initiatives. In these "developmental" situations a coach is hired to help the executive to function more effectively on the present job or be well positioned for future stages, tasks or responsibilities. In rare cases,

coaches might also function as a “sounding board” to help senior level executives clarify their business agenda, corporate vision and strategies.

Coaches make strict distinctions between “coaching for development” and “remedial coaching.” According to these distinctions, coaching for development is often used as a preparation for a career move and as part of a succession plan and is offered to executives during transitions to a new role in order to help them develop certain skills. A typical example is an executive who needs to take a leadership role and learn how to lead the team of which he was previously a member. Now that he is the leader, he cannot treat team members as peers. He has to “unlearn” his behavioral liabilities based on his previous position as a team member and “learn” new behaviors based on his new position as a new leader.

The developmental part is when someone is doing well and she is considered generally successful and just like anyone else nobody is perfect so they have their weakness or what I would like to call areas for development. So I would be hired then to work on these areas for development so that the executives would be even more successful and will be well positioned for promotion for handling the next role, etc. This is the developmental part.

When this coach says “developmental” she refers to development on the current job and development for the future job. Other coaches keep the two separate and make a

distinction between “coaching for skills”¹⁷ on the current job and “coaching for development” for the future job. They define “coaching for skills” as learning focused on a specific task or project and skills as basic concepts, strategies, methods, behaviors, attitudes, and perspectives associated with success in business.

I argue that the distinction between “remedial coaching” and “coaching for development” is subtle and insignificant. In both cases, there is lack, excessiveness or misuse (too little or too much) of a character trait, skill or habit. Executive coaching helps executives gain what is lacking, lose what is excessive, learn and unlearn a habit. Let us look at two stories that I heard during my fieldwork:

So let us say the executive is not good at managing their team. Somehow there is a strength and that is why the company invests in them. Because if they are in a client service company and the executive cannot serve clients effectively, they are not going to hire coach, they are just going to get rid of him. But if it is someone who is usually good at the thing that brings money, but not good at interpersonal skill ... That would be very often it calls for coaching. People would say ‘oh, he is amazing with clients, really good at sales, accounting, with the clients or solving problems or good at whatever it is that the company does!’ But the people below them think they are *assholes* and they really suffer from them. This

¹⁷ Skills might involve “basic skills” such as planning, organizing and setting priorities; “advanced skills” such as conflict management, customer management and delegation of skills; “general consulting skills” that include project management, prioritizing work and “customer management skills” that include assessing client’s readiness and commitment for projects, developing credibility and professional relationships with clients, working with difficult clients, etc.

is a very typical example of when a coach is hired. (Personal conversation with an executive coach)

A successful woman executive. She had a great relationship to the clients but not the to the peers. Her boss marches to his office: “Bad news Lynn, your peers can’t stand you. Good news is that you will have a coach.” That same day, Lynn starts working with a coach. The coach sits down with Lynn and tells her: “The good news is that you are better than anybody else in your area of expertise. The bad news is that no one can stand working with you because you won’t listen anybody.” (Presentation at an APA Annual Meeting workshop, August 2005)

These stories describe similar scenarios, present typical executive traits that cause problems at workplaces. An “*asshole*” executive mismanages his team and negatively affects its morale, fails to give enough information or contacts to people he leads and becomes a bad project manager. Their teams receive conflicting messages in the middle of indirect and triangulated communication and are unable to follow through on commitments. Fear of retaliation, anger and envy, acting out behavior, cognitive distortions, unexpressed grief, poor morale become dominant and the productivity of the company drops. Executive coaching clients have technical brilliance (good news) but are generating interpersonal and/or managerial problems (bad news). These problems might involve lack of good communication skills (oral and written), incompetence in supervising teams, imbalance between being a team player and team leader, too much competition, lack of ambition and/or being asocial.

These stories describe the same pattern of the use of psychodynamic approaches to the workplace. First they relate business failure to other things that are not business performances themselves, but character traits, and forms of conduct: ways of being and behaving. It is no longer a question of organizational structure but a question of interpersonal “performance.” Then, they make the assumption that to function at a higher level, executives’ personal and interpersonal issues (the way they think, the way they feel, and the way they relate to themselves and others) have to be understood and improved. I will focus on two case studies, both taken from the *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research* to illustrate how the personal and interpersonal performance is linked to business performance.

The first case study starts with the description of the coaching client: Ted’s gender, age, educational background (including sports activities that he was involved at school), professional background and current position in the company are listed. It ends with brief information about his family and family of origin: “He has been married for 25 years and has one child who is now in high school. He comes from a working-class family.”

It then shifts to describing the industry and the current state of the company (revenues and number of employees and the future challenges that it faces):

Ted’s employer is a large, independent, investor-owned company that provides energy and energy-related services. Company revenues exceed \$1 billion

annually, and in spite of recent downsizing, employee number over 4,000. The company is faced with the need for financial flexibility in the face of an increasingly competitive marketplace due to deregulation. Enormous fixed costs must be balanced with the real need to cut costs. The background and experience of senior management is changing from engineering to marketing and financing.

The article also gives a brief account of the referral process that was initiated by a senior executive with whom the coach worked over several years. The senior executive encouraged the vice president who is Ted's manager to seek coaching services. Then an interesting shift takes place in the story where the coach starts talking about the personality of the executive:

The presenting problems included his insensitivity to employees and their needs, an autocratic and coercive management style, and gross impatience in the pursuit of results.

We have to pay attention to the fact that the presenting problems did not include any figures related to revenues and profits. Ted's production record was "hard to beat." He was considered to be a one of the very best technical and operations managers in the entire company. But he was described as "abusive in his use of power, engaging in intimidations of subordinates and self-oriented." The company chairman did not wish to receive any more letters about Ted's management style. Ted would have lost his job if he

had not changed his behavior and the senior management hired the coach to “save” him if possible (Diedrich 1996).

Another case study is presented by Richard Kilburg in the special issue of *The Consulting Psychology Journal* on executive coaching. This story opens with a description of the executive coaching client Susan Luci’s professional role in the company: what she does in the company and how she does it.

Susan Luci is a senior staff member and programmer in the management information systems unit of a computing department. She has a reputation for technical excellence in her position, works very hard, completes her assignments on time, and expects her colleagues and clients to do the same. She neither has performance nor time management issues.

Susan is a typical example of an executive with technical excellence, hard work and high performance that is required and expected of a successful executive. The story then shifts to her flaws that are related to her social skills.

She works as part of multidisciplinary team. A perfectionist, she explodes verbally with subordinates, colleagues, and managers in other departments. Harsh, sometimes nasty exchanges aren’t unusual.

Kilburg gives a chronological account of events which he thinks led to the crisis: Susan's boss leaves her out of the loop and she feels resentful, suspicious and combative with him. The problems that Susan had with her boss and the other teams that she works with lead to untenable situations where they were unable to provide high quality services to clients within the expected time frames. The coach is called into the company to refine her administrative and interpersonal skills.

One day Susan sends out a note to her boss in order to educate her about a problem in one of her projects and the effects that resource shortages and lack of cooperation from other departments has created for her and her staff. She shares this email with the coach. The coach discovers a typo in which Susan referred to the "moral" (meaning morale) of the unit staff. The coach asks her what she thinks the typo means. She says that she often makes mistakes. The coach points out that she might be making a statement about how she believed her superiors were managing the situation, that her boss and many of his colleagues in the department had a problem behaving *immorally* with regard to resource allocation and decision making. She comes to the realization that this is actually what she thought. During the session she admits that she was chronically angry with people she was working with and discloses that her parents were Holocaust survivors who were both demanding, angry and depressed most of the time. Together the coach and the client explore several major dimensions of how this might be influencing her current performance at work and talk about emotions as they affect job performance, including anger, sadness, shame and anxiety. In the next appointment, they identify several techniques that she could use when she felt herself "losing it with someone."

Kilburg ends the case study with the conclusion that “various components of her conscious and unconscious behavior, as manifested through and mediated by her working relationships with subordinates, colleagues and superiors, led to the derailment of her career in her organization. She was scapegoat by the group for many flaws and problems in operating systems, historic inadequacies in management and supervision, and real resource shortages.” Such statements about systemic issues come up in stories and conversations but do not change the fact that human psychology remains at the core of the problem and the solution.

These stories operate on a number of levels. They are used by coaches as examples to illustrate a point, they are told over and over again and turn into solid frames of reference. They become symbols of modes of thinking and acting. They normalize a situation or de-normalize it. As told to me by a coach who is an exceptional storyteller, good stories are “impossible to resist.” Stories register and recount a series of what could be called the subject for coaching intervention (the target of personal and professional development): brilliant executives lacking personal awareness and interpersonal skills. They have above average intelligence, technical skills and expertise combined with “above average anger and hostility,” “too much ego,” “low degree of self-awareness,” “poor introspection,” “weakness in areas of communication, interpersonal relations, and motivation,” and “toxic emotions.” (Diedrich 1996; Quick et al 2004; Orenstein 2006; Wasylshyn et al 2006).

The typical psychoanalytic/psychodynamic assumption that dominates the field is the following: “past experiences, emotional responses, defensive reactions, unresolved psychodynamic conflicts and dysfunctional patterns of thinking and behavior contribute to poor leadership and decrease organizational effectiveness.” This imagined link functions in two ways: it justifies and legitimizes the use of psychodynamic approaches and methods and yet it challenges its claims of scientificity. When business performance is related to intra-personal and interpersonal dimensions, psychodynamic approaches become inevitable solutions to issues of productivity and effectiveness. However, the same link makes it incredibly difficult to explain and measure how coaching the intrapersonal and interpersonal would change the business parameters. I posed this question to Kilburg.

Ozkan: You give us a very rich description of sort of the unconscious and irrational forces and psychodynamic processes that influence people and organizations and explain how to change these processes. On the other hand you have studies of outcome measured in revenues or sales figures. I am struggling to bring them together and wondering whether one of the difficulties with empirical research in such settings is the difficulty of defining what is it that needs to be changed or – did I make myself clear?

Kilburg: Yeah, I think you understand the problem entirely. Now what is it that we are measuring and where are you putting pressure on a human system, an individual or a group or an organization or all of the above to achieve a result and

what kind of results you are trying to achieve or are trying to improve the performance of an individual in a leadership position in the supposition is that we improve the individual's performance we have improved the organization's performance. Is that always the case? We do not know. We assume it is. We have lots of anecdotal evidence, clinical case examples, if you will, of what happens.

I have worked with a lot of leaders who are struggling with intra-psychic forces or organizational forces or group dynamics and if you work with them on that stuff and you help them improve things, their organization's performance improves. I just got back from an all day consulting session with the three leaders of a fairly substantial business in the neighborhood of 300 million dollar business and these are the top three people on that organization. They have gotten a bit off track over the last six to nine months in terms of their relationships and there has been a lot of suspicion and a lot of distrust that have grown up between the three of them. They are having somewhat you can think of as relationship problems. There is a lot of conflict between them and the people in their organization and yet they consistently had a very, very good economic performance in the organization. Their misery index was very high and they didn't do as well financially as they could have and yet on the outside of it everybody would think that this is pretty hunky dory. The leader knew very, very well that in order for the organization to continue to do well or even better that the three of them needed to ventilate what had been going on between them including the competitive forces and the

ambitions and the anxieties that they had about what they have been through. We were able to get through that and it was not just an interpretation of those forces. They actually agreed to behave in a different kind of way and created a new set of normative expectations for all the three of them to work together including changing how they were going to meet and the kinds of things they were going to discuss in the meetings. Now it remains to be seen whether the issues that caused us to meet in the first place improve. We will probably know in another three months whether they are making progress, but they were willing to pay me a couple of days of my time to come out and meet with them and structure and facilitate the meeting. Is that psycho-dynamic? Absolutely. Is it leadership development? Absolutely. Is it coaching? Absolutely. This is focused on the organizational systems. It surely does because we are talking about business results and the expectations that they have for business results and what they wanted to do by way of corporate strategy over the course of the next 18 to 24 months, but it was also about the fact that they mistrusted each other and at least one of the people was talking about how she had gotten depressed over the course of the last six months and was going through what we identified and talked about in the meeting as a sort of midlife crisis, not even knowing whether she wanted a leadership there anymore. That affected her relationships with the other two guys in the room. So, you know, how would you evaluate that intervention? Is it psychodynamic? Is it behavioral? Does it have to do with group arms? Does it have to do with the empirical performance of business? Does it have to do with restructuring a strategy of the business? I would say all of the above. That is the

space you are entering into when you are working with leaders. What do we call that? Some people call it executive coaching. Some people call it process consulting. Some people call it consulting psychology, you know, all of the above. How do you teach it? When you walk into a room with an individual executive or an executive team you have got dozens of variables if not hundreds that are dancing in the room that you have got to be aware of and you make selections all of the time about the variables which you are paying attention to and whether you are going to intervene on those variables and why. That is what makes it fun.

Even though the conceptualization in executive coaching is from a psychodynamic perspective coaches use “behavioral techniques” rather than psychodynamic methods for helping behavior change. The links between these ‘dozens of variables’ (psychodynamics, behavioral patterns, organizational structure, business performance, social relationships) multiply as they are seen from the perspective of executives, executive coaches and companies. The source and the location of problems flow from the economic to the social to the political to the psychological. Economic, organizational and political become personal and the psychological is addressed in behavioral terms.

Ethical dilemmas

The coach receives a call from the director of executive development about one of his most senior executives to “come and take a look at the situation, talk to some of the key players and then decide what to do next?” The director shares with the coach that there

are certain deficiencies in the way Jenny goes about her leadership tasks. She is too tough, demanding, doesn't suffer fools well, puts people off, is seen as "ineffective" and alienating to all but the chairman. Within a week after Jane is derailed to a different job. The coach collects several different types of information about Jenny's business performance, leadership and interpersonal skills from development advisors and human resources department. The coach meets with Jenny and learns that she is confused, uncertain and distrustful of the organization. But more importantly he learns that Jenny is under care for both physical and psychological issues. Later during the process, the coach also learns that this is the third senior woman in the company who was derailed, information that was not shared with him upfront.

The scenario above was presented at a workshop organized by the Division 13, Consulting Psychology Division, as part of the Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association. The workshop organizers asked each group to discuss as a group whether they would agree to do a coaching intervention and if so how they would proceed. Coaches started asking questions to the organizers to clarify the situation. The questions regarded the eligibility of the executive as a coaching client, the problem to be addressed, tools and methods to be used, and issues of confidentiality. At the end of the group gatherings, organizers asked each group to tell whether they would take the job or not. Coaches disagreed as to whether they would take the job and their reasons for their decision.

Regarding the source and the scale of the problem, for example, one group brought up the possibility that the issues might be systemic as Jenny was not the first woman who was derailed but the third, which brought the question of whether there was a systemic or cultural issue and what coaches would do if in that case. Would they talk to the three women who were derailed? Different opinions were raised from different groups and within each group. Some emphasized that when they are hired as executive coaches they are not asked to change the culture of the company but to help the executive to reach the performance level that the company is asking for. Some said that they would take this job and not tell the company about systemic issues, as most companies would not want to hear that there are systemic issues. Others backed up this argument by asserting that there are always systemic issues. Did this sound like a systemic failure? Most said, 'most likely.' A few commented that a systemic failure like this would not slip through the cracks in a Fortune 100 company. How much would you tell your client? They are your bread and butter. You don't have to tell them there are systemic issues: you can do your assessment and tell them there are cultural issues. Others disagreed. If there is a systemic problem, there will be governance and legality issues, declining it and asking the chair to advise on the situation is the best strategy.

Each question led to another set of questions for which there was a new set of contradictory answers. If they took the job, what kind of assessment would they do? From whom would they collect information when the company is suffering from lack of trust and communication? And finally, what would they do with the story that she has a psychological history? Assuming they took the job would they try to get in touch with

her mental health care providers? If they decide not to take the case because of her psychological history, how would they explain their decision and reasoning behind it without violating their client's privacy? Who is their client?

This workshop represents a range of ethical dilemmas faced by executive coaches working in corporations such as mandated reporting of illegal and unethical behavior, conflict of codes, boundaries between coaching and psychotherapy, (mis)use of psychologists' work, confidentiality boundaries, navigating multiple relationships, measuring outcomes, defining successful outcomes and working with clients with psychological problems. In workshops like this one, ethical dilemmas are presented as puzzles to be debated for which there are no generic answers. The reason for the existence of many different and contradictory opinions has to do more than the fact that executive coaches come from different backgrounds. Most attendants of this workshop come from a consulting psychology background and have been members of the Consulting Psychology Division for several years. Yet their opinions on ethical practices of executive coaching differ greatly. In another workshop at the Mid-Winter Conference for the Consulting Psychology Division, the differences were more distinct. Here too the workshop organizers proposed a case study:

The executive coach, Kenny, is hired by the company to work with an executive. When he collects data through 360-degree feedback method, Kenny invites people to speak off the record.¹⁸ The CEO tells him, off the record, that they are

¹⁸ In a 360-degree feedback process the coach collects information about his client from others that work with him. The 360-degree refers to the cyclical information gathering process where the peripheries talk

thinking of firing the executive. Kenny feels responsible to keep this as a secret. But at the same time he considers his client to be the executive. He had several dilemmas:

- Should the coach should tell the executive about the CEO's thought of firing him?
- Should he do this without the consent of the CEO?
- Should he try to convince the CEO to talk to the executive?

The discussion about the case went on for about an hour. The coach's invitation to speak off the record was criticized and seen as an open call to complication. Some coaches suggested that the coach has a responsibility to tell or at least imply to his client that he is on the red line. Others insisted that it is the CEO's responsibility to tell this to the executive and that the coach's responsibility was to convince the CEO to do so. Coaches should not have to be the "angel of death." Some suggested that the relationship between the coach, his executive client and his client's company has changed and the terms of contract had to change accordingly. The responsibility to coach the person has been discharged. Others objected that the relationship might change but the responsibility of the coach to help for his client's development has not. Furthermore, they added, the relationships and thus the terms of contract always change. Some pointed out nuances between confidentiality and anonymity, that things can be included in the feedback report with disguised identity. Some found the coach to be faulty in the way in which he did not

about the center—the client. It is one of the most commonly used assessment tools in corporate and executive coaching. I will examine this method further in the fourth chapter.

tell people that their comments might be reported back and their identity might be disguised. Others pointed that this would prevent people from honestly telling what they think.

Throughout the discussion workshop organizers encouraged workshop participants to have a look at the new Ethical Principles of Psychologist and Code of Conduct published by APA in 2002. There were around a hundred references to organizational/consulting psychology compared to three references in the previous ethics code published ten years ago. Coaches were able to make use of references in the ethics code of conduct but there was no agreement over what these principles meant in the context of organizational consulting and coaching. The Code of Conduct included references to confidentiality, conflict of interest, the release of tests data and the use of assessments in organizations. However working in corporations as coaches meant being in the midst of multiple relationships. In most of the cases it was not clear who the client was. Thus, whose confidentiality was to be protected against whom was not an easily resolved dilemma.

Coaches commented that they face such dilemmas every day; any relationship that they are engaged in a corporate setting is a multiple relationship and it comes with complicated dilemmas. For example, coaching clients tell their coaches that they are going to resign. What does the coach do? Does the coach continue providing his coaching services to his client and be paid by the company from which his client is planning to resign? Does he tell this confidential information to the company, asking to finish his contract? Does he try to convince his client not to resign? He was hired for the

development of the executive and now he knows about the fact that he will resign, does he tell the CEO that the terms of his contract changed?

An executive coach that I interviewed deals with the problem of multiple relationships and confidentiality by writing two reports: one to his client and one to the company.

Companies want to know and should know about the strengths and weaknesses of a certain person (my client) as it reflects his ability to do his/her job. Where they need to grow and develop. This is mostly at a behavioral level. My work with the executive also goes into what he/she typically says to him/herself when things are about to go badly, into what types of invisible, interpersonal structures this person does well in and doesn't. These implicit structures are not something the company has asked about and are not something they want to know. They are the subtle stuff of politics and interpersonal position. And it is systemic. I'm helping the executive navigate in the maze of interpersonal stuff that facilitates/hinders tasks. And I don't include any of that in the report. The company gets basically the same report that most coaches write. The executive him/herself gets a much richer set of organizing principles for his/her career going forward.

This executive coach shares the report with the executive for him to comment on it before his/her boss or HR sees it. He writes different reports for his client and for the company, leaves out anything that is about their family life for example. Other situations include the type of information to be shared. Whether the coach learns about a sexual harassment

from a subordinate of the executive or about a potential job termination from the executive's boss who is paying for the coaching services makes a difference. These dynamics take different forms depending on referral processes (who initiates the coaching engagement?), reasons that led to coaching engagement and expectations from it (coaching for development or coaching for derailment) and the specifics of the coaching contract.

Other ethical cases included questions about handling confidential information (the boss of the consultant asks the consultant to delete information about an affair between a manager and an employee of the department, the coaching client tells the coach that he is going to resign), use of information collected by coaches (a coach is asked to recommend a candidate for a higher position in the company or asked to provide assessment tool data to assist in making decision about who stays and who goes from a department to be downsized or asked to destroy assessment tool data), handling confidentiality (a coach is asked to disclose the names of participants in a 360 degree feedback), use of assessments (a coach is asked to help the future executive of the company to develop his leadership skills, after interviews the coach concludes that he would not be the best person for this position) and conflict of interest (a coach is paid in stock options and learns that the CEO is planning to leave the company which would effect the company stock options and thus his payment).

I argue that these ethical dilemmas refer to the struggle of coaches to define the boundaries, methods and practices of a profession in its early stages of development.

They underline the ambiguity and confusion regarding the object, subject, methods and tools of executive coaching and the expertise that it relies on. They show that there are no clear answers to basic questions such as: What is coaching? Who is a coaching client? What is the problem? How is to be addressed?

In the majority of cases, an executive's boss, governing body, human resources department or the department of executive development initiates and sponsors the coaching engagement. An executive coach might be hired for the company for developmental and remedial reasons. Most developmental cases are considered as a sign that the company is willing to invest in executive's career. The initiation of the coaching process might suggest that the executive is "on the derailment trail, is at risk and on the hot spot." Executive's superiors and peers recognize certain performance problems and/or dysfunctional behavioral patterns as needing intervention. Companies hire executive coaches to know about why an executive is performing lower than the company's expectation (lower than his potential). Coaches link performance issues and effectiveness to past experiences and unresolved psychological conflicts. The problem (low business performance and inefficiency), the causes (unresolved psychological conflicts) and the solutions (self-improvement) become incongruent.

Whereas previously efficiency was posed as an organizational problem, coaching shows that today efficiency is seen as a matter of individual psychology. The set of techniques to increase efficiency is enlisted in increasing self-awareness and becoming a different person. Self-knowledge is not merely a vehicle in this process: one's knowledge about

her/himself becomes both a source and a product of her/his work. Coaches and coaching clients talk about a work ethic that emphasizes increased knowledge about the individual and the social in which the individual operates.

This chapter has argued that the challenges of coaching, including its ethical challenges, involve more than continuing the shift from early organizational management to a focus on the flexible individual. Because the coach often has conflicting commitments (to the company that hired him; to the executive he is coaching) and is subject to shifting implicit contracts as her knowledge deepens, the field of coaching remains a dynamic moving target for those who theorize and develop techniques for coaches, for coaches themselves, and for anthropologists who study them. For the anthropologist, it is this fluidity that helps shed light on the changing nature of the self and organizational expectations. For corporations and for the coaches, the recursive need to constantly revisit ethical dilemmas and implicit contracts constitutes a kind of reflexive social institutional structure to negotiate the shifting grounds of the economy, of the tensions between individuals, small groups (work teams), larger organizations and what Foucault called disciplinary societies.

Chapter 4

The World in Executive Coaching: From Scientific Numbers to Scientific Narratives

Introduction

The use of psychological theories of the individual to increase efficiency is not new. Psychologists have started working in corporations and pointed to the importance of psychological and social factors since the 1920s and used psychometric tools to assess potential and current employees. Executive coaching draws on some of these approaches. Yet it is also distinctive in its choice of psychodynamic frameworks, its exploration of behavior and thought patterns that are traced back to childhood and its emphasis on self-awareness and self-knowledge. In this chapter, I lay out the methods and tools used by coaches in their engagement with their executive clients and provide an analysis of theories in the field that relate problems of efficiency and productivity to individual psychology and social relations.

This chapter proceeds in four steps:

Section 1) Psychodynamic approaches

Section 2) Making psychodynamic approaches more structured

Section 3) Using structured tools

Section 4) Adapting the instruments and conflicts with narrative methods

Section one analyzes what, at first sight, might seem a misunderstanding of the unconscious, or perhaps an Americanized psychodynamic perspective that easily relates

what the client can tell about his or her childhood to conflicts with bosses, subordinates, or co-workers. This section uses a preliminary teaching case from the coaching literature by the well-known practitioner, Richard Kilburg. This case on the one hand illustrates the drive for professionalized and systematic use of cases and on the other hand cautions about the shortcoming of systemized short cuts to psychodynamic models. Section two tracks one particular effort of systematization of psychodynamic models where a coach is attempting to improve the efficiency of story collection through developing a new model for coding and mapping his analyses. This case grounds the conflicts of professionalization of coaching and delivering help to clients more efficiently.

Section three pursues the efforts at quantification and the use of psychometric instruments by coaches. This section looks at a coaching process at a hospital with employees who have recently been promoted to managerial positions. It points to wider efforts to create organizational change through analyzing a manager's personality, skills and limitations and helping him/her develop skills on a continuum of personal development. There are five interrelated elements to this case: 1) the shift of the hospital from an authoritarian to a more open, democratic and trusting institutional model, a system level adjustment involving not only the manager but all managers; 2) "time entrapment," a set of dilemmas and structural conflicts general to many types of professionals; 3) learning to shift from one set of responsibilities to a broader set of responsibilities with different priorities; 4) the personality portfolios of particular professionals; and 5) the theme of "development" used as a non-threatening device to

help people understand themselves in terms of a positive future trajectory rather than entrapped by a failure.

The last section of this chapter analyzes the continuous desire among executive coaches to become senior researchers and their push for quantification. There are two difficulties associated with the desire to make coaching more scientific. The *first* has to do with the difficulty of making intra-psychic and inter-psychic forces visible and legible. The diagrams, graphs, maps, columns, numbers make visible and quantify what is otherwise inaccessible to the rational mind. This is related to another challenge of proving a cause and effect relationship between intra-psychic and inter-psychic forces and business performance. What coaches measure, interpret and claim to improve is the individual but the measures have to make sense to the company. It is the executive, who potentially, could perform better with the help of coaching and bring more value to the company, and who if they cannot perform better, is derailed. The question then, is what can be done so that the executive developing with the help of the coach creates enough value to the company, a value that is worth the investment in the cost of his recruitment and retention, versus recruiting another executive in his place? Related questions are, how much data has to be collected by coaches, in what form, and how much value is being added via the coaching engagement, to the executive and to the company, respectively?

The argument of this chapter is that coaches occupy two intersection points: a) for their clients, the intersection between rational organization and the irrational individual; and for their own sense of expertise, the need for rational tools (quantification, maps, efficient

but reliable short-cuts), and the need for rich narrative stories that turn up unexpected connections disciplined by a desire for research publications, promotion and the creation of something approaching a “science,” or at least marketable expertise. On the one hand coaches emphasize the importance of making coaching scientific and relying on statistical data that is collected through psychometric tools and on the other hand they want to have access to underlying cognitive and psychological structures through the collection of stories. Indeed, they want to make the method of story collection more scientific as well. But most of all, they aim to have tools that can be practical, to provide useful cues, and be effective and relatively time-efficient in their coaching engagements. I argue that coaching illustrates not only the permeation of psychological principles into the workplace but also the permeation of principles of efficient management into the discipline of psychology.

1) Psychodynamic approaches

You know part of the work of the coach, part of his/her job is to figure out what is going on here? Why is this person behaving this way? What are their fundamental beliefs? There is something here ... They are not trying to behave in a way that is unproductive. They are not trying to be unsuccessful. They are really, really trying hard to do the exact opposite. What is going on here? What is the thing that is getting in their way? Part of your job is to muddle through that, through conversation and through observation and through listening to the way they talk about the world. (Interview with Rachel, an executive coach)

Most executive coaches coming from consulting psychology backgrounds use psychodynamic theories¹⁹ to ‘muddle through’ the situation²⁰ and make sense of why executives, despite their best intentions, skills and capacities, are not being productive. They refer to Freudian theories and post-Freudian psychodynamic theories that treat the unconscious at the core of psychic world and consider the unconscious psychological conflict as a key motivating factor in individual and group behavior. Based on these psychodynamic theories they conceptualize, theorize and systematize relationships between the executive and his/her past, and between the executive and his/her organization. They see unhealthy patterns of feelings and behaviors resulting from unresolved unconscious conflict as impeding executive and organizational performance. For these coaches, psychodynamics becomes a tool for analysis, a model for explanation and a method of intervention.

In this section, I will trace the different ways in which the unconscious is talked about and explored in the executive coaching field and how it is similar to or different from

¹⁹ The 5th edition of *A Psychiatric Glossary* (American Psychiatric Association, 1980: 112) defines psychodynamics as:

The systematized knowledge and theory of human behavior and its motivation, the study of which depends largely upon the functional significance of emotion. Psychodynamics recognizes the role of unconscious motivation in human behavior and is based on the assumption that a person’s total make-up and reactions at any given moment are the product of past interactions between his genetic endowment and the environment in which he has lived since conception.

²⁰ “Muddling through” is a phrase that was introduced by Charles Lindblom in 1959 in his classic article “The Science of Muddling Through” in which he characterized the opportunistic and muddle form of decision-making processes of public administration bodies. Lindblom argued that these bodies, rather than engaging in rational research and assessment of all possible solutions to a problem, concentrate only on small measures and introduce policies that differ only incrementally from existing policies. Only a small number of possible solutions are introduced into the planning framework and a small number of expected consequences arise. The larger problem to be addressed is continually redefined and is addressed through continuous assaults on the problem. In this framework, the feasibility of these assaults is essential. The “science of muddling through” was characterized by many as a conservative pseudo-science for maintaining the status quo (Faludi, 1971). The escape from the science of muddling through led to the numerous large-scale planning models formulated during the 1960s and 1970s.

Freudian theories of the unconscious. I will illustrate the ways in which coaches try to come up with a tool that is efficient and does not take as much time as psychoanalysis. I will use a case study taken from the *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research* to illustrate the ways in which executive coaches apply psychodynamics methods. The reason I cite this particular case study has to do with the case study itself and its author. The case study describes the coaching process from beginning to end and nicely illustrates the typical usage of psychodynamic theories in the process. It quotes directly from the conversation between the coach and the client and provides access to the revelations and resolutions as they unfold and as seen from the perspective of the coach. The author of the case study, Richard Kilburg, is a prominent figure in the field for his application of psychodynamic models and theories to the field of executive coaching and is an advocate for the use of case studies in a systematic way to make coaching more scientific (1995, 1996, 1997, 2000 and 2004a).

The case study opens with a short description of the situation: the coaching client Ron has been serving as an interim president of the northeast region of a major service company for nearly a year. He has replaced his previous boss who had been fired after underperforming for several years. The CEO of the company who has promoted Ron cannot decide what to do about the region. Ron tells him he has been “overworking with indefinite goals and with limited capacity to make decisions.” He is confused about what to do given the CEO's indecision, and frustrated that he is being taken advantage of. Having heard Ron's description of the situation, Kilburg proposes three choices: 1) exploring Ron's efforts to influence the CEO and others in the senior leadership position,

2) developing a strategy to re-create the region into a full-fledged subsidiary of the company, or 3) working through the emotionally charged material. The first choice deals with Ron's positioning in the organizational structure and involves exploring his relationship with authority, the second choice involves the business and operational problems that he will face as he is implementing the growth of business in a new region. They both involve larger scale analysis and interventions at the level of the organization which executive coaches see as outside of their expertise and professional practice. They argue that such interventions are pursued by management consultants and not in the realm of executive coaching.

Kilburg chooses the last course of action: "sticking with the emotionally charged material that Ron had so deliberately spilled for both of them to see and hear" and asks Ron whether the situation reminds him of anything he has faced before (Kilburg 2004: 247). He knows this is "generally a terrific way to invite people to explore the history and components of very difficult situations on their own terms." After a quiet moment of hesitance Ron tells the following story:

When I was 6, I was living in a small town with my mom and dad and my brothers and sisters. My mom's dad was dying in the hospital in town, and sometimes I'd get in the car with her and drive over there. At that time, children were not allowed to visit patients and I had to wait in the car, which usually did not take too long. The last trip though was different. That time, she was gone for hours, and when she returned to the car, she was crying. She told me that my

grandfather had just died and that she had been with him the whole time. I did not have any idea what to do of course because I was only 6. But, I remember what she told me as if it were this morning. Through her tears, she said that her dad had been delirious and that he had kept asking for her brother. She was standing there, comforting him, but he kept asking for her brother. And, you need to know that my uncle was never a nice guy. Through the whole ordeal of my grandfather's death, he never came to visit him once. My mom and dad were there each step along the way. Anyway, he was so agitated about wanting to see his son, that when a resident physician came in to see him, my mom asked him to pretend that he was her brother. He agreed to do that and after his examination of my grandfather, he took his hand and said, 'I'm here, Dad.' My mom was crying very hard when she told me what happened next. She said that her dad smiled and squeezed the resident's hand. He seemed very comforted and at peace. Then he died. (Ibid: 247)

After his death, Ron's grandfather left a considerable debt, which Ron's parents decided to pay off so that they could protect their father's reputation in town. The situation presented a constant financial struggle for Ron's family. Ron resented his uncle who never took care of his grandfather and had been "bleeding" him and feels that his parents had been taken advantage of. The following conversation follows:

Coach: How do you think the story applies to your situation in the company?

Client: Oh that is easy now that I've remembered the story. I really hate the feeling of being taken advantage of. Cannot stand it at all. The fact that the CEO cannot make up his mind what to do and keeps me in this temporary position is just driving me crazy. I feel like I just want to quit and go elsewhere.

Coach: Did it help to tell the story?

Client: When I remembered it, I knew immediately what was going on. I did not want to say anything, because it feels so childish in a way. *But now that I know that I'm feeling that old sense of resentment about being taken advantage of I think I can steer clear of making some bad choices.* (My emphasis)

In this interaction, the coaching client Ron refers to an easily remembered connection between his current feelings (of being taken advantage of by his boss) and his past experience (of his parents being taken advantage of). His feelings of anger and frustration, which seemed 'childish' to him, now make sense as the coach presents them as the repetitions of the old sense of resentment towards his uncle. According to the coach the "historically ambivalent attachment between his mother and his grandfather and the underlying resentment that was created in his family" makes it very difficult for Ron to accept his organization's slow-footed response to settling the leadership and organizational issues in his unit. Ron's "irrational" feelings of anger and resentment towards his boss makes sense as the coach helps him to find their root in the past by asking simple questions.

Kilburg is coming from a lineage of theorists that have reintroduced the notion of the “irrational” and the “unconscious” to management and organizational theories.²¹ This lineage of theorists and practitioners in the field of psychology of management and consulting psychology including Levinson (1981), Kets de Vries (1984 and 1991), Miller (1983, 1998), Czander (1993) Stacey (1992, 1996) and Kernberg (1998). Executive coaches frequently use Freud’s theories of the unconscious and of the self as explanatory frameworks. Among post-Freudian theories, conflict theory (knowing what happens to people when they are in conflict) and Winnicott’s and Klein’s object relations theory (how people are likely to form and struggle in human relationships) are the most commonly used psychodynamic perspectives in the field.²²

In the *Irrational Executive: Psychoanalytic Explorations in Management*²³ Kets de Vries (1984) criticizes the organization and management theories for their presumption that “organizations are logical and sensible and distribute its resources and pursues its goals effectively and efficiently.” Kets de Vries and other contributors to the book criticize oversimplified and idealized conceptions of human nature in organizational theories that

²¹ There were management theorists in the 1950s and 1960s who adapted psychoanalytic theories to the workplace. Some executive coaches refer to this period as the first phase in the history of executive coaching when a few professionals used a mix of organization development and psychological techniques in working with executives (Tobias 1996).

²² Coaches frequently refer to the theories of Abraham Maslow who proposed that psychology should be the study of the whole person and laid stress on the person as a self-actualizing being. They also cite Rogers for his emphasis on the importance of striving to function fully. Together the two psychologists create an image of an individual that is conceptualized in terms of motivation and self-direction, an image that is adopted and advocated by coaches.

²³ *The Irrational Executive* is an edited book of papers presented at an applied psychoanalysis conference in 1980. The contributors to the volume are psychoanalysts interested in organizations and management theorists that are interested in psychoanalytic theories.

presumes the existence of an “economic and rational decision maker.” He argues that each person brings his/her own unique and complex personality and irrational and unconscious self to work. Thus understanding and improving organizational efficiency requires understanding the “internal workings of the mind” and examining the role of the unconscious in human motivation and decision-making (Kets De Vries 1984: XVI). This is where psychoanalytic approaches enter into the picture. If deviations from rational action are inevitable, explanations of them can be given in terms of our knowledge of these unconscious processes. The exploration of the unconscious becomes especially important at high-level management not only because managers’ behaviors affect the performance of their employees but also because the “delusional reality of a manager is contagious.” When this delusion is shared by others around him, there is the likelihood of “folie a deux, double insanity, mental contagion, collective insanity and psychosis of association around irrational behavior” that are detrimental to the organization (Ibid).

Harry Levinson, a pioneer in the field of psychoanalytic organizational and consulting psychology, voices a similar critique of management theories that neglect the irrational parts of the individual and informal structures within organizations. He argues that there are “psychological contracts” between the individuals and organizations through which people unconsciously choose organizations to meet their psychological needs and organizations in turn choose people who will meet their unstated needs. These needs need to be mutually met for the organization to thrive and management needs to be aware of these needs. For Kilburg and other consulting psychologists in the executive coaching

field, Levinson's theories of the unconscious at the workplace hold a prominent place in their thinking and practice.

Not all executive coaches use psychodynamic theories of the unconscious explicitly. Yet the unconscious and unresolved psychodynamic conflicts from childhood remain at the center and underline coaches' way of thinking. As one of my informants put it, childhood experiences are profound things that shape the way people feel about themselves and how they interact with the world around them and these experiences are significant in understanding who they are as people and why they do the things they do. With this logic in mind, they argue that exposure to invasive, over-controlling, and punitive parenting as a toddler could establish a dysfunctional pattern of having real problems in accepting legitimate authority and lead to inappropriately deviant behavior in the workplace. High pressure from parents to succeed might result in passive resistance and reluctant conformity with higher authority. Being raised by an abusive stepmother might make it difficult for a woman to work with other women in positions of power due to strong unconscious reactions to and interpersonal challenges with them.

In the example I gave above, when the coach Kilburg removes his client's ignorance about this connection his client Ron reaches a new level of self-awareness and capacity. It is this new awareness that Ron is referring to when he says: "Now that I know that I'm feeling that old sense of resentment about being taken advantage of, I think I can steer clear of making some bad choices." Ron has been under the control of unresolved and deep issues that shaped his patterns of thought. Now that he figures out the relationship

between his present feelings and behavior and past experience he is immediately endowed with truth, will and power. These correlative statements rely on several assumptions: 1) the unstated unconscious could easily be made conscious through conscious conversation, 2) the transfer of the unconscious to the conscious would have a direct effect on the conscious behavior of the executive, 3) the awareness of the unconscious and the containment and management of the executive's unconscious would positively effect his efficiency, his team performance and eventually, the company's profits. In a magical moment of verbal acknowledgement of parallels between the current situation and past experience, the resolution unfolds. The coach points out the link between executive's current behavior and past experience and shows how previous patterns of feelings, thoughts and behaviors make sense but are not working in the current situation.

This is precisely what Freud called "a technical error" in "'Wild' Psycho-analysis," published in 1910 as part of a series that deals with aspects of relationships between analyst and analysand:

It is a long superceded idea, and one derived from superficial appearances, that the patient suffers from a sort of ignorance, and that by giving him information (about the causal connection of his illness with his life, about his experiences in childhood, and so on) he is bound to recover. The pathological factor is not his ignorance in itself, but the root of his ignorance in his *inner resistances*; it was they that first called this ignorance into being, and they still maintain it now. The

task of the treatment lies in combating these resistances. Informing the patient what he does not know because he has repressed it is only one of the necessary preliminaries to the treatment. If knowledge about the unconscious were as important for the patient as people inexperienced in psychoanalysis imagine, listening to lectures or reading books would be enough to cure him. Such measures, however, have as much influence on the symptoms of nervous illness as a distribution of menu-cards in a time of famine has upon hunger. The analogy goes even further than its immediate application; for informing the patient of his unconscious regularly in an intensification of the conflict in him and an exacerbation of his troubles. (Gay 1995: 354)

In this piece, Freud is talking about a middle-aged woman who was complaining of anxiety states that started after her divorce from her last husband. She had been referred to him (as the discoverer of a new technique) by a young physician who related her anxiety to her lack of sexual satisfaction. Freud criticizes the suggestion of the physician for its scientific and technical error. The scientific error is in considering nervous disorders to be simply a result of the conflict between two forces (libido and rejection of sexuality). The technical error is in quickly telling the patient the secrets discovered by the doctor like the early psychoanalysts who collected information about their patient's forgotten childhood (sometimes from other sources such as parents) and conveyed this as the root of pathological behaviors. Such an explanation is wrong, he argues, not only because "one is never in a position to discover the whole truth" but also because it brings a severe disappointment as the treatment is rapidly over but the cure is not achieved, the

patient will continue to behave the same despite the new knowledge. This only works to intensify the prejudices that patients feel.

Cure, according to Freud, can be accomplished only after two conditions are fulfilled: the patient has to reach an awareness of what he has repressed and has to form sufficient rapport with his analyst, which requires a long period of contact with him/her. Only after these two conditions have been met, the patient may start “lifting” resistances that led to the repression and ignorance. The process through which the patient reaches that which was repressed is itself traumatic. To make this experience bearable one needs transference/counter transference. Psychoanalysis insists that the unconscious only gets revealed in an unconscious flow of thoughts where the patient is not inhibited. Just like the patient, the analyst has to let the unconscious material flow freely without censoring it. His unconscious has to be receptive to his patient’s unconscious, must keep back all the logical and affective objections that force him to make a selection among materials, instead he has to listen without following his inclinations or expectations: “If he follows his expectations he is in danger of never finding anything but what he already knows ...” Executive coaches do precisely this. They expect to find childhood trauma beneath their client’s problematic behavior and they help their clients face their trauma without feeling any trauma while claiming to have access to the unconscious through conscious, quick conversations and interactions.

Reflecting on Edgar Allan Poe’s “Purloined Letter,” Lacan (1977) establishes a parallel between Auguste Dupin–Poe’s detective—and that of the analyst. Executive coaches

always find the letter that has been waiting to be found (in the unconscious of the executive) by the coach. Coaches know how to find it (by making their clients tell stories consciously). It is always the same letter left at different offices, written several years ago and sealed until the coach finds and lets the client read it. The police (the coach) think that if they follow science (basic psychoanalytic approaches applied in a scientific form) they will find the letter (the unconscious) and they do find it. The process is almost never a surprise for the coach and almost always a surprise for the coaching client. There is never a question of: why it is this letter that is found and how it is possible to quickly find it each time? Based on Lacan's reading, Žižek (1991) differentiates between the rational and intuitive detective figure, the first being the "bourgeoisie scientific rationalist," the second being the successor to the romantic clairvoyant possessing an irrational, quasi-supernatural power to penetrate the mystery of another person's mind. An executive coach is both: on the one hand coaches reduce to their rational foundation phenomena that, at first sight, belong to the most obscure and irrational strata of the human psyche. On the other hand, coaches read dark signs and produce hidden meanings not susceptible to scientific verification. If detective novels and psychoanalysis center around the impossibility of telling a story in a linear, consistent way, or rendering the realistic continuity of events, coaching centers around the possibility of telling stories in a linear way even when the main actor in these stories is the non-linear unconscious.

The fact that coaches might have access to the unconscious through everyday conversations is an irony. This approach depicts the unconscious as unavailable to the client but not unavailable to the coach. Coaches tell their clients:

I have access to parts of you that you don't have. I am the intermediary point between you and yourself and you and others. I know you in ways you don't know yourself. I am your guide to these hidden parts--hidden even though they are the 'you that you know' and the 'you that others know.'

In differentiating their expertise from management consultants, coaches insist that unlike consultants they do not provide "expert answers" because "the client has the answers." I have not had a conversation with a coach in which this statement was not made explicitly. The client has the answers but lacks access to them. It is this access to their client's inner self that makes coaches experts. Coaches have more knowledge about their executive clients than executives could have or imagine having about themselves. Executives have parts of themselves that they did not know existed. If corporations are the intersection point of the organizational rationality and individual irrationality, the coach is effective at the intersection of management of the organization and of the self. The coach does not know the executive who is the sole owner of answers but knows how he can know himself. He can teach the executive to know and control their feelings, thoughts, actions and reactions. He can tell his client what he is made of (conscious and unconscious) and how to manage both. It is only through the management of the self that the corporation can be managed.

Among the 15 situations Kilburg lists in which psychodynamic issues and interventions are relevant, two illustrate the forms of structural conflict that give rise to managerial tensions and provide access points for coaching:

When things are not happening in the executive's organization that should be happening or things are happening that should not be happening.

When normal or abnormal crises, regressions, or failures in the group, organization, or markets arise.

These are parts of everyday life in organizations: normal and abnormal crises arise, things that should not happen, happen. If these situations are omnipresent in today's corporations, then the psychodynamic approach is also essential and necessary. By linking corporate management to the management of unconscious motives, coaches become indispensable experts who can make sense of this link and change it in ways to increase efficiency and profit. By reformulating failures as specifically-caused-but-changeable actions, coaches allow executives explanations that suggest that they can control the past and therefore control the future.

Coaching is not psychoanalysis but it is one of the sites to which psychoanalysis has moved, changed form, and been associated with other ideologies. If psychoanalysis was a form of undisciplined conversation (disciplined in its lack of discipline) where the patient was encouraged to say whatever comes to his mind without inhibiting himself,

coaching proposes a totally opposite approach where the client and coach are having a structured conversations, so structured that coaches might propose models of such conversations which clearly lay out the possible conversation between the coach and the client. Psychoanalysis had no predetermined time limit. Neither the analyst nor the analysand knew where the analysis would lead to and when it would end. Coaching assignments start at the initiative of the executive's boss and have a preset length that ranges between six months to two years.

In *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud associated psychopathologies with the ills of modern society. It was the irreconcilability of instinctual desires and requirements of the modern life that caused psychological problems. Psychoanalysis was developed as a method to uncover the repressed memories and their projections on current situations. Coaches are not aiming to cure the patient/executive. Yet they are putting psychoanalysis to pragmatic uses and applying basic psychoanalytic assumptions about the unconscious to address the repressed memories and projections on current situations. They believe the unconscious needs to be made conscious, not because it is an obstacle to the cure but because it an obstacle to efficient and rational management. Coaches want to use psychoanalytic explorations not to understand, explore or resist but to adapt to "psychopathologies of modern society" through increasing individual and organizational efficiency.

2) Making psychodynamic approaches more structured

From psychodynamics in narratives to psychodynamics in numbers

As psychodynamics permeates the workplace through executive coaching, principles of efficiency based on scientific technological rationality permeate coaching. This rationality is based on quantification and is concerned with maximum output for minimum input. Coaches struggle to make coaching more scientific and more efficient and thus make it more legitimate for all actors in the field including the coach, the client and the corporations. They aspire to use scientifically based measurement tools and shift between data collection through narratives and through numbers. I illustrate this continuous struggle by telling the story of my work with an executive coach whom I will call James.

I met James at the American Psychological Association Annual Meeting in August 2005, in Washington DC. We briefly chatted about my research on coaching at the reception hosted by the Consulting Psychology Division. He told me that he has conducted interviews with twenty executives for the last two years and has been quantitatively analyzing them. He was interested in seeing what the data would look like if it had been analyzed qualitatively by an anthropologist. We talked about collaborating: he was going to share these interviews with me, I was going to do an analysis of interviews on a case-to-case basis, a cumulative analysis as the data evolved, and share what I found out about executive coaching as I interviewed more coaches and coaching clients.

We met in New York City a month later to talk about what I could do with this data, what the output might look like for me and for him and how we could handle confidentiality. We explained our modes of analysis. I talked about “grounded theory” (coming up with themes, issues and concepts that are generated from the data rather than pre-coding the data) and “thick description.” James explained his model in which he links tasks, relationships and results based on the assumption that people form relationships around tasks that lead to results (Relationships \mapsto Tasks \mapsto Results). Relationships can be good or bad (relative to different partners), independent or interdependent. They change over time and have dimensions (individual to the entire group, triadic or dyadic). Tasks can be independent, interdependent, vary in terms of intensity, complexity, duration and the degree of coordination required. Results can be for individuals, teams, companies and groups, negative or positive and softer (capabilities) or harder (profits). Being inspired by a structural functionalist approach and doing “quasi psychology, quasi business and quasi sociology,” James aims to understand relationships around tasks to see what kind of effects they have on the results and try to change them to improve results. Business results can only improve when relationships around tasks can be improved. He aims to capture the “central mental model of relationships that underlie the executive’s most problematic and most effective behaviors and to be able to link them to business results.” The central model of relationship, which is in most cases the relationship model in the family of origin, provides essential clues that reveal themes, patterns and motifs of relationships that are central to executives’ business performance.

Using only what the executive tells him, James maps out relationship implications for tasks that need to be accomplished: what is to be done and when (tasks), who has to do what with whom, who has to give what to whom (relationships) and what is to be achieved (results). He has been collecting this information through 3-6 hours interviews that ask for stories that cut across personal and professional life, audio taping and transcribing them. He noted that his model was not as efficient as models used by some other coaches who get much quicker results than he does:

There are coaches who are much more efficient than I am. They give some tests, talk to people around the executive (boss, reports and colleagues) and then give the executive feedback on the issues the tests and others come up with. This is considerably less expensive and time consuming than what I do ... This is time consuming and deep ... What I do is across work and personal domain which is what most coaches don't do and which is what most executive don't want me to do because it gets very scary.

In this quote James puts forward the trade-offs about his method. This method has a great advantage: it helps him to get to a deeper truth about the coaching client and about the case that the client deals with. But "it is a lot of work," interviewing, transcribing and analyzing the interview data take many days. He is proud that he is able to get at a deeper knowledge about his clients but he is wary of the fact that what his method reveals might be "too personal, intrusive and intensive" and thus "scary" to hear. He is trying to come up with a method that would reveal enough information about the personal (not less

or more than necessary) in order to shed light on the business realm and do this in a time efficient manner without sacrificing the depth and complexity of the “truth” about the client. James wants to increase both the efficiency and efficacy of his method: getting to the deeper truth in a reliable and short manner.

During our first meeting James handed me a 66 page, single-spaced transcript of an interview that he conducted with a female executive whom I will call Mary. Mary was fired from her executive position where she was leading more than one hundred people and hired James as an executive coach to help her understand why she has been fired. She also wanted him to help her make a choice between two job offers and learn how not to make the same past mistakes in her new job. James wanted me to first come up with a chronology of events and a relationship map based on the interview and then look at the interview data to explore his coaching client Mary’s character and personality (What kind of a person is Mary? How does she describe herself?), the organizational structure she worked in (Who is she working with, in what capacity? What kind of a business relationship does she have with them?), her interpersonal relations with those in the organizational structure (What does she think of them? How does she describe them? How does she describe her relationships with them?), and the sequence of events in a cause-effect relationship (What really happened here? What led to Mary’s derailment?).

The interview is divided into six parts. It starts with Mary’s struggle to understand why she was fired. In the second part of the interview James learns about the phases of Mary’s career. They move on to stories about business projects that she thought she managed well and those she felt she had mismanaged. The fourth part of the interview

addresses “people event stories” where Mary tells a story about people that she was working with. The last part of the interview is about Mary’s relationships with members of her family of origin where James asks Mary to tell stories about family members based on the way she described them in an earlier meeting (father – survivor, aggressive, entrepreneurial, mother – dependent, insecure, sister – Mary, capitalist, driven, assertive, sister – caring and earthy). For each story and person James asks what emotions Mary felt (indifferent, skeptical, inconsistent, excluded, angry, underappreciated, hurt, connected, deserving, mad, undervalued, humiliated, respected, trusted, disrespected, warmth, appreciation, disappointment, insecurity).

The interview was long and convoluted. It was incredibly difficult to map the chronology of events: Mary was not asked to give a linear chronology and she did not, instead she told stories in a ‘zigzag’ form. She shifted back and forth between events, people and her feelings about them. At many points of the interview she compared the way she saw herself and others saw her and pointed to discrepancies between the two. At one point of the interview she described herself as “direct.” James asked what “direct,” meant and what it was a euphemism for: “tough, blunt, confrontive?”

Mary: Well it’s not so much confrontive as just honest. Some people ... you don’t know what they are thinking, with me you always know. One of the best things about me as a manager ... At the end of the year when I give you an evaluation, there’s never any surprise because I communicate very freely with you continuously. I have a hard time hiding the way I feel. Now it’s good and it’s

bad. If you are not a confident person, you shake in your boots around me. See I don't ... I have I guess a façade ... of confidence. And assertiveness, but I'm really a very emotional person. And if you don't know me ... if you're just seeing me operate you think I'm like a terror. But if you're part of my organization you understand what I am about. (From the transcript)

In this quote and several others throughout the interview she underlined the way she openly communicated her thoughts and feelings with others. Even when she wanted to, she could not hide the way she felt. She was expressive and assertive. But her colleagues saw something else behind what she expressed. In her own words she was insecure, emotional, a cheerleader, an enthusiast but also an angry person, and ultimately a capitalist. She thought other people might think of her as “an ungrateful, demanding bitch who doesn't understand politics; a critical, outspoken and expressive female.” What created problems was not who she thought she was but whom others thought she was. The kind of relationship that she had with others determined how she was seen. Those who worked with her and those who are confident understood what she was about. Those who just saw her “operating” and those who are not confident thought she was “a terror.”

She knew she had had interpersonal issues. She was sent by her company to the Human Interaction Laboratory where she spent seven days with other people and one psychotherapist and saw how she was trying to topple strong team members who were potential leaders and that she was a destructive influence to the team. Yet while she

considered herself a great leader the company presented her lack of leadership potential as a reason to fire her. She wanted coaching in order to learn what not to say in her new job, she feared that her new colleagues were going to be 'scared shitless' by her, because nobody there knows her. She said: "I have this ability to change my reputation. I don't think I can make myself that different." She knew it would be difficult to change herself but that she hoped that she could change her reputation: the way she is seen by others she was working with.

I did a textual analysis of the interview, traced repeating themes in the interview and patterns in her thinking about herself and others. I came up with a list of conflicts and confusions that she expressed repeatedly and sent James a report that included analysis such as:

In the events leading to her firing, it looks like ruptures at several levels occurred: relationships, openness, trust and respect. At a meeting following leadership assessment, she tells a colleague (Don) that she thinks he doesn't like her (blurring personal and professional). She does not respect the COO but can't express it (conflict between personal feelings and professional relationship). Maybe she feels she is betraying her self by not expressing her disrespect and not being open about it (a high standard by which she values herself and others). She believes she has not revealed her disrespect because she has not openly talked about it (her strong distinction between verbal and non-verbal communication). Only towards the end of the interview, after several interventions by James, she

starts questioning her assumption that what she has not verbalized is not communicated.

The next day, I met with James to talk about my analysis of the interview. He seemed to like the way I analyzed the interview and read the underlying feelings and thoughts. Together we drew organizational structure maps to lay out Mary's professional and personal relationships at her company and talked about which relationships worked and which relationships did not work. James added information about Mary's family of origin and talked vaguely about how earlier relationships with them might have shaped her current relationship and led to her firing.

After several months James and I met again to discuss a new model that he was working on. He wanted to use the same model of tasks, relationships and results and its effects in the current challenge but with two improvements: collecting the same information in a shorter amount of time and "getting a sense of red and green light" about potentially risky relationships earlier in the process. He wanted to learn about the current challenge and relationships around it through a simple pen-and-paper map. Through another map he wanted to get a sense of members in the family of origin, their relationships with each other and the client. The family map was complimented with the power relationships map where family members were scaled according to how much power each had and who was closest to and farthest from whom. By combining the current challenge map and the family of origin map he hoped to figure out the elements and relationships that were central to the current relationship structure that created the current challenge. It was a

new model not because it was focusing on relationship or relational structures but because it introduced a “purely quantitative scale.” He was keen about the fact that the structure would come out of numbers.

Through this pilot study, he wanted to figure out the stage at which these things will be introduced during the coaching process, the questions that will be posed and the kinds of stories that will be collected. He asked me to become a subject for his pilot study. I agreed. He emailed me two forms, one form to list my top twenty skills and another form to map relationships in my family of origin. The form about relationships involved rating the ways in which members of the family shared values, communicated and had conflicts or tension with each other and mapping how people moved in cases of differences of opinion and expression of strong emotions, collaboration (move away, move towards, move together). Finally the members of the family were to be placed on a scale of power from the person having the most power to the one that has the least as well as the one with the highest current career success. The aim was to help “the understanding of people, examples and stories that affect the current situation and that only your unconscious knows about” but in a much more efficient way than in the previous model.

We met the next day. James asked me to present a current challenge that I was struggling with just like his clients who always come to him with a challenge. He then asked me to tell him a short story about a person with whom I have had a positive relationship with positive effect, a positive relationship with no effect, a negative relationship and negative effect and a negative relationship with no effect. He asked me fill self-reports on each story and show how I moved in relation to these people, what I felt and what I

accomplished or failed to do in these relationships with regard to tasks in hand. Based on this data, he came up with clusters of people. Then he asked me to rate my task in hand according to its interdependency on people in the current challenge. He was hoping that he could take these pieces about the family of origin and current relationships and could have a quick insight into the current challenge. Through integrative analysis of key people, events, sequence of behavior with positive and negative outcomes, he wanted to map the “interpersonal dance.” This model, he insisted, was “real and empirical.”

It takes ten minutes to fill out the paper and pencil thing (about the family of origin), full hour to do the current challenge and telling of stories and then we can do the analysis right then or the second time ... Is this little subset of data working? Is it telling us anything? Everybody comes in with a current challenge, either they want to focus on, do or address. This is a very simple quick way. Mary was the whole thing; this is one tenth of that level, 1 fifth to 1 tenth. Really quickly, really simply can you get some beginning insights into the relational themes going on in people’s heads about the current challenge?

In our first meeting he had talked about a coaching engagement that he had with a mid-level executive, John, at one of the Fortune 500 companies in the pharmaceutical industry. John missed an investment opportunity by not investing capital in a new drug market that later proved to be incredibly profitable. He was not the only one who was responsible for the decision but he still played a major part. James added that this happened more than once: “this was something that went across time and across context.”

James interviewed the executive to learn about the organizational structure of the company, personal and professional relationships at the company, his place in the organizational and relationship structure and his personal life. He asked about the family his client grew up with and learned that he had a father that he very much idealized.

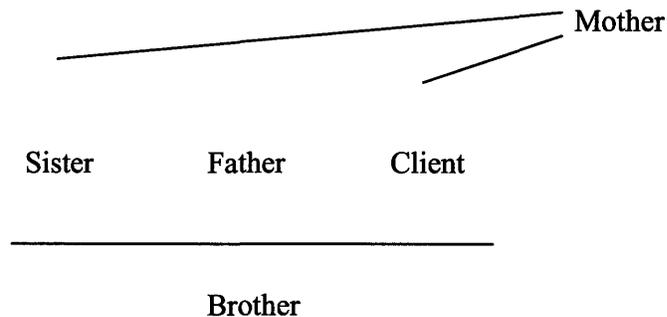
The stories that he told about his father were somewhat shallow. He was very protective of his father. He has a relationship with his boss that is a love-hate and he switches off like a bulb. He has total fear of criticizing his father. He started idealizing me too. I told him to watch when he would try to kick me out of the pedestal too.

In this scenario, the company assumed that the business outcomes (loss of a potential profit of 150 million dollars) are related to executive's lack of vision. James came to the conclusion that John lost \$150 million because he could not speak up to power. The executive idealized his boss and wanted to please him. He had a father who never made money and whom he never confronted. He projected this image onto his boss. The company missed an investment opportunity because the executive was not able to speak up to his boss/father. The solution for the executive was to recognize this similarity and use this knowledge to change his pattern of behavior and attitude.

This person wanted his father to be more of a father authority and to be better. What did your father want from you? A whole set of things. What did your boss want from you? A set of whole different things. You can use this knowledge in

the workplace with an entirely different attitude. You tap the reservoirs of their understandings, feelings and actions and you say ok now, now that you understand your dad and mom better, now that you understand yourself better, what do you do in this situation differently? Oh my God, I really can tell my boss what is going wrong? Yeah you can. Be careful but yes you can, if the task requires it. Task comes first, relationship second.

He re-explained the case through this new model in order to show me how much easier and quicker the application of this new model was:

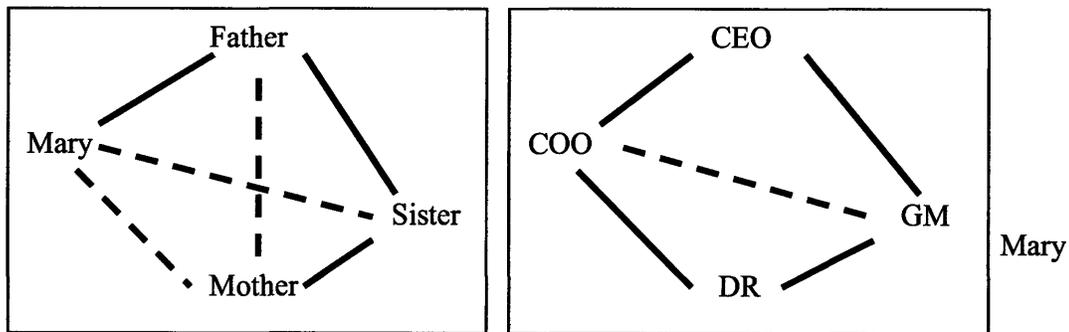


James explained:

In this map of family of origin there is a little sub group here sister, father and client. He (the client) has good relationships with his sister and father, but bad relationship here (between the brother). This guy (brother) never earned any money and the client was really angry at that but was never able to express that. The structure was built around defending that and never allowed him to express

his anger. The bottom line is that this executive had a very difficult time challenging authority. He was doing the same with his bosses: he was putting them on a pedestal and knocking them down. He needed to confront authority and he didn't, he was incapable of it and that is why the company lost a lot of money. The current task was confronting authority but he couldn't in part because he was incapable of confronting authority. The result was huge (potential) profit loss.

He referred to the case of Mary that we worked on, and drew a map for me to illustrate what he thought of the current challenge and how relationships in the family of origin have shaped current challenge.



Mary had good relationships between the CEO and the direct report but bad relationships with the GM (General Manager) and the COO (Chief Officer of Operations). James believed that it was her relationship with the GM and the COO that got her fired and compared it to the relationship structure within her family of origin.

So, here is her family of origin. Now it is different. They are different, they are not the same but what is the same in this is this piece (between Mary and the sister) with this piece (COO and GM). Mary had a strong relationship with the CEO. In essence, Mary is third down and one removed from the position of power. That is dangerous for her. Because here GM is a very close, very powerful and a very strong person. But if she were down here she would be in her sister's position and her sister is really in an unenviable position and there is a lot of tension there. So this is the same structure ... Second in command and the one below that there is conflict. It is not exactly the same by any means. But there are similar elements and the positioning is similar.

Here, dotted line means that the relationship is bad or broken. The solid line refers to a healthy and good relationship based on open communication. The structure of relationships in Mary's family of origin and her company were not exactly the same but there were similar (sub)structures within them. It was not that the CEO was the father but that they both had the most power and occupied the highest position in the structure. Mary did not necessarily see her sister in the GM but her sister's position represented an unenviable position to be in. It was not that there was a parallel relationship between the family of origin and current relationships per se but that old relationship structures repeated themselves in current relationships. In this particular case, for example, the fact that mom is on the side was unusual, it could have been the client's relationship with his mother that is the core, but it was not.

The assumption here is simple and based on a psychodynamic model: a map of origin of family stories are a gateway to the ways in which people interact in their current relationships. The forms in which the client scales members of the family of origin and maps the kind of relationship between them (moving away, moving towards, moving against) give insight into what goes on in each of these positions. James asks his clients whether the position is similar to current positions in relationships and feelings about these positions. The internal processes are unpacked, not through stories but through a map that can be drawn through a ten minute, paper and pencil test. The intention is to get into these internal processes in a way that does not involve stress and vulnerability, getting insight about one's relationship patterns that has a bearing on the current stuff in a "not very complicated, not very sophisticated but very quick" way. In doing so, he would be abandoning the "scary" part of the first model. James wanted to see whether he could actually use this with his executive clients: "If it works, that would be fabulous, if this whole little thing doesn't work then I forget it." The whole thing would work if the new model could give as much insight into current relationship structures and their effects on the business performance as his time-consuming model did.

James worked as a psychotherapist and as a researcher at an Ivy League university, and trained other therapists. Throughout his career he focused on relationship structures. Of these relationships, he chose relationships in the family of origin, as he wanted to go to the heart of it. If he were to help executives make a real shift in effectiveness, which was really difficult, he wanted to give a best shot and truest diagnosis about relationship patterns. The relationship structures in the family of origin determine current relationship

structures and eventually, business results. “Family of origin is the origin of everything.” He wanted to understand “these feelings, these understandings, these wishes, these desires” that are originate in the family and using a person’s deep knowledge about these relationships and patterns that were repeating in the current challenge, and show them that the circumstances were different so that the same thing would not repeat.

But aren’t our relationships with our parents, with our siblings incredibly complicated? They had better be, he responded. I rephrased my question: Aren’t they mostly beyond our conscious understanding and expression? What if the power structure that I tell consciously is very different from the structure in my unconscious? Stories are rich, convoluted, inconsistent and contradictory and include subtle details into people’s (at least conscious) thinking which seem to be missed by self-filled forms and relationship maps. James responded:

This is the possible weakness of this model. With all this (qualitative) data, you have the anthropologist on one side with ‘thick description.’ Based on this data you make an interpretation, you can miss or get it. And that is where the problem is. With this quantitative approach you don’t interpret the data, the interpretation comes out of data. What you might miss is the richness and subtlety. You might not be getting as rich of a data as you need. And you will find a trade off in all research. You can compare the two too: the information that you get from quantitative method and the data that you get through stories. We can compare it and see how much and what we are losing as it relates to effectiveness. We might

be losing a lot but how much are we losing in terms of understanding effectiveness in business relationships. Maybe not as much.

The question for him is to understand how much data is enough--not too much, not too little--to be able to make sense of the executive and his/her current challenge. James wants to collect enough data about his clients' past to make sense of patterns but not too much. He makes a cost and benefit analysis: data loss is tolerable as long as it does not diminish understanding of effectiveness in business relationships.

In collecting data through psychodynamic approaches coaches remove the conditions of conflict at the workplace and create the conditions of possibility of another conflict about the family relationships hidden in the unconscious of the executives. When coaches collect data on who their clients are and who they have been and when they register the kinds of relationships and emotions they experienced in the family of origin they aim to increase their self-awareness but also sense of responsibility. Once coaches help executives to see why they behave the way they do and make it clear to them how their behavior was productive in the past but no longer productive in the present, executives become responsible for consciously acting on their unconscious.

Executive coaching deals with the following dilemma: if organizations are founded on rational principles and are expected to run on these principles, how is the irrationality of people to be negotiated with the rationality of corporations in an unpredictable marketplace? Here we see the appearance of a series of questions that coaches pose: Is there rational irrationality? Is it or is it not a problem to allow irrationality to show up in

a rational setting? Is there a particular mechanism of the irrational that is not pathological?

I suggest that in effect executive coaching codifies irrationality as natural yet problematic, depathologizes its seeming disorders, errors, and illusions and undertakes psychodynamic analyses accompanied by observations, visual maps and scales to make the irrationality visible and manageable. The principle of executive coaching is found in the practical carving out of a field of what I will call “useless irrationality” or “surplus irrationality.” The irrationality is part of human nature and more of a part of the executive nature. But in certain circumstances the irrationality of the executive is too irrational. It is precisely with regards to the “too irrational” or “irrational in a useless way” that we see the emergence and prominence of psychodynamic approaches to coaching. The motives that make the irrational behavior intelligible can be superimposed on the executive but he is not to be punished, he is to be improved. Coaches tell that they can help executives understand that they acted irrationally and explain to them why they acted irrationally. They can enter into the (psycho)analyzable intelligibility of the act in question. As a result of this, coaching functions as rationality hygiene. With the knowledge of the irrational, individual and social, coaching traces the patterns of irrationality, detects that which is imperceptible to everyone else, and confines the useless surplus irrationality.

3) Using structured tools

Coaches document their executive clients’ beliefs, values, assumptions, character traits, strengths and weaknesses, mental and emotional intelligence, and assess their capacities,

potential and vision (or lack thereof) through a variety of structured psychometric tools. These are standard tools that have been used by human resource departments since the late 1950s for purposes of employee selection and placement. Among these tests the most commonly used one is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) that was developed by Katharine Cook Briggs and her daughter Isabel Briggs Myers in 1942 to assist people in identifying their personal preferences. Its criteria follow Jung's theories in Psychological Types and categorize people into sixteen groups that are a combination of four types²⁴ to help them find suitable work. California Personality Inventory (CPI) was developed in 1957 to assess inter and intra personal skills by measuring two dozen scales in five areas in interpersonal behavior, social and personal values, cognitive performance and personal and workplace characteristics. Fundamental Interpersonal Relational Orientation (FIRO-B) was developed by psychologist William Schutz in 1958 to help select compatible teams for the Navy. It is built on the theory that three dimensions of interpersonal relationships (inclusion, affection and control) are sufficient to explain human interaction and measures how people's expectations in these dimensions shape their interaction with others.

Until the 1980s these tests were used as recruiting tools to profile people according to their personality, background and preferences and placing them in fitting jobs. They were designed as tools for one-way data acquisition and provided information to the company about potential and current employees. In contemporary coaching, the data

²⁴ Katherine Cook Briggs began her research in 1917 and developed a four-type framework: Social, Thoughtful, Executive, and Spontaneous. Based on this research she published *Meet Yourself Using the Personality Paint Box* in 1926 and *Up from Barbarism* in 1926. Since 1975 MBTI has become a trademark of Consulting Psychology Press.

collected through psychometric tools and the abundant biographical information registered in texts, graphics, maps and numbers is shared with the client with the hope of increasing self-awareness and efficiency. In order to map a variety of psychometric tests used in executive coaching, I incorporate my observations of three coaches in five coaching engagements with newly recruited managers at a hospital that I will call St. Vincent.

St. Vincent is the second largest hospital in a city in the Midwest. It has been going through a major development process and growing its physical and service capacity by acquiring new clinics and developing existing ones. One of the consultants whom I will call Daniel has been working with the hospital for twelve years since a new management team initiated organizational and “cultural” shifts in the hospital from “authoritarian” to “open and trusting.”²⁵ Coaching was part of the larger management consulting services that Daniel’s company had been providing to help with the transition. Karen and Sheila joined Daniel last year and together they coached 35 high and mid-high level managers including the CEO, VP and the directors. A couple of months ago they started coaching 60 managers, 12 of whom were clinic managers.

There were fifteen managers that would be coached by three different coaches. Coaches told me the coaching process they have planned:

²⁵ The CEO and COO of the company laughingly told me several stories to describe how “ridiculous” things were at the hospital under the leadership of the previous CEO. The most illustrative of these stories was that he did not allow anyone at the hospital to use a purple pen, as he wanted to be the only one who used a purple pen. The new management team wanted to replace a culture of “fear, control and power” with a culture of trust and open communication and hired DO to help them with this transition.

- 1) Gathering information about clients through several psychometric tools
- 2) Giving feedback about these tests
- 3) Organizing a workshop to teach managers how to develop themselves and help others develop through coaching
- 4) One-on-one coaching session with each manager
- 5) Meeting with the coaching client and his/her boss to go through development plan that the client works with his/her boss

The day I joined them was the second phase of the coaching process where they would be feeding back the results of data they collected through life-career history, a battery of psychometrics and in-basket and role-play session observations. The feedback process was important for clients to recognize what they have, what they are under-using or overusing. Coaches wanted clients to “digest the feedback without feeling insecure and fragile.” As coaches they were to do “what they can to help them develop what their clients have and teach them not to overuse what they already use.”

When the coachee Alice came in she looked tired and a bit worried. The coach Karen asked for permission from Alice to let me observe the coaching engagement, adding that my primary goal was to gather information about the coaching engagement and the coach, not the coachee. Alice was comfortable with me sitting in. She immediately commented that she did poorly, especially in the tests and role-playing assignments. Karen told Alice that she had done well and pulled out the Watson Glaser test results. This is what Karen usually does, she later told me, showing these results before anything

else so that it is out of the way and the coachee is less anxious. Together we looked at Alice's critical thinking test results. Alice did exceptionally well. She was in the 90th percentile in verbal comprehension, 98th in verbal reasoning, 90th in number reasoning and 99th percent in critical thinking. Karen explained that it is very rare to see people doing 'great' in all of these categories. This was excellent: she would produce great results and make correct and fast decisions in intense situations. But her high scores in all categories also implied that she would expect the same high standards from other people. Even when she is not verbalizing these expectations, she would give nonverbal clues and get impatient when things are not done quickly according to her high standards. Alice agreed:

When I first started, I was rude. There are certain procedures for getting patients ready for surgical operations, tests to be repeated. I was very agitated when these weren't done up to the highest possible standards. A male manager approached me later and told me: 'Alice, you are getting to be known as a bitch.' I was so focused on the goal and the work. It has been ten years and I am much better in recognizing it.

The coach intervened: "well because you are so fast, fast, fast." What Alice needed to keep in mind, Karen said, was that people might be failing at what they do because they are actually not understanding their job. While Karen tried to tell Alice about herself, exploring how and why she was doing what she was doing she referred to results of several methods she used to collect data: 1) an online interview to collect biographical

information and information about key events, key people in their personal and professional lives, 2) two three-minute Watson Glaser tests that measure people's critical thinking, verbal comprehension, numerical reasoning and verbal reasoning, 3) Myers-Briggs Step II profile test that measures personality profiles, 4) FIRO-B (Fundamental, Interpersonal Relational Orientation) Questionnaire, 5) CPI (California Personality Inventory), 6) an in-basket assignment where they need to address a list of tasks in a given time, and 7) a role-play session where they deal with a challenge presented in the in-basket.

Alice is the manager responsible for surgical services at St. Vincent Hospital. She had practiced as a surgical nurse for 10 years before a recent promotion to the manager position. In her new position she has 164 direct reports under her, led by four lead people in charge of different departments (general surgery, oby-gyn, neurology, urology). She was one of several newly recruited managers in the hospital that had been promoted during the organizational re-structuring. She had several challenges in her new position: 1) lack of knowledge about her responsibilities and rights as a manager, 2) lack of knowledge about relationships with the union of employees under her supervision, and 3) confusion about boundaries between her old position and new position and about recognizing differences in professional practices and ethical principles. As a new manager she did not yet know what she was and was not allowed to do: she was working with employees who are members of three different unions each of which has different policies regarding issues such as payment structures and workload. Also she shifted from the role of an expert to the role of a manager of experts; she did not understand what her

team members understood so that she could help them get done what they needed to do. When this ambiguity was combined with her lack of knowledge about the organizational structure, policies and overall changes taking place in the hospital as part of the restructuring she became overwhelmed about what to do, what to tell, to whom and when.

The coach responded:

You need to bring the information to them (employees under her supervision) so that they can follow it on their own and get things done. But you have to do in a non-dominating way.

According to all tests, Karen said, Alice was inclined to dominate people. The coach took out the CPI results sheet and circled the 80% of dominance: it was the score that deviated the most from average. In CPI, too big of a deviation from the average indicates a point of stress and strength. Karen explained the CPI through making an analogy to sixteen rooms and suggested that they find the room in which she would like the change to happen and it looked like dominance might be the room of choice.

According to FIRO-B preference items, Alice was working outside of her areas of preference. She did not express much affection to others nor wanted it from others, but she was a manager and her position required both. Because she was working outside of her preferences, it was natural that she would feel uncomfortable and stressed. How

could she succeed if she was working outside of her preference? The coach assured Alice that it was possible but she needed to try harder. According to MBTI Alice was INTP (Introverted, Intuitive, Thinking and Perceiving). Alice hinted that maybe this was not the right job for her and she laughingly remarked: “I hate people, don’t I? Maybe this job isn’t for me!” The coach objected:

You are very empathetic.

Am I?

Yes you are.

I later asked coaches where this surprise affect was coming from. Why were clients surprised by the results of tests they filled? How did coaches ensure that the results represented who their clients are, not just who they think they are? They gave three related answers. First, the tests include questions that do cross check and do not directly ask the client who they think they are. Second, there is always more than just one test that is analyzed collectively and the data collected through self-filled tests is supplemented by more normative data such as observing them in simulation exercises. And finally they added that clients were surprised but not shocked. They described their analysis “an integrative process” where they look for patterns across these surveys and trace whether and how things confirm, back up or contradict each other. For example, to explore whether the client has empathy for others, the coach would look at the CPI empathy scale, Myers-Briggs, and FIRO-B. These tests would give a sense of the person. But the tool that helped coaches to see the most was the in-basket and the role-play

session. Karen said there were two reasons for it: these two simulations gave coaches an access to see how their clients operate as managers. Coaches were likely to see more about how a mixed type of intuitive and thinking Myers-Briggs type uses these two sides in action. Additionally, coaches were able to have a sense of the person in these simulation exercises. “When you do the role play you respond to the person you play with. If someone is a jerk, you respond to that.”

During the in-basket session the client is given a “basket” of tasks that the coaching client needs to prioritize and complete in a limited amount of time and a role playing session where the coach and the coaching client act a situation from the in-basket. The in-basket tasks are not intentionally designed to be stressful but the tasks are such that they are barely doable in the given amount of time. They include several emails and letters from different people in the organization regarding a professional dispute between two supervisees, information requests from the CEO and clients, complaints about the technical department regarding increasing requests from them, etc. The role-play sessions are acted by a different coach from the coaching team, video taped and watched by the main coach who works with the client. Like multiple tests, the crossing aims to maintain “objective” assessment of each coaching client.

In this role play, managers are assigned the role of Vice President (VP) of an International Sweeper Corporation (ISC), a producer of floor scrubbers founded in the 1920s which assumed a position of major dominance in the 1940s and has recently risked losing. ISC has acquired a new business line within the past year (a commercial grade of

floor vacuum cleaners/buffers, which were to be used primarily in large office applications). The growth of this new business line, however, has never met the overall growth plans. In the role play, the senior management is divided into two camps: those who support the new line and those who object to it seeing it as a threat to other lines that the company manufactures. The coaching client is given the role of a VP who has just been promoted to the position and had to spend three days away from the office to handle some matters related to her/his former position. The time is Sunday afternoon, February 8, 2007. The role-play instruction summarizes:

1. As of right now, you are the Vice President of National Sale and Services for ISC.
2. You will be out of town until Thursday, February 12, 2007.
3. The papers you have been given consist of materials received in your in-basket in the few days while you have been out of the office.
4. You have one hour to take action on your in-basket

Alice, whom I quoted earlier, has been trained and worked as a surgical nurse. Following procedures meticulously is a fundamental part of her job. In the role-play she is “suddenly” the Vice President in charge of a company producing floor scrubber. She has no idea what a vice president does. In the role-play she has a meeting with Doug Hal who is the Central Region Manager. Doug has achieved a solid record of success thanks to special attention and service he provides to his clients but lately he has become increasingly “harried” and has had difficulty meeting deadlines. One of the machines is

broken and the Doug who is played by the coach Daniel suggests buying a replacement for the broken part from a hardware store around the corner that sells non-certified manufactured parts. Alice challenges Doug (Daniel) and declines his offer.

Karen watched the video taped role-play and pointed out that Alice did not make Doug feel included in the decision making process. This was how Alice's dominance showed up. Alice was aware of the situation and tried to explain why she did not (could not) include him. "I am a surgical nurse. There are life and death situations that might be caused by a replaced part that is not produced up to the highest standards." Whereas in this scenario, the coach intervened, which is not a life or death situation, she could have ordered the part, tried it and returned it if it was not working. Alice agreed but went back to the surgery room, pointed out to the importance of reliability, redundant practices and risk and quality management in life and death situations: "There is no going back in a surgery room." The coach nodded. She, of course, understood how her educational and professional background would make her think and act that way but pointed to the difference in circumstances:

Yes, there is no going back in the surgery room but in this role-play when you are producing floor scrubbers you can make a quick decision, fail and go back. It is not the surgery room.

Alice went through what she thought she did not do well. The coach intervened: Alice did not include people and was dominating, but she did other things well. This shift of

attention to positives was part of Karen's emphasis on focusing on strengths rather than weaknesses. She took charge and stayed in charge throughout the hour, conveyed confidence and warmth and provided reliability. While doing the in-basket she had problems prioritizing things: she responded to the CEO before addressing more urgent things but she still got most of the things done.

By looking at the way in which clients deal with in basket tasks and act in role-play, coaches try to come up with generalizations about their clients' patterns at work including time and project management (Did they use the calendar that they were distributed? How did they use their time? How did they handle the crisis at hand?); and people management (How did they treat the coach who was role-playing? Did they establish eye contact? Did they communicate their ideas clearly in oral and written form? Did they care about the other person? Were they direct, aggressive, indirect or too polite?). Based on their observations of their clients' performance in these two simulations coaches make assumptions about the ways in which their clients manage and control their ways of being, thinking and feeling at work. In other words, coaches hope to capture how executives are acting (out) at the emotional, intellectual and organizational level.

My aim here is not to generalize about executive coaching based on the frequency of the use of simulation exercises, as it is impossible to know the frequency of the use of any particular method. The use of such exercises serves another purpose for my analysis however. It nicely illustrates the ways in which reality is continuously staged in the field

of executive coaching. On the one hand coaches always claim that they are interested in “now” and “here,” on the other hand they address what is “not here” and “not now” such as the unconscious, the past and the future. They fabricate a staged reality in real life through pushing their client’s memory and imagination. Neither the contents of the stage (the floor sweeping business is not a hospital) nor the actors and their expertise, match (the surgical nurse knows nothing about management of a floor sweeping production). It is precisely these major shifts and changes of the business world that the role-play successfully replicates though: it is true that a surgical nurse would not know about floor sweeping business, but neither will she know about labor unions of her supervisees. She does not have time to complete in-basket tasks but neither does she have time at work. There is really no difference in how managers think and talk about the role-play and their real experience. The only difference is that we laugh at the role-play as we find it unreal and we do not laugh at their real experience.

There are current trends in the working reality of contemporary corporations that are mirrored in these tests and related to each other: 1) the imperative to learn how to shift from one set of responsibilities to another set with different priorities, 2) the feeling of “time entrapment,” a set of dilemmas and structural conflicts general to many types of professionals, and 3) the theme of “development” used as a non-threatening device to help people understand themselves as having a positive future trajectory rather than being captured by a failure.

Experts are shifting to managerial positions and are in charge of a system whose components and functioning they are not familiar with. A new manager who has moved to her new position from an educational role put it in the following way:

I am the expert, I know what I am doing and I do it better than most people. But now I need to move from this expert position to the position of a generalist. Management would be easy if it wasn't for the people. And I don't know how to do that.

The coach suggested that she needed to learn to delegate, and leverage her teaching skills. In order to do so she needed to take time, which she did not have for anything, whether for daily tasks, learning about her new position and about people working for her or for the system she was working in. Also, the concept of time had changed as she shifted to this new position of management. Previously two principles were fundamental and came before any other principle: 1) the priority is today, 2) patients come first. Now she needed to think about not (just) now but the past and the future of the hospital--she was expected to have a vision. But she did not have time to do that. Alice had a similar struggle. In order to differentiate between contexts in which she needs to delegate things and explaining how she wants them to get done, and contexts where she just needs to delegate without explanation, she needed time (which she did not have) to step out of her role. She explained this vicious circle in the following way:

I can't take the time to recognize when it is time to take time to explain things to people.

The entrapment by time that Alice expresses is pervasive in the corporate world. Despite their differences, all tests used in the field address this entrapment and diagnose a problem of a 'time mismatch.' The psychodynamic approach that I talk about in the first section of this chapter refers to executives who are trapped in their unconscious memories and unresolved childhood conflicts. Coaches talk about behaviors in temporal terms that move along a continuum and deploy coaching to transcend unhealthy behaviors without regressing into pathological symptoms and disorders. Coaches remind their clients that their old self that was formed in early childhood has learned patterns of behavior that are no longer 'working,' so coaching should help them move from the past to the present and become a new self.

James's model that I explored in the previous section insists on the importance of the unconscious and follows the same temporal principles of bringing the client from the past to the present but it wants to get quicker and more efficient results. To adapt to demands of the corporate time he struggles to find shortcuts to his clients' unconscious. Structured tests point our attention to another dimension: that of fighting against time. On the one hand executives are measured according to how they manage time and are told to speed up even more, and on the other hand they are asked to slow down so that they can catch the intangible (personal and social).

The concept of development runs across these themes. Coaching makes the potential for development a baseline. Here executives are not defined according to their limitations but rather their potential to develop. If a person is stuck in the process of development the treatment is to help them move along this continuum. The urgency of development does not arise as long as they are generating value to their company but when the very same behavior no longer produces the desired effect in corporate time and the company's profit. The executive coach becomes an agent of change placing the individual in a continuum of past, present and future reminding them of continuous change of the business and corporate world.

Conclusion

Science in numbers / science in stories...

The notion of the interviews is asking people questions that they can answer but even though the questions at first would evoke a "yes," "no" response they are not allowed to just say "yes" or "no." They have to tell something about why is that yes or why is that no, which is evocative of a story ... It builds on Dan McAdams from Northwestern, from the Kellogg School, Dan McAdams' notion of the "Stories of our lives" ... 'Tell me about the time you tried something and failed.' It doesn't ask the question 'did you ever fail?' to which somebody could say 'no, I never have.' 'Tell me about the time you tried something and failed.' It allows the person to define that failure experience in any way he or she sees it and then to tell the story of it. It allows the person to answer the question they can answer,

not the question you necessarily try to force them to answer. This is much more, you know, “tell me about.” (Conversation with an executive coach)

Executive coaching exemplifies a rational approach to the irrationality of the individual in what is assumed and desired to be a rational setting. On the one hand coaches emphasize the importance of making coaching scientific and rely on statistical data that is collected through psychometric tools on the other hand they want to have access to the “intangibles,” to underlying cognitive and psychological structures through the collection of stories. They shift between a logico-scientific mode that is based on mathematically testable hypotheses, controlled studies and clearly defined measures and findings and a narrative mode that is based on the collection and interpretation of stories through which people make sense of their and others’ lives. As coaching places the irrational individual psychology at the core of the self, the division between the scientific and non-scientific gets blurry.

In a 1991 article, Levinson criticizes the commonplace use of pen and pencil psychological testing and other data gathering tools in consulting such as questionnaires, morale studies, attitude surveys, and performance feedback. He argues that these tests take things at face value and do not consider the tacit communication behind the manifest responses. They fail to take into account unconscious assumptions and underlying cognitive structure and trajectories. Equating psychometric tools with objectivity is a mistake:

Operating by the numbers in pursuit of objectivity, many psychologists have buried their heads in the psychological sand. When a consultant confuses statistics with objectivity and objectivity with numbers and equates numbers with science, that frequently leads to inadequate, if not destructive, psychological consultation. (Levinson 1996: 4)

According to Levinson only by telling stories can one be truly scientific. Reaching a psychologically sound science requires proceeding from facts to inferences and interpretations based on these stories. People tell stories to organize experience, to try to understand and solve problems, explain, teach, protect, unify generations, discharge anxiety and rage, regret and mourn. Stories constitute the psychological grist of life and thus have to be at the center of consultation because they are the way in which implicit psychological contracts are understood or felt to have fallen into violation and dysfunction. This puts the psychotherapist at a clear advantage. Psychotherapists who are the most sophisticated group in making people tell them stories could make a monumental contribution to the coaching field. Good coaches who would also be good scientists should become good storytellers.

Coaches want their clients to be able to say more than what the tests enable them to say. They want to hear more from them through stories with subtle and rich details but want to be able to collect and analyze them in a scientific way. James's desire to shift to a new model was not because he did not want to rely on stories but because he wanted to collect these stories in such a way to minimize the time he spent on story collection and

interpretation. By introducing numerical scales to relationship maps he hoped that the data would be generating itself in an efficient manner without the need for individual interpretation. What he wanted was not a shift to quantitative measures or structured tests but to making storytelling and interpretation quantitative and structured. He wanted to introduce diagrams, graphs, numbers and maps to make visible and quantify what is otherwise inaccessible to the rational mind.

This is related to another challenge in the field: that of proving a cause and effect relationship between intra-psychic and inter-psychic forces and business performance. What coaches measure and interpret and claim to improve is the individual but the measures have to make sense to the company. In a parallel way how much data has to be collected by coaches, in what form, and with what focus has to do with how much value is being added to the coaching engagement, to the executive and finally to the company. The value to the company that can be measured in numbers becomes the predominant measurement tool: it measures success, it determines failure, it tracks patterns of success and failure and it defines the contribution of employees, employers, and coaches. By establishing a strong link between individual psychology and business performance coaching promises to create big changes at the level of performance through minor changes in the ‘contours of a person.’

Coaches exist at the boundaries: they use psychoanalytic measures without doing psychoanalysis and they work in corporations without being a part of them. On the one hand they acknowledge that corporations have to operate rationally on the other hand

they acknowledge the existence of irrationality. Coaches operate at the intersection point between individual psychology and organizational management as experts of human nature but not psychotherapists, experts of management but not managers, and theorists of leadership but not leaders. They propose to carry the individual from his unconscious past to the present so that they can move the corporation forward.

Executive coaching might be seen as a form of management tool, managerial control of the managerial class. But there is something more here. Executive coaching takes the form of management of psychodynamics and of the make-up of personality. It addresses and attempts to change the way managers are and the way they behave. Coaches say that they can help executives understand that they have acted irrationally and explain to them why they acted irrationally. They can enter into the (psycho)analyzable intelligibility of the act in question. The motives that make the irrational behavior intelligible can be superimposed on the executive but he is not to be punished, he is to be improved. It promises to address the “delusional reality of managers” and promise to contain it so that it does not become contagious. Coaching functions as “rationality hygiene.” With the knowledge of the irrational, individual and social, coaching traces the patterns of irrationality, detects that which is imperceptible to everyone else, and confines the “surplus irrationality.”

Chapter 5

The Versatile Executive in the Darwinian Workplace

Introduction

360-degree feedback is one of the most commonly used methods in the field of executive coaching.²⁶ It is associated with coaching so often that some coaches find it necessary to differentiate the two by stating that “coaching is not 360 and 360 is not coaching.” 360-degree feedback is rather a method through which a person receives ratings of performance through multiple raters including peers, superiors, subordinates and customers, compares these with self-ratings and sets goals for improvement. Coaches argue that self-awareness is essential to business performance and that 360-degree feedback helps increase self-awareness and closes the gap between clients’ self-perception and his/her perception of others. In this chapter, I look at how this feedback mechanism reveals the ways in which coaches talk and think about the self and the ways in which the self can change and improve. The self here is a versatile, re-trainable and segmented one.

In the first section of this chapter I analyze how and why 360-degree feedback is used by coaches. Next, I talk about efforts of a group of coaches to make this feedback method more “objective” and versatile. I show that the versatile 360-degree feedback does not only measure executives’ strengths (and skills) necessary for good leadership but the

²⁶ 90% of Fortune 1000 firms use some form of multi-source assessment (Waldman and Atwater 1998). There are different types of 360-degree feedback that measure different sets of skills such as Benchmarks, Clark Wilson and Campbell Leadership Index.

speed and versatility with which executive can move between these strengths depending on changing circumstances. It places versatility above all other strengths.

The emphasis on versatility is part of a larger trend among executive coaches of taking Darwinian metaphors from scientific and popular worlds and integrating them into their language and practices. The set of stories about the Darwinian corporate world is told by coaches in personal conversations, at professional conferences and workshops, and in articles published in professional journals by consulting psychologists and executive coaches. The corporation is a “jungle” and surviving in it means responding to the imperative of continuous adaptation. Executives are “alpha males” whose power is essential to the survival of the jungle. But they misuse their alpha power and misunderstand the rules of the jungle. They are trapped in a discrepancy between who they think they are and who others think they are. This is a discrepancy that coaching promises to close with the help of tools like 360-degree feedback. Only by closing this gap between self-perception and the perception of others, the alpha male can survive and help their company survive. Coaches help executives change their sense of self and thus their self as they offer them help across positions, responsibilities and companies. Coaching does not only provide lenses through which we can see today’s versatile workplace but also provides access to notions of a versatile, re-trainable and segmented self. It participates in and co-constructs today’s workplace by offering professional help to executives dealing with its versatility. It represents and reinforces the prominent notion of continuous change and adaptation in today’s American workplace.

360-degree feedback - The “you” that others know

360-degree feedback collects information about a person’s managerial and leadership skills, interpersonal and communication skills, behavioral patterns and personal character²⁷ (Morgeson 2005: 202). It is also known as multi-source or multi-rater feedback as it places the target participant at the center and gathers information from two or more (typically 3-16) participants including boss, peers, direct reports, subordinates and internal or external customers. Sometimes family members, executive’s spouse and children are also interviewed in order to obtain a more complete portrait of the executive’s performance and strengths and weaknesses.²⁸ The data collected from these

²⁷ Based on a content analysis of different 360-degree programs Morgeson, et al. listed the following dimensions that were most often measured (my groupings):

Leadership

- Creating a team environment
- Conflict management

Human relations / people management

- Listening
- Motivating
- People development / coaching

Communication

- Oral
- Written

Personnel organization and time management

- Planning and organizing
- Delegation/participation and empowerment
- Informing

Personality

- Personal motivation
- Personal adaptability
- Fairness
- Integrity and respect

Business / Technical

- Occupational and technical knowledge
- Problem analysis
- Financial and quantitative
- Commitment to customer satisfaction

²⁸ With top-level executives the number of interviews might increase. The consulting firm KRW, for example conducts three interviews with the executive, thirty with subordinates, peers, and superiors and fifteen or so friends and family members including parents and children.

different sources is put together by coaches and presented to the executive. Executives hear comments such as:

We never know which Mike is going to show up in the morning, the effervescent guy with the big smile who can't wait to take on the world, or the maniac who's going to explode the first time someone rubs him the wrong way.

She's like the big sister of your dreams: supportive, patient, understanding and kind. She'll do anything to help you be the best you can be. An hour later, she's the wicked witch. She snipes at everything and everyone, cutting people down with nasty criticism. (Ludeman and Erlandson 2006: 18)

Depending on the method of data collection and analysis, the presented data might include numerical ratings and verbatim comments, data about workplace performance and data about personal life collected from family members and friends, data on behavior and motivation and data on the present and on the childhood and family history of the client (Kaplan and Palus 1994). Guidelines, books, and coach trainers warn coaches about how such data might make their clients feel fragile and offer them ways to handle the delicacy of feedback process (Waldman 1998; Craig and Hannum 2006). An executive coach described the process in a training workshop:

The data is unsettling as it tells to executives that they need to change old patterns and reconsider their perceptions of themselves. It is lots of active listening and

lots of rephrasing. We read together every word in the data book out loud. We read to each other what is in the data book. Think about how powerful it is. We take frequent breaks, lots of waters, usually in casual clothes. Go for walks around the block. It is taking an excursion, by getting out and by getting out of yourself ... It is intense, it is very intense. I have seen executives cry.

The executive coach trainer continued describing this intense process: the first time an executive reads the data book, it is always a shock. Even positive data are shocking to the executive. Executives go through the data an average of five times. The coach goes through the data too and takes notes on the executive's reactions and comments. Executives are presented very challenging questions and they need to work through them. The trainer warned coaches to be very careful to create a safe and comfortable environment for their clients when they present the data book.

At the end of this feedback process, a set of "homework" is generated for the executive. An executive who has control issues, for example, might think he is good in delegating and empowering people. The 360-degree feedback reveals the opposite; that he does not trust others and that his overly controlling attitude is de-motivating to his team members. The 360-degree feedback is expected to help the executive see the gap between how they see themselves (empowering) and how others see them (controlling). When this gap is revealed to him, his self-awareness will increase. Areas of development will be specified and an exercise will be created to address these specific areas. In this case, the executive

needed to learn what it would mean to let go and he was told to let his eighteen year old son plan their summer vacation.

Some coaches take the roots of 360-degree feedback back to Freud:

Freud made a big distinction between “the you that you know” and “the you that we know.” For Freud “the you that you know” is not worth knowing because you made it all up, but “the you that we know” is worth knowing because that is your reputation. That summarizes what you have done before and the best predictor of what you will do in the future is what you have done in the past, right? ... I think the interesting point there was that “the you that you know” is not the same as “the you that we know” necessarily, but in the ideal case it is. When your self-concept matches our experiences of you people say things like ‘he is very authentic’ or ‘he is genuine’ and we hear those kinds of things. (Personal conversation with an executive coach)

When this coach talks about the authentic self he refers to a self that sees himself/herself as others seem him/her. Another coach differentiates 360-degree feedback from traditional psychotherapy by stating that in therapy a patient’s reality—“the you that you know”—is all that matters whereas a 360-degree feedback takes the client’s reality in relation to the broader reality, as perceived and experienced by others. References to Freud and psychotherapy are noteworthy considering the ways in which 360-degree feedback has historically evolved.

360-degree feedback was developed by the German military during World War II in order to gain insights from multiple perspectives. In organizations, early forms of 360-degree feedback were used to gather employee opinions from multiple perspectives about various aspects of organizations, including compensation, benefits, and leadership (Fleenor and Prince 1997). The use of 360-degree feedback for individual assessment to help with development and performance appraisal started only in the 1980s. Today 360-degree feedback is used by companies for developmental, appraisal, assignment or selection purposes and for helping organizational change.

There have been several studies in the field of executive coaching to show how 360-degree feedback works effectively and why it is crucial for developing good leadership skills. Lack of feedback in today's corporations, especially at higher levels of management, is seen as pervasive. Business writer Bryne calls it as the "CEO disease," and offers 360-degree feedback as an effective tool (1991) through which managers can view their strengths and weaknesses based on perception of people who they work with against their self-perceptions. It is believed that a discrepancy highlighted by 360-degree feedback helps executives realize the effect they create on others and that they are "battering and terrifying the talent around them" (Lee 1993). Once they know they are harming the bottom line they are likely to work on these areas and improve. Some coaches argue that even the fact that an area is found valuable to be measured signals managers that their performance in that area is important to the organization. Furthermore, the specification of their behavior enables managers to set specific goals to change that behavior (Smither et al 1995). Others argue that 360-degree feedback

process helps respondents to let off steam by identifying problem areas, encourages a positive and constructive attitude on the part of the respondents. The clear and consensual feedback enables the manager to hear what constitutes a legitimate problem for others (Tobias 1996).

I will cite two research studies on 360-degree feedback, as they seem to contradict and compliment each other at the same time. In one study, a group of psychologists compared the relationship between middle and high-level managers' self-perceptions and those of others (Sala 2003). The data included 1,214 participants who served in various functions (finance, HR, R and D, sales, marketing, technical, executive and general management).²⁹ Researchers found out that that lower level managers are more likely to see themselves as others see them and higher-level managers consistently overrate themselves, that is they have "an inflated view of their emotional intelligence competencies and less congruence with the perceptions of others." Referring to the previous research on self-perception and performance Sala reached the following conclusion:

This information is valuable for managers and practitioners because previous research has established that high-performing managers tend to have more accurate self-perceptions. That is high-performing individuals' self-perceptions

²⁹ 1,214 participants were surveyed for this study serving various functions in corporations (finance, human resources, research and development, sales, marketing, technical, executive/general management etc.) within in a wide variety of industries (technology, financial, retail, government, pharmaceuticals, health care and so forth). 227 of the participants were low on job level and 987 were considered high (first, mid- and high-level managers).

tend to match the perceptions/ratings of others. Therefore, helping managers and executives better understand how they are perceived by others can have significant implications for managing performance improvement. (Sala 2003: 225)

The second study was conducted by a group of psychologists to assess upward feedback programs (Smither et al 1995). It concludes that managers who have the largest discrepancy between their own performance ratings and those of others will be the most motivated to change their behavior. If feedback is consistent with their self-perceptions, managers may not be motivated to improve even if their performance is low. Programs are most effective when the manager's self-ratings are more favorable than the constituent ratings, that is, when managers overrate themselves. Smither bases this observation on another study by Johnson and Ferstl (1999) who predicted that when managers receive ratings lower than their self-ratings they would be motivated to improve performance and reduce the discrepancy between how they perceive themselves and how others see them, but would not improve if others' ratings are the same as or higher than their self-ratings.

Sala concluded that higher-level managers have a larger discrepancy between their own self-perception and those of others and suggested this to be a weakness that needs to be worked on. Smither's study obscures the correlation that Sala has put forward and turns lack of self-awareness into an advantage by arguing that managers who observe the largest difference between their own performance ratings and those of others would

demonstrate the largest performance gains from 360-degree feedback. The bigger the discrepancy between one's self awareness and perception by others, the more improvement is desirable and possible. The higher the manager is in the organizational hierarchy, the less aware he is of himself and the less aware of himself he is, the more chance of improvement he has through 360-degree feedback. When the two studies are combined, it looks like lack of self-awareness precedes and justifies the use of 360-degree feedback but also guarantees its success. A manager that is lacking self-awareness needs the feedback and the feedback works precisely because he lacks self-awareness.

The 360-degree feedback feels like a "parachute jump" as one executive coach calls it. Executives think they have a likable personality and feel shocked to hear that they are seen as bad team players "overly dominating, stubborn and myopic." 360-degree feedback shows them who they think they are is not who others think they are. It provides undeniable proof that the executive's behavior to which he is attached does not work nearly as well as he thinks it does. Having knowledge of this discrepancy is transformative and enables change. The bigger the shock is, the more is the chance of improvement.

It seems to me that in this expert-mediated practice, and for all the discourses around it, "believing oneself to be different from what others see," is an implication of ineffectiveness. By relating self-awareness to performance through 360-degree feedback coaches are claiming that 360-degree feedback is a technology of measurement but also a

technology of improvement. It improves what it measures as it measures. Measurement and improvement are inseparable and parts of the same picture. What is measured is not the performance but self-awareness. Self-awareness *is* performance and improving self-awareness amounts to increasing performance.

Making numbers more meaningful

In order to collect information about an executive's managerial and interpersonal skills through 360-degree feedback, some coaches use numerical scale questions. Other coaches criticize this 'cookie cutter' approach for not being able to capture the complexity and subtlety of their client's predicament and they instead collect information through 60–90 minute, open-ended interviews. They argue that these interviews are essential to capture the "nuances and texture" and to hear specific suggestions for areas of improvement. Other critics of 360-degree feedback such as Levinson warn that inadequate interpretation of the feedback might threaten one's self-image and points out that there is "characterological behavior that is refractory to change" (Levinson 1996: 7). Two executive coaches, Robert Kaplan and Robert Kaiser, further criticize 360-degree feedback for its incapacity to measure "lopsidedness" and apply the concept of "versatility" to leadership and 360-degree feedback (Kaplan and Kaiser 2003).

I wrote about the dynamic tension between data collection through numbers and through narratives in the previous chapter. In this section, I will talk about versatile 360-degree feedback that represents the ways in which executive coaches are trying to improve a measurement technique not through shifting from numbers to narratives but by making

the numbers more meaningful. I hope to show that the versatile 360-degree feedback does not only measure executives' strengths (and skills) necessary for good leadership but the speed and versatility with which executives can move between these strengths depending on changing circumstances. It places the versatility of the executive above all his/her other strengths.

Robert Kaiser is a prolific author on leadership, executive selection and performance measurement. He coaches individual managers and their teams. I met him at the American Psychological Association annual meeting in New Orleans where he presented some conclusions based on research he conducted at the Center for Creative Leadership and at a consulting firm where Kaiser and his research colleague Robert Kaplan collected information about 562 managers from 5,334 workers. Based on these surveys Kaiser and Kaplan came to the conclusion that when managers do not perform a function well it is because they are either doing it too much or not doing it enough. They described these leaders as "lopsided" who have distorted beliefs, values and sensibilities about leadership. They overdo something because they overvalue it or underdo it because they undervalue it. They felt the necessity to look for the overused (overvalued) and underused (undervalued) strengths, look for imbalances between the two, and assess the "how and what" of the interpretations (Kaplan and Kaiser 2003: 23).

Through a conventional 360-degree feedback, a bad boss was defined as "sadistic" and people described it as a misfortune to be on his team. But the tendency of such a boss to step on other people was overlooked: to what extent and how often he was "sadistic" was

not measured. Numbers alone were insufficient because they were de-contextualized and abstract. The researchers defined three major problems with conventional 360-degree feedback and the leadership model it was based on:

- 1) Overkill is overlooked,
- 2) Lopsided leadership is undetected,
- 3) Leadership models are not integrative.

They proposed solutions for each of these problems: adding a provision for raters to indicate “too much” in order to measure overdoing, introducing two-sidedness of leadership and using an integrative model of leadership to reflect tensions and trade-offs between opposites (autocratic-inclusive, task-orientation-people-orientation, stability-change, execution-vision, specialist-generalist). The concept “versatility” emerged as a “second order” as they heard more comments about lopsided managers.

Nobody said he is not versatile. Nobody said that at all, but what they would say is you know, to paraphrase ‘he is too forceful and not enough empowering’ and you start seeing that pattern on those pairs more and more. Occasionally you will see that ‘Oh, he is such a nice guy. He is so supportive and so considerate, but at the expense of the work, he lets people off the hook.’ (Personal conversation with Kaiser)

Kaiser and Kaplan defined versatility as “having a full range of motion; able to freely use opposing dimensions, unrestricted by bias in favor of one and prejudice against the other.” They mainly focused on two opposing dimensions of how one leads (forceful-enabling) and what one leads (strategic-operational). Leaders, they argued, tend to do either of these opposites (thus not versatile) and conventional measurement scales tend to measure overkill of either of these opposites (thus not versatile). During an interview, Kaiser gave the following example to explain how the versatility index would reveal richer and more contextualized feedback as compared to conventional scales.

In order to measure supervision skills, a common scale would offer five options from 0 to 4 or “never” to “always,” respectively. A question about the directedness of a boss would be stated as:

Direct—tells people when he is dissatisfied with their work.

0 never 1 rarely 2 sometimes 3 often 4 always

The five-scale measurement in a conventional 360 becomes a scale from -4 to +4 in a versatility index and the question is posed as:

Direct—tells people when he is dissatisfied with their work.

	Too little		The right amount			Too much		
-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4
Much			Barely		Barely			Much
too little			too little		too much			too much

What managers needed was to be neither “much too little direct” nor “much too much direct.” The conventional numerical scales did not mean much and assumed that a higher score is higher proficiency.

On a scale of one to five, you have no idea what “four” means by itself. Does an executive empower subordinates? Four being a whole lot, one being not at all, you are ‘four,’ you do quite a bit. But if you have 4 in a -4 to +4, you are able to say, you are doing it too much. *In this job, in this company, with these people, right now* you are doing it too much. You need to do less of that! (My emphasis)

In this scale, “zero, smack dab in the middle of zero,” means that you are doing just right. Any deviation from it means that in this job, at this time, in this company you are doing it too little or too much. What was lacking in conventional 360-degree feedback was that numbers were “cosmic, abstract and de-contextualized.” The beauty of the versatility index was that numbers were specific to contexts, positions, teams and goals. The versatility index was not only a measurement tool that measured versatility but it was versatile adapting to the requirements in different contexts and times.

“Zero” is the ideal number but is zero different in different organizations, I asked him?

Kaiser: Oh, I think it absolutely is. I think the right amount of accountability is different if you are at the St. Louis Department of Corrections or General Electric

or the Salvation Army ... She was loved at General Electric. She was loved at the St. Louis Department of Corrections and she derailed at the Salvation Army.

Ozkan: Because of different expectations of accountability?

Kaiser: The quote was 'she is a ball buster.' We do not need that around here, but a ball buster is exactly what was needed in a penal colony or in General Electric during the Jack Welch years.

This woman was doing just right at G.E., her accountability would have been “smack dab in the middle of zero” according to the versatile 360. But she was “too accountable” at the Salvation Army. She failed because she did not adjust her degree of accountability to the different organizations that she worked at.

During our conversation, Kaiser introduced several other contingencies to the equation of a versatile leader. Having heard stories about different ways in which leaders were expected to adapt and be versatile, I asked:

Ozkan: Can you be forceful one day and enabling the other day or enabling with certain teams and forceful with others? Do you need to be so strategic for certain project and operational for others? ... So a versatile leader in a certain corporation might not necessarily look similar to another versatile leader in a different corporate setting?

Kaiser: Well, it depends on what you mean ... A highly versatile leader in a startup corporation where they have got a high burn rate and they are just trying to stay ahead of losing capital and get lift it is going to look very different from a highly versatile leader in a mature industry where you have got commoditization of product lines going on and increased competition. You are going to have different kinds of business challenges in those kinds of organization. Similarly you could have a versatile first line supervisor who has a bunch of new entrants to the work force on her team. Her behavior will probably look different from a highly versatile CEO surrounded by a team of very strong executives.

Even though he does not specify as such, Kaiser is referring to “niche theory” in evolutionary theory and is suggesting “niche adaptability” or “niche change” for those executives who move up and find that their old strategies do not work any more. He insists that that it is a failure for leaders not to recognize when contingencies have changed.

The idea of 360 is based on a duality that a person is composed of “the you that you know” and “the you that others know” and says that if the two are too disparate, there is a problem. The versatility index not only says that one’s own perception of oneself has to come closer to others’ perception of him (authentic) but also one’s own dualities have to be in balance and the self has to be ever-shifting (versatile). Managers need to be strategic and operational, to direct and execute, and to be innovative and maintain the order. They need to take charge, empower, and make decisions but also listen and

include, push but also support. A forceful manager also needs to be enabling of others. They need to be agreeable but not so agreeable that they would give up their decisions and vision for maintaining their likeability. They need to have a certain level of likeability and agreeableness; with too much of it they lose their capacity to insist on their long-term vision for the company and with too little of it they create social problems and frustrate their subordinates and colleagues. To survive in a volatile business environment they need to be versatile, flowing flawlessly between opposites.

Throughout the interview Kaiser used several Darwinian metaphors. He started some of his stories with the description of the natural laws of survival and ended them with laws of survival in corporations. As the natural history of *Homo sapiens* implies, he said, we are social animals (collaborate) but we tend to be selfish individuals; we need to move together to waterholes, to find different foods and shelter (coordinate) but we have inter-group warfare (compete). The answer to the tension between the three (collaborating, coordination and competition) is “leadership.” Kaiser emphasized that “evolution is not a theory but a fact” that is supported by biological as well as social sciences. Leaders need to be versatile at the level of species and organizations. Survival in corporations is akin to survival of species in the nature. By applying the theory of evolution to the corporate world through analogies and metaphors, and insisting on its “natural”ness Kaiser has made the idea of continuous adaptation in corporations look natural and inevitable.

Darwinian workplaces

Versatility theory is explicitly Darwinian. Kaiser defines himself as a “hardcore Darwinian” and uses Darwinian metaphors frequently. Other coaches make more implicit references to a Darwinian world and define the corporation as a “jungle” where tigers and predators have to maintain their high status in the food chain. Of these coaches, Ludeson and Erlandson are worth mentioning as they have appropriated the term “alpha male” from primatology and sociobiology and popularized it in the coaching field. Based on their observation as coaches working at corporations and on a survey they conducted over a population of 1,500 all of whom worked full time in the business world many in high-ranking leadership positions,³⁰ Ludeson and Erlandson came to the conclusion that 70% of all senior executives in the corporate world were alpha males. In 2004, they published an article on “Coaching the Alpha Male” in *Harvard Business Review*. In response to positive criticism they received about the article they subsequently published the book *Alpha Male Syndrome: The Good the Bad and the Ugly* in 2006.

The book opens with the following quote:

Human history is the story of alphas, those indispensable powerhouses who take charge, conquer new worlds, and move heaven and earth to make things happen.

Whether heading a band of warriors, bringing a vital new product to the market,

³⁰ 1,484 of 1507 survey participants were drawn from the *Harvard Business Review* readership,. 123 came from personal business contacts. 63.8 of them were male and the average age was 41.2 years. The majority of them were white (65.2 percent), came from 106 nations and spanned hundreds of different industries including agriculture, telecommunications, high technology, real estate, education, finance and banking.

guiding a team to glory, or steering a giant conglomerate, alphas are hardwired for achievement and eager to tackle challenges that others find intimidating. (Ludeson and Erlandson 2006: 1)

They define the “alpha male” based on an analogy between the natural world and the human jungle, as “a person tending to assume a dominant role in social or professional situations or thought to possess the qualities and confidence for leadership.”³¹ In the animal kingdom, rivals compete for positions in the social hierarchy to ensure access to necessities like food and mating opportunities. Similarly, in the human jungle, alpha males strive to achieve positions of prominence. The business world abounds with alphas who produce astonishing results and bring enormous value to their organizations. It is hard, they claim, to imagine the modern corporation without alpha leaders (Ibid: 58). Healthy alphas become “natural” leaders, run companies, or teams, lead to “amazing accomplishments, earthshaking breakthroughs and skyrocketing profits.” Unhealthy alpha males, on the other hand, are combative and pathologically competitive and see everyone as a rival and every situation as a contest for supremacy. They unwittingly leave a path of destruction in their wake and run roughshod over colleagues and employees. They destroy their careers and their company’s bottom line and ultimately, their companies.

Alpha males are “top dogs”; they are not happy unless they are at the top. They are bold, self-confident, demanding. They have opinions about everything, and rarely admit that

³¹ Authors take the definition from the online version of the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

their opinions might be wrong or incomplete. With complete faith in their instincts and thinking they often focus on their coworkers' flaws and intimidate them. They are unemotional and analytic in their cognitive style, eager to learn about business, technology, and things but have little or no natural curiosity about people or feelings. They are typically stubborn and resistant to feedback. They are uncomfortable showing vulnerability.

Their strengths that make them so successful also make them challenging to work with. Alphas are indispensable to progress and potentially hazardous. The "top dog" can be a "pit bull," the "dreamer's" dreams can be impossible to achieve, the "analytic genius" can be a "stubborn know-it-all" and the "driver" can drive you up the wall. They have high performance and capacity to take on challenging responsibilities that "rational" others would find unimaginable. But they expect the same performance standard from others, feel frustrated when they cannot find it and fail to appreciate and motivate others. They think very fast, which prevents them from listening to others. They are impatient and thus miss important details. The business environment needs their courageous leadership, goal-driven focus, sense of responsibility and ability to take charge and execute. But their aggressive tactics create resistance, resentment, and revenge, they are loathed for the *carnage* they leave in their wake, people hate reporting to them or working with them.

The logic in which the same trait poses opposite effects across time for different positions is prominent in the field of coaching. Having the right set of character traits

and skills for the current position does not guarantee success, high performance or effectiveness in the future. Even the best traits need to be modified across time and position. The following chart was presented at the workshop “Executive Coaching: Models, Context and Practice” as part of the APA 2005 Annual Meeting. The organizers Randy White and Sandy Shullman,³² defined a derailed executive as “one who has achieved a very high level but did not live up to the potential as the organization saw it.” Once very successful in the organization with a good track record, now his performance has declined: he might have been “plateaued, demoted, fired, accepted early retirement or had responsibilities reduced.” They presented the following chart to illustrate why and how derailed executives were successful in the first place and their “fatal flaws” that led to their derailment.

<u>Pattern</u>	<u>Flaw</u>
Brilliant, not personable	Insensitivity
Personable, not brilliant	Not strategic
Loyal to management	Over-managing
Ambitious	Overly ambitious, insensitivity
Brilliant, personable	Overly ambitious, betrayed trust, insensitive to wrong person

³² Sandy Shullman led the APA Consulting Psychology Division, Executive Coaching Work group that looked at executive coaching as an alternative form of practice beyond clinical practice and explored how psychologists could address this new field.

On the left side of the chart are patterns that made executives successful. Being brilliant, ambitious and personable is necessary and desirable for successful management but there is a delicate balance between the three. Traits overused or misused become flaws. An executive who is brilliant but not personable might end up becoming insensitive and over-managing. A personable but not brilliant manager will make decisions that are not strategic. An ambitious manager might end up becoming overly ambitious and insensitive. We might think that being brilliant and personable would be the recipe for success. But the brilliant and personable executive could end up becoming overly ambitious and he might betray trust and become insensitive.³³

Coaching relies on the inevitability and necessity of change. Coaching turns versatility into an opportunity to help executives. In response to changes in business and corporate life, coaches suggest “change of the self” as a solution. An executive coach working for one of the biggest management consulting firms described the larger context in which coaching became a necessity and a component of integration into the current corporate system:

The business life is very complex. Executives have more to do with fewer resources. Wall Street is on their necks. They are dealing with complex organizational structures that they are not trained to deal with. The higher you go in an organization the more complexity and politics you have to deal with. Baby

³³ The chart also implies that there is a distinction between insensitivity (to everybody) and insensitivity to the wrong people. The brilliant and personable executive could be insensitive to the wrong person. This implies that there is such thing as insensitivity to the right people. Insensitivity to the wrong people is sensitivity misused or sensitivity miscalculated.

boomers are retiring. Middle management is reduced. Executives tend to be getting younger, managing greater complexity in terms of business, organizational life and working with others.

The coach described a corporate world in which executives were struggling to succeed. She then shifted to how coaches might help them in this environment by helping their clients increase their awareness and move any barriers towards fully achieving their potential, helping with certain stages that executives go through, giving them an opportunity to reflect on how they are going to drive their business agenda, to navigate organizational politics and best lead their teams, preparing them for new roles, and accentuating the executive's ability to do what she is tasked to do in any role. She reminded that executives take on a new role every 18-24 months and emphasized how coaching became a necessity to help integration before and after changes take place.

A similar logic is prominent in a recent survey conducted by the consulting company RHR International. The research is based on the idea of a series of stages through which executives go through: honeymoon 1-3 months, reality 4-6 months, adjustment 7-12 months, integration 13 months. It concludes that 40 percent of new hires and promotions fail within 18 months. Only 20 percent of senior executives stay with the same employer and 80% change employers within 2 years of their move. Two researchers who conducted the survey presented the following figures:

Pre-program attrition cost: 92 departures / \$500,000 per loss	= \$46,000,000
Post-program attrition cost: 30 departures / \$500,000 per loss	= \$15,000,000

Comparing these numbers with the cost of a coaching program, they argued that companies could save significant amount of money through coaching. The logic is simple here: each arrival and departure means big losses for companies both in terms of the cost of recruitment, training and loss of skilled and knowledgeable managers. Another survey conducted by the RHR in 2006 concludes that the average amount the companies spend on each executive search is \$2,000,000 and one in two CEOs will quit or be fired within eighteen months. Coaches often refer to such figures to make the point that coaching is an economical alternative in an incredibly fast changing business environment. Coaching promises to help keep executives in their position. By juxtaposing the cost of recruitment and departure of executives with the cost of coaching, coaches are assuming that coaching is an indisputably cost-saving solution.

An article published in *The Boston Globe* quotes a survey by a management consulting firm and suggests that the return on investment from executive coaching is almost six times the initial cost of purchasing coaching services (22 September 2004). The article entitled, "Executive coaching viewed as a bargain," argues that coaching saves money by increasing retention, improving productivity, producing better quality work and making the organization better and more cohesive. Other articles present statistics about the high executive turnover in companies, defining the CEO tenure on "shaky ground" where they have to play like a tiger" in the "jungle of work". Keay's article in *The International Herald Tribune* (24 June 1996) describes this shaky ground in the following way:

Many executives today are working harder in environments that are more competitive and less supportive than every before. Gone are the days when as long as an executive played the right cards, lifetime employment was assured, gone too is the steady promotion through the company ranks that a team player could expect ... In fact, the career ladder, in the conventional sense, has all but been pulled up and thrown away.

The promise of executive coaching is to keep the executives in companies thus eliminate executive recruitment cost and to make executives more effective so that they can manage their teams more effectively. With increased morale and productivity, the company profits would increase and the employee turnover rate would decrease. Coaching promises help to executives to survive on “shaky grounds.” It becomes a “symbiont” necessary to the corporation but also to surviving in it.

Changing the self

Coaches insist that to achieve organizational efficiency the self has to change. However it is difficult for highly successful executives to understand why their success patterns that worked until this point would not work any longer and would suddenly start to become a problem. Executives have difficulty in understanding “if they have been this way all of this time why people are noticing it just now.” Because, coaches say, the interpersonal becomes more important as one goes up in the organizational hierarchy, people who work with them might have it so much so far, new feedback methods

focusing on interpersonal skills might be providing new insights about their personality and behavior.

As one of my informants put it: “To get feedback that it is not the way for them to continue to be successful in the future is like pulling someone’s rug from underneath their feet.” Having worked at a big international consulting company as a coach she observed many executives who were shocked when they were told that they needed to change if they want to be successful and productive. She continued:

I think what happens quite frequently is that ... there is a behavior pattern that has been actually quite adaptive and quite successful up until a certain stage, and there is a point at which that is no longer successful, and unfortunately the person does not know what to do about it. All they know is that they keep kind of bumping into the wall but because they have not really developed any other strategies they do not really know what to do. It is much helping people to shift the way they see things and how they can take all of those strategies and just by turning them 10 degrees to the left, how they can still utilize them in a productive way 20 degrees to the right and shifting how they think about things. (Conversation with an executive coach)

What this coach defines as “turning 10 degree left 20 degree right” is defined as “softening rough edges of a diamond” by another coach. Coaches suggest minor changes and promise to preserve an executive’s strengths while correcting his weaknesses. That

which changes, coaches tell their clients, is not the core self but its fragments and representations (behaviors). The core self will remain the same, only “finessed.” They insist that it is a modest change—not a total change but rather a partial realignment of one’s inner world, a shift in one’s values—what the individual deems important versus unimportant, his or her pattern of emotional investments, what he or she puts energy into (Kaplan and Palus 1994: 7).

A leopard can’t change its spots but dogs—even top dogs—can learn to new tricks. You are not being called upon to change the basic structure of your personality. Alpha risks such as poor listening, belligerence and impatience are not wired into the genetic code; they’re merely habits that can be modified or eliminated. You not only can change, you *do* change. (Ludeson and Erlandson 2006: 228)

This quote is taken from “Coaching the Alpha Male” and continues with an anecdote: A “tough-as-nail” leader accuses the co-author of the book Erlandson for trying to turn him into a “wimp.” Erlandson responds: “You become a wimp? I am not that good a coach” (Ibid: 230). Here Erlandson and Ludeman are addressing an anxiety that is prevalent among executives about change of the self through coaching. Alphas fear that if they change and become nicer and softer they would be inauthentic and ineffective. Coaches tell them change is inevitable and necessary. They will change even if they do not want to change. With the help of coaching, they will change in the right way and at the right pace. Their core self will not change, they will remain as an alpha but as a healthy alpha.

Coaches acknowledge that corporations do not want their alphas to turn into “oversensitive wimps” and offer executives help leveraging their strengths while also curbing their destructive “flip side risks.” Coaching plays a role in turning their ambition, discipline, energy and qualities that brought them there but that have now become shortcomings toward changing themselves according to the requirements of their new leadership positions, new teams and new business parameters.

Yet there is something else in these discourses that I would like to point out as expressed in the following quote:

Many alpha males operate under the mistaken belief that fear moves people to productive action. They think the laws of the jungle apply to business, but it turns out that the chest-thumping leadership style not only doesn't cut in today's office, it doesn't work all that well in the jungle either ... (19)

Here, Ludeman and Erlandson refer to an interview in *Fortune* magazine by primatologist Robert Sapolsky who noted that the brutish baboons who fight for the top slots were the most stressed out of the bunch. They did not do well in sex wars and were not all that good at keeping the status they won through force. The conventional view that brute force determined which animals led ‘the good life’ and passed along their genes was flawed. Animals who were “great at forming coalitions” with others won in the long run (Grainger 2003: 48).

The quote above repeats the previous argument that most leaders are alpha males fighting for dominance in the business jungle. But it makes another point by stating that their alpha character is a result of a misconceived perception of the jungle. It acknowledges the existence of a jungle but argues that leaders do not comprehend what it takes to be successful in this jungle. The mistake of the alpha male in the business world is not to be an alpha but to be a particular type of alpha who thinks that success depends on being tough and brutal. Coaches tell their clients that they are in a jungle but the jungle works differently than the way they see it. They claim knowledge of the principles of the jungle and promise executives to help them survive and win in the jungle of business.

Coaches do not only argue that executives “misunderstand” the rules of the environment they are operating in, but also misunderstand themselves. In articles, presentations and conversations I have found again and again the following notions to describe executives: “egocentric,” “action-oriented competitive risk-takers with above-average anger and hostility” (Quick 2000). Executives are (or are seen as) “abrasive,” “too expressive of anger,” “territorial,” “over-controlling,” “under-empowering,” “aggressive,” “tough,” “dismissive,” “arrogant,” and “aloof,” (Wasylyshyn et al 2006; Orenstein 2006), “interpersonally clumsy and inept,” “pushy, arrogant, insensitive and unable to share deserved credit with peers of subordinates,” and “emotionally volatile or erratic.” They are “over-managing” or “under-managing,” “unable to be strategic and adapt to boss and the company culture,” and “overly ambitious.” They are “immature high-functioning

adolescents” with insane and weird behavior causing erratic and unfair corporations full of politics, chaos and confusion.³⁴

All of these expressions I have found in articles and commentaries recount a series of what could be described as a world full of mis-presentation, mis-understanding, mis-calculation, mis-communication and mis-perception. Not only do executives lack a comprehensive understanding of the context they are operating in but also lack insight about themselves and the effect they have on others. These “mis-” create a space for coaching to exist. Instead of naturalizing failure, coaching provides a set of reasons for these failures of presentation, understanding, calculation, communication and perception and treatment to prevent it in the future.

These descriptions of executives and workplace that I cite from different sites do a couple of things: they represent the corporation as a jungle governed by alpha males. Through analogies to the natural world, they make the existence of coaching sought after and inevitable. Coaching is seen as a tool to help leaders get to know themselves through the eyes of others. It helps them to change their own nature to adapt to and survive in the Darwinian nature of the corporate world. Coaches claim expertise in helping executives

³⁴ At a meeting organized by the Organizational and Developmental Network of New York, the presenter, executive coach Michael Dooner argued that most corporations were erratic and unfair, full of politics, game-playing, chaos and confusion. Some of them were profitable but nevertheless there was blood everywhere. There was “insanity and weird, really weird behavior” behind the scenes caused by “immature” managers. He talked about a developmental stage model from infancy (0-2) to youth (2-12) to adolescence (13-20) and to adulthood (20+). He insisted that there were only 20-30 percent of adults in corporations and the number only decreased as one went up in the organization. 65-75 percent of people at the workplace were “high functioning adolescents”: very smart/adaptive/educated but who live in the now, disoriented and confused about their identity, continuously looking for acceptance. Here too, coaching was proposed as a solution to “upgrade” maturity. Other options included role models, mentoring or severe consequences.

get to know their own alpha nature and psychology but also to better understand the corporate/social world they are striving to dominate. Coaching is proposed as a ubiquitous solution to paradoxes and conflicts of the self in today's workplaces.

The landscape of change

For sixteen months between September 2005 and January 2007 when I followed *The New York Times*, the coverage of executives focused mainly on executives' movement within or across corporations (up as a progress story, down as a derailment story) and the changes that took place following their moves. Other themes such as fraudulent behavior and extravagant pay and compensation also received a lot of coverage but these stories were almost always told in relation to an executive's move up or down in the same company or across different companies. Those who were able to introduce and maintain effective and big changes regarding the vision, strategies and practices of companies were considered successful. Those who could not keep up the pace of change failed. In this section, I focus on the story of Bob Nardelli—the current CEO of Chrysler. His story is important for the purposes of my analysis not only because his career path shows the kind of volatility in America's business environment but also because he is a senior executive who has publicly talked about the importance of coaching. His famous motto “Without a coach, people will never reach their maximum capabilities” circulates in the field of coaching more frequently than any other motto.

Nardelli worked at General Electric for more than thirty years and hoped to become the CEO of that company. In November 2000 when his former boss Jack Welch told him

that he had chosen another executive (Jeff Immelt) as the new CEO, a Board member of G.E. and Home Depot offered Nardelli the position of CEO of Home Depot. During my fieldwork, Nardelli moved from Home Depot to Chrysler and received coverage during different transitioning moments:

1) During his tenure at Home Depot between 2000 and 2006: His 'autocratic' management style to turn a "loosey-goosey" work environment into a disciplined one was criticized. According to most, he failed at Home Depot because he wanted to "GE'ify" the company and to impose a command and control structure in a corporation that depended on a more casual culture and gave store managers more autonomy. He earned the nickname "general" in part because he hired a dozen of former military officers to run stores. Having incensed managers by sending critical messages, asking them to re-stack shelves during off hours, and moving them around he failed to win over the store managers. The company experienced a huge turnover and lost twenty-four of thirty-nine managers in the first nineteen months of his tenure. In response to criticisms that Home Depot was changing "too much, too fast," Nardelli countered that "the rate of internal change had to be greater than the rate of external change, or we will fall behind." He believed that "what got Home Depot here might not get it there." He was criticized for not only imposing changes that did not fit Home Depot's culture he also for failing to understand that Home Depot reacts to change different than G.E.

2) In May 2006: He had a clash with the Home Depot board at the annual meeting for shareholders. At this meeting he limited questions from shareholders to one per person

and refused to give answers to most of these questions. He requested that questions be asked within one minute and had digital timers to make sure that the shareholders did not take more time than was allocated. According to a *The New York Times* article, Nardelli ran the meeting like a “Gulag chief.”

3) In January 2007: The concerns over the way Nardelli managed the annual meeting grew and he was forced to leave. Yet he received a “lushy” compensation package regardless of the fact that Home Depot did not do well financially during his tenure. Since he became the executive chief, the company’s stock price fell and the company lost market share to Lowe’s. When Nardelli left Home Depot, he was an “overpaid and underperforming CEO.” His \$210 million pay package was one of the largest exit packages of 2006.

4) In July 2007: He was offered the position of CEO of Chrysler to rescue it from a potentially disastrous path. In a news conference after he took the job, Nardelli said: “We have the ability to move with speed; we have the ability to move with flexibility.” Chrysler spokesman Mike Aberlich said that Nardelli’s aggressive style was an asset for Chrysler: “Being a disciplinarian is a good thing because we have the plan,³⁵ but we really have to execute it, and that’s what Bob brings to the table.” His 24/7 work hours and high expectations of hard work from others was emphasized, praised and seen as

³⁵ The plan that Aberlich was referring to involved a restructuring plan that called for eliminating 13,000 jobs, closing its Newark factory and eliminating shifts at other plants in cost-cutting efforts.

crucial for the success of Chrysler. What made him fail at Home Depot was why he was hired at Chrysler.

Nardelli's passion for coaching is well known and frequently cited in coaching circles. After Nardelli moved to Home Depot, he hired the human resources executive Dennis Donovan who worked with him at G.E. In his first year, Donovan received a \$21.5 million package making him the second highest paid person at Home Depot and the highest paid HR director in the country. Nardelli and Donovan have implemented a new appraisal system where salaried associates, from the CEO on down, are rated by co-workers, above and below on criteria such as "getting results," "developing people," "driving change," and "displaying character." The two executives have created a leadership institute at Home Depot's Atlanta headquarters where high-potential executives meet with the CEO and take courses in leadership, merchandising, store planning and financial operations.

Like many other senior executives, whether or not Nardelli had an actual executive coach was not clear from news media. But he underlined that he wants to create a coaching environment at the company and that he is eager to be coached and to "play the coach" himself. He talked about Langone (the lead director of the board who offered Nardelli the CEO position at Home Depot) as his coach and consulted him on various issues of management.

Nardelli is making coaching a baseline for everybody by insisting that people do not reach their maximum potential unless they are coached. Similarly, the *Fortune* article that I cite below also insists that being assigned a coach is an advantage if not a necessity for all executives with new responsibilities:

As companies shrink, they demand more effort, inspiration, and versatility from everyone who remains, down to the novices and apprentices. A n executive who obstructs that creativity, innocently or not, ought to get coaches—or get out.

Coaches talk about the stepped-up pace of change due to globalization, technological developments and corporate mergers and suggest that executives do not have all the answers anymore. They point to the uncertainties of the corporate world and propose coaching as a tool to “aid in the management of uncertainty” in these days where there can be five or six correct strategies potentially pursued. Coaches are promising not to change the corporate world but to help executives change their selves so that they can catch up with the speed of these changes and adapt to it. Change in the larger context is not to be resisted or criticized but to be enabled.

Conclusion

In *Flexible Bodies* Emily Martin traces across several domains what she describes as a “worldview that encompasses notions about how persons, bodies and organizations are put together and how they function in health and illness” based around the notion of flexibility (Martin 1994: 43). Ideas about flexible systems are adopted in popular,

scientific, economic and political discourses and reflect the “peculiarly American cultural attachment to individual growth and development” (Ibid: 243).

Martin shows how human resource managers, consultants and authors of different political persuasions are advocating that American corporations must become like biological systems that survive in nature. Based on analogies between the corporate and natural worlds, they insist that the corporation must become “fluid,” and “ever changing” and corporate bodies must become “agile” and “flexible.” Metaphors that describe business organization as “flexible” are embodied in the workplace via a number of means such as corporate training programs and experiential learning models that involve placing employees in situations which demand cooperative responses to the uncertain and the unknown. Martin criticizes this new social differentiation that is based on the ability to constantly adapt to change and that furthermore makes this ability the criterion for success. As the imperative to succeed in extremely competitive and unpredictable circumstances has intensified, the prospect of failure has become more frightening (Martin 2007):

Moving gracefully as an agile, dancing, flexible worker/person/body feels like a liberation, even if one is moving across a tightrope. But we can simultaneously realize that the new flexible bodies are highly constrained. They cannot stop moving, they cannot grow stiff and rigid, or they will fall off the ‘tightrope’ of life and die. (247)

This chapter has shown that coaching is one of the instruments of the flexible self at the corporate-executive level. Coaches become flexibility trainers. The argument for coaching as necessary hinges on a pseudo-evolutionary argument that the “species” of managers have to adapt to a new niche. If 360-degree feedback refers to adaptation as an individual problem, the Darwinian metaphors in coaching help formulate a strategy for generalizing a market for coaching.

Darwinian thinking is pervasive in the coaching field and underlines continuous changes in the business world and poses adaptation as natural and inevitable. Coaches make references to a corporate jungle explicitly and implicitly when they describe pre-contexts of coaching for developmental (adapting to a new position or a new context) or remedial purposes (failure to adapt to new circumstances). They use metaphors of the jungle to explain patterns of derailment (skills that are overused or misused become flaws). As they transfer the principles of natural jungle to the corporation they make the corporate jungle look natural. They use these metaphors to bring out what they imagine to be a productive and adaptive self in today’s corporations. Coaching is a product of the so-called Darwinian environment and a response to it.

The strength and power of coaching with regard to the versatile corporate place comes from several interrelated features: 1) coaches present change as inevitable and continuous; 2) they link change of the of self and of corporate world tightly; 3) they present coaching as a technology of change; 4) they thus make coaching inevitable and

continuous. The individual here is improvable with respect to two norms: that of the efficient organization and that of the adaptive individual.

Tools used in the executive coaching field such as 360-degree feedback both measures and reinforces flexibility and adaptability to the volatility of the workplace. Making 360-degree feedback versatile does not only represent efforts at making a technology of measurement more reliable and nuanced. It measures executives' versatility, presents a case for why they should be versatile and promises to teach them how to be versatile. Coaching is a product of this volatile and Darwinian environment but also keeps it as such.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

In this dissertation, I studied executive coaching as: a) a new form of professional expertise, b) a management tool to increase productivity and efficiency at work, c) a window to changing notions of the self and personhood in America and, finally d) an access to the corporate world. I argued that coaching is a product of and a response to a fast changing business environment where continuous improvement is required to adapt to the volatility of changes. This dissertation illustrates and explains the grounds of a shift from depth models of psychology to flexible, segmental, and pragmatic notions of the self.

In my second chapter *Tribal Conflicts*, I explored the ways in which coaches are drawing boundaries between coaching and psychotherapy populations. This boundary relies on other boundaries that are drawn between seemingly distinctive categories of functionality and mental health. Examining the blurry boundaries between coaching and psychotherapy refers to overlaps across these categories. Despite a pervasive rhetoric about the distinctiveness of the coaching population, a more careful analysis of discursive strategies and practices in coaching shows that coaches are not just dividing mentally healthy and higher functioning coaching populations from mentally ill, lower functioning therapy populations. They are separating pathology from its everyday symptoms and dividing individuals from within to “coachable” and “uncoachable” fragments, each of which can be monitored and improved.

Boundary maintenance is not just a matter of professionalization for coaches. Coaches exist at the boundaries: they use psychoanalytic measures without doing psychoanalysis; they work in corporations without being a part of them. On the one hand they acknowledge that corporations have to operate rationally, and on the other hand they acknowledge the existence of irrationality. Coaches operate at the intersection point between individual psychology and organizational management as experts of human nature but not psychotherapists, experts of management but not managers, and theorists of leadership but not leaders. They propose to carry the individual from his unconscious past to the present so that they can help move the corporation forward.

Coaches underline that coaching is for people who are living healthy and productive lives and present “health” and “functionality” as prerequisites for coaching intervention. By doing so, coaches keep away from psychotherapy and remove the stigma associated with having a mental disorder. Yet by arguing that coaching is for people who are doing well but who want to do better they make development a baseline for everybody and coaching suitable for everybody. Coaches address healthy individuals and offer that many dysfunctions in life may be problems of poor self-management not problems of pathology and offer ways to act on this re-description through engaging in expert help.

In the third chapter *Executive Coaching in the World: Histories, Visions and Ethical Dilemmas*, I situated coaching in the history of the use of psychological theories and methods in corporations. I showed how executive coaching draws on some of these approaches while it is also distinctive in its choice of psychodynamic frameworks, its

exploration of behavior and thought patterns that are traced back to childhood and its emphasis on self-awareness and self-knowledge. Whereas previously efficiency was posed as an organizational problem, coaching shows that today efficiency is seen as a matter of individual psychology. The set of techniques to increase efficiency is enlisted in increasing self-awareness and becoming a different person.

In this chapter, I argued that the challenges of coaching, including its ethical challenges, are more than continuing the shift from early organizational management to a focus on the flexible individual. Because the coach often has conflicting commitments (to the company that hired him; to the executive he is coaching) and is subject to shifting implicit contracts as her knowledge deepens, the field of coaching remains dynamic for those who theorize and develop techniques for coaches, for coaches themselves, and for anthropologists who study them. For corporations and for coaches, the recursive need to constantly revisit ethical dilemmas and implicit contracts constitutes a kind of reflexive social institutional structure to negotiate the shifting grounds of the economy, of the tensions between individuals, small groups (work teams), and larger organizations and between what Foucault had called disciplinary societies. For the anthropologist, it is this fluidity that helps shed light on the changing nature of the self and organizational expectations.

In chapter four *The World in Executive Coaching: From Scientific Numbers to Scientific Narratives*, I analyzed the theories, methods and tools used by coaches. I explored the tension between making coaching scientific through relying on statistical data and

psychometric tools and having access to underlying cognitive and psychological structures through the collection of stories. Coaches shift between a logico-scientific mode that is based on mathematically testable hypotheses, controlled studies and clearly defined measures and findings and narrative mode that is based on the collection and interpretation of personal narratives. By placing the irrational individual psychology at the center of their analysis of their clients, coaches blur the division between the scientific and non-scientific in their methodologies.

There are interrelated challenges with making coaching scientific: proving a cause and effect relationship between intra-psychic and inter-psychic forces and business performance. What coaches measure and interpret and claim to improve is the individual. But these measurements have to make sense to the company. Related to this potential contradiction is how to determine how much data is to be collected by coaches, in what form, and with what focus so that the company, not merely the executive, values the coaching engagement. The value to the company that can be measured in numbers becomes the predominant measurement tool: it measures success, it determines failure, it tracks patterns of success and failure and it defines the contribution of employees, employers, and coaches. By establishing a strong link between individual psychology and business performance coaching promises to create big changes at the level of performance through minor changes in the ‘contours of a person.’

Executive coaching might be seen as a form of management tool, the managerial control of the managerial class. But there is something more here. Executive coaching takes the

form of the management of psychodynamics and of the make-up of personality. It addresses and attempts to change the way managers are and the way they behave. Coaches tell that they can help executives understand that they acted irrationally and explain to them why they acted irrationally. They can enter into the (psycho)analyzable intelligibility of the act in question. Coaching promises to address the “delusional reality of managers” and promise to contain it so that it does not become contagious. Coaching functions as “rationality hygiene.” With the knowledge of the irrational, individual and social, coaching traces the patterns of irrationality, detects that which is imperceptible to everyone else, and confines what I call “surplus irrationality.”

Finally, in chapter five *The Versatile Executive in the Darwinian Workplace*, I looked at the pervasive Darwinian thinking in the coaching field that emphasizes the existence of continuous changes in the business world and poses adaptation as natural and inevitable. Coaches make references to a corporate jungle explicitly and implicitly when they describe pre-contexts of coaching for developmental (adapting to a new position or a new context) or remedial purposes (failure to adapt to new circumstances). They use metaphors of the jungle to explain patterns of derailment (skills that are overused or misused become flaws). As they transfer the principles of a natural jungle to the corporation they make the jungle nature of the corporation look natural. They use these metaphors to bring out what they imagine to be a productive and adaptive self in today’s corporations. Coaching is a product of the so-called Darwinian environment and a response to it. Chapter five shows that coaching is one of the instruments of the flexible self at the corporate-executive level.

The strength and power of coaching with regard to the versatile corporate place comes from several interrelated features: 1) coaches present change as inevitable and continuous; 2) they tightly link change of the self and of the corporate world; 3) they present coaching as a technology of change; and 4) they thus make coaching inevitable and continuous. The individual here is improvable with respect to two norms: that of the efficient organization and that of the adaptive individual. As the adaptive and non-adaptive behaviors of executives are linked to business performance the necessity of assessing and improving versatility become possible and understandable. Coaching provides the tools for maintaining the versatility of the executives so that they can adapt to the versatility of the corporate environment.

Uchitelle argues that from the 1890s to 1970s, America labor practices worked to encourage lasting attachments of employers to workers and vice versa. Job security was required by efficiency, government policies, community expectations and social norms. Until the 1970s various employee benefits were introduced, including pension payments, company funded pensions and profit sharing, so that employees would remain loyal to a single employer. Starting in about 1977, job security disintegrated in the United States and layoffs became common in American corporations. The Bureau of Labor Statistics started counting “worker displacement” in 1984. By 2004, it counted at least 30 million full-time workers who had been permanently separated from their jobs against their wishes (Uchitelle 2006; Baumol et al 2003).

Coaches point to the increase in changes in the business environment due to globalization, technological developments and corporate mergers and acknowledge that employees and employers do not have all the answers anymore. They point to the uncertainties of the corporate world and propose coaching as a tool to “aid in the management of uncertainty.” Coaches are promising not to change the corporate world but to help executives change themselves so that they can catch up to speed with these changes and adapt to them. Change in the larger context (corporate settings and business environments) is not to be resisted or criticized but to be enabled through the change of the self. Coaching helps people adapt to change and illustrates a shift away from systemic approaches and systemic criticism. It emerges in and becomes an illustration of a neo-liberal economy that emphasizes constant retraining of a self that is versatile, pragmatic and fragmented.

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