Global Coaching for Organizational Development

Philippe Rosinski

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The author examines the notion of “coaching culture” by referring to his definitions of “coaching” and “culture.” He further investigates the concept of a “global coaching culture” building on “global coaching,” which transcends traditional coaching. Coaching is viewed here as a general philosophy and outlook, rather than as a particular leadership style. The goal of promoting a “global coaching culture” was implicit in the author’s approach of coaching for organizational development in the case of a strategic alliance between a Dutch and a French company. The article discusses the outcomes of this hybrid approach and describes the process. In particular, it explains the application of the Cultural Orientations Framework (COF) assessment. Finally, in hindsight, the author considers the usefulness of the “global coaching culture” concept. What else could have been achieved in light of this notion? The underlying elements associated with a “global coaching culture” and coaches’ congruence mattered more than that concept per se.

GLOBAL COACHING CULTURE

I suggest that “coaching is the art of facilitating the unleashing of people’s potential to reach meaningful, important objectives” (Rosinski, 2003, p. 4), while “a group’s culture is the set of unique characteristics that distinguishes its members from another group” (ibid., p. 20). The cultural characteristics are both external (behaviors, artifacts) and internal (norms, values, and basic assumptions/fundamental beliefs).

Characteristics of a “coaching culture” include the belief in the vast human potential and the value of striving to unleash that potential. Other values include high performance and high fulfillment. These values are notably manifested when people achieve ambitious business objectives while deriving a sense of satisfaction from their work. Norms comprise the habits of listening carefully and of asking powerful questions, rather than prescribing solutions. Norms include suspending judgment and seeking to understand first. In a coaching culture, people feel a sense of power and responsibility. They believe they have choices. Consequently, they take an active part in forging a life that is meaningful to them. Conversely, organizations don’t have a “coaching culture” when people live on autopilot mode with a sense of powerlessness.

Global coaching transcends (traditional) coaching without excluding it. It is a holistic approach that calls upon multiple interconnected...
perspectives ³ to facilitate the unleashing of human potential. The various facets of this potential can be unfolded in their rich diversity. More choices become available. Global coaching implies a dialectical (and) form of thinking resulting in cross-learning, rather than the binary (or) habitual Western mode that often fosters polarization and division. It promotes an inclusive and dynamic approach, enabling a synthesis. When simple mono-dimensional approaches are insufficient, global coaching allows addressing our interconnected and complex reality.

Everything is connected, and in many ways. Global coaching embraces this reality. Take the epidemic of obesity, for example. It is well known that overeating junk food, together with sedentary habits, are major factors, but this knowledge alone has not eliminated the epidemic. William Reymond (2007) has shown how industrial farming has and is exacerbating the problem in the US, and increasingly worldwide. Moreover, the current socio-cultural-political system favors marketing short-sighted strategies to mount junk food consumption, to the detriment of both individuals and our planet’s health. The remedies against the obesity epidemic involve acting with awareness and responsibility at all levels to foster sustainable solutions, notably by pressing for necessary regulations such as banning sodas and junk food from schools.

For those who want to lose weight, global coaching suggests actions combining multiple perspectives: physical (notably adequate nutrition and a comprehensive fitness regimen), managerial (e.g., fostering empowerment and installing practical self-management programs), psychological (e.g., overcoming psychological obstacles such as low self-esteem), political (e.g., building a support network), cultural (e.g., defeating debilitating consumerist habits and avoiding other cultural pitfalls), and spiritual (e.g., learning to live mindfully and to savor life). In sum, global coaching is concerned with the purpose of our human pursuits and not solely with facilitating the process, with the what as well as the how. It is about meaningful and sustainable results rather than “success” at all costs.

The concept of a “global coaching culture” helps to enrich and complete the notion of “coaching culture:” the belief is that human potential is vast and multifaceted. A key value is to leverage the differences, to achieve unity in diversity. The associated culture notably implies an advanced stage of human development: being at ease with complexity and seeing the world from multiple perspectives. Global coaches are able to use the adequate level of complexity to meet the clients’ needs. This culture is also characterized by “genuine communities” (Buber, 1958) of openhearted and open-minded people, present to and for one another, engaged in authentic relationships in a spirit of human solidarity. This culture is about acting purposefully, contributing to improve the world. Everything is connected and constructive actions, as modest as they may seem, all matter.
A “global coaching culture” in this ideal sense will be hard to attain, and tougher still (impossible?) to realize in a stable and definitive manner. Perhaps the concept of a “global coaching culture” can be used to describe environments where several characteristics, even imperfect, are already manifested, and most of all, where people are sincerely engaged on the journey toward this ideal.

**COACHING FOR ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Beyond individual and team development, coaches can add value by facilitating organizational development. Organizations rely on three mechanisms to achieve growth: organic growth, alliances, and mergers and acquisitions (M&As). Coaches can help organizations identify the combination that is best suited to their unique circumstances, help in the execution (e.g., integration), while being ready to challenge the assumption that bigger necessarily means better.

Throughout 2009, I had the chance, together with two colleagues, to help two organizations (one Dutch and one French) make their strategic alliance a success. Our focus in particular has been to promote, de facto, a “global coaching culture” to make the most the human potential in cultural differences, by favoring cross-learning and by fostering unity in diversity. Cultural differences often cause M&As and alliances to fail. However, when treated as an opportunity, culture can become a source of progress. It enables leaders and employees to grow by expanding their worldview and behavioral repertoire to address their challenges.

Our intervention could be qualified as hybrid. It included consulting, keynote speaking, training, and coaching (mainly team coaching). However, there was an underlying “global coaching” philosophy and attitude in our approach.

In my experience, coaching in organizations should best operate at multiple, interconnected levels. Individual, team, and organizational development, whenever possible, should occur in concert, enabling reinforcement of more effective practices while fostering overall alignment and coherence. This implied, in our case, collaborating/partnering at various levels (with individuals and teams) in the top team, integration team, and project teams. In particular, we made extensive use of the Cultural Orientations Framework assessment to stimulate conversations and open new options, beyond current cultural limitations.

**OUTCOMES**

A year after the start of the coaching initiative, several positive outcomes were achieved, which I have summarized below. Participants increased their repertoire of behavioral options by

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4 See research findings in Rosinski (2010).
5 See www.COFassessment.com
learning from their foreign colleagues. In particular, many French executives accustomed to a hierarchical culture began to realize that they could take initiatives themselves, going beyond their cultural assumptions. They felt more empowered and began to empower their subordinates, learning from the Dutch example.

They built mutual respect, understanding, appreciation, and trust. In some cases, they built closer relationships: buddies, sparring partners, friendships. They took advantage of having colleagues immersed in the same industry, yet with different habits and fresh ideas. A spirit of collaboration was far from obvious at the beginning because the two firms remained competitors despite also being in a partial equity alliance.

They were able to overcome misunderstandings and frustrations. Some of these could have derailed the projects and the alliance overall. A French and a Dutch project leader were so frustrated at each other that they had stopped talking together directly until they realized, during the cross-cultural team coaching, how much they had in common. They were able to reframe the conflict from personal to intercultural misinterpretation.

They articulated a common vision and started to identify systematic actions to make the vision a reality. They satisfied their curiosity and eagerness to learn by going beyond their borders and by taking part on this journey. They were able to achieve some quick financial wins by increasing their bargaining power vis-à-vis common suppliers. They achieved initial joint innovations and quality improvements in the service of their clients by pooling resources together and sharing best practices.

I would argue that the emerging culture was resolutely taking a “global coaching culture” direction as described earlier, in particular: the cross-learning and leveraging of differences, the spirit of solidarity and the development of genuine relationships, and the opening up of new choices beyond habitual national cultural habits and preferences.

PROCESS

A crucial value we can add as coaches is to offer processes that can help participants determine and achieve their desired outcomes. Before I describe what we did, let me say a few words about the Cultural Orientations Framework (COF) assessment, which was a key tool in our approach. Incidentally, the COF also gives us a language to describe salient traits of a culture. It can be used to describe the specificities of a “global coaching culture,” what may be missing in the current culture for it to be considered a “global coaching culture,” and to stimulate a conversation about specific cultural gaps to be bridged, avenues for development.
Cultural Orientations Framework

Culture is a group phenomenon. To systematically integrate culture into coaching, we need a language with which to talk about culture—a vocabulary to describe cultural characteristics. The task may appear daunting: there are an almost infinite number of possible behaviors, norms, values, and basic assumptions. The good news is that we can take a pragmatic approach and focus on the most relevant and salient aspects, building upon the work of eminent interculturalists. The Cultural Orientations Framework (COF; Rosinski, 2003, Part II) is meant to serve that purpose. The COF is an integrative framework designed to assess and compare cultures. The COF assessment is a coaching-specific measurement tool that can be invaluable for introducing meaningful dialogue about culture into coaching and coach training. It can be used to establish individual and collective COF profiles, while providing the scope for creating new cultural dimensions that reflect unique contexts.

The COF includes a range of cultural dimensions/orientations, grouped into seven categories of practical importance to leaders, professional coaches, and anyone striving to unleash human potential in organizations:

- sense of power and responsibility;
- time management approaches;
- definitions of identity and purpose;
- organizational arrangements;
- notions of territory and boundaries;
- communication patterns;
- modes of thinking.

Unlike traditional interculturalism, I am less interested in describing static and binary traits of a culture than in having a vocabulary to depict dynamic and complex cultural features. Aristotle declared that “out of two contradictory propositions, if one is true, the other must be false.”* Ironically, this is true and false at the same time! Binary thinking (or) tends to promote polarization and division. Dialectics (and) helps us find new ways to reconcile alternatives, leverage differences, and enable unity in diversity (Rosinski, 2003, pp. 57-58).

The COF assessment

In 2006, I started to build an assessment tool based on the COF. The tool makes it possible to provide specific feedback to individuals and groups and identify concrete opportunities for development. The online COF assessment is easily accessible to individuals, teams, and organizations around the world.† In truth, the “cultural profile” concept is somewhat of a stretch. Cultural orientations

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*On Interpretation (Book 1, Part 9), the second of six works on logic making up Aristotle’s Organon.
†Please refer to (Rosinski, 2010) for further information about the tool.
(unlike psychological preferences) depend to a large extent on the cultural context. This means that orientations frequently change (at least to some degree) depending on the situation (e.g., low context at work, high context with family and with close, longtime friends). Therefore, how can we establish a reliable cultural profile? One solution is to devise a cultural profile in each situation. The cultural profile would be accurate, but only in that situation. Another solution is to accept that an individual cultural profile is only meant to represent a default, an overall tendency.

Table 1. Cultural Orientations Framework (COF)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Category Dimensions</th>
<th>Dimension Descriptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sense of Power &amp; Responsibility</td>
<td>Control/Harmony/Humility</td>
<td>Control: People have determinant power &amp; responsibility to forge the life they want.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Harmony: Strive for balance &amp; harmony with nature.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Humility: Accept inevitable natural limitations.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scarcity/Plentiful</td>
<td>Scarce: Time is scarce resource. Manage time carefully!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Plentiful: Time is abundant. Relax!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Management Approaches</td>
<td>Mono/chronic/Polychronic</td>
<td>Monochronic: Concentrate on one activity and/or relationship at a time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Polychronic: Concentrate simultaneously on multiple tasks and/or people.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Past/Present/Future</td>
<td>Past: Learn from the past. The present is essentially a continuation or repetition of past occurrences.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Present: Focus on “here and now” &amp; short-term benefits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitions of Identity &amp; Purpose</td>
<td>Being/Doing</td>
<td>Being: Stress living itself &amp; development of talents and relationships.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Doing: Focus on accomplishments &amp; visible achievements.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Individualistic/Collectivist</td>
<td>Individualistic: Emphasize individual attributes &amp; projects.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Collectivist: Emphasize affiliation with group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Arrangements</td>
<td>Universalist/Particularist</td>
<td>Universalist: All cases should be treated in same universal manner. Adopt common practices for consistency &amp; economies of scale.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Particularist: Emphasize particular circumstances. Favor decentralization &amp; tailored solutions.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Change: Value dynamic &amp; flexible environment. Promote effectiveness thru adaptability &amp; innovation. Avoid routine, perceived as boring.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Protective: Protect oneself by keeping personal life &amp; feelings private (mental boundaries), &amp; by minimizing intrusions in one’s physical space (physical boundaries).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sharing</td>
<td>Sharing: Build closer relationships by sharing one’s psychological &amp; physical domains.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Patterns</td>
<td>High Context/Low Context</td>
<td>High Context: Rely on implicit communication. Appreciate meaning of gestures, postures, voice &amp; context.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Low Context: Rely on explicit communication. Favor clear &amp; detailed instructions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Direct/Indirect</td>
<td>Direct: In conflict or with tough message to deliver, get your point across clearly at risk of offending or hurting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Indirect: In conflict or with tough message to deliver, favor maintaining cordial relationship at risk of misunderstanding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Affective/Neutral</td>
<td>Affective: Display emotions &amp; warmth when communicating. Establishing &amp; maintaining personal &amp; social relations are key.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Formal/Informal</td>
<td>Formal: Observe strict protocols &amp; rituals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Informal: Favor familiarity &amp; spontaneity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modes of Thinking</td>
<td>Deductive/Inductive</td>
<td>Deductive: Emphasize concepts, theories &amp; general principles. Thru logical reasoning, derive practical applications &amp; solutions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Inductive: Start with experiences, concrete situations, &amp; cases. Using intuition, formulate general models &amp; theories.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Analytical/Systemic</td>
<td>Analytical: Separate whole into its constituent elements. Dissect problem into smaller chunks.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Systems: Assemble parts into coherent whole. Explore connections between elements &amp; focus on whole system.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Intercultural coaching assumes a “multiple realities” view of the world. Culture, from this perspective, is highly contextual, dynamic, and fluid. Capturing data through the COF assessment in a particular moment is useful for generating conversations and making sense of change processes, but not so helpful in seeking definitive truths about individuals, groups, or societies.

THE INTERVENTION

Cultural audit through interviews and use of the COF assessment

My company was first called upon by the leader of the integration team to conduct a cultural audit using the COF assessment. I will illustrate here how the COF assessment, in combination with interviews, allowed us to gain valuable insights. Both CEOs, together with the entire top management committee, found the cultural findings illuminating and readily approved our recommendations. One committee member, who had a reputation for being particularly skeptical about these “soft” managerial aspects, commented on the precision of the cultural analysis and usefulness of the recommendations.

Two colleagues and I conducted a total of five days of interviews in France and the Netherlands. More than 100 participants completed the Cultural Orientations Framework assessment. The high response rate confirmed people’s enthusiasm about the alliance and curiosity to learn about culture. We added five supplemental dimensions to the standard dimensions, based on polarities that emerged during the interviews and appeared relevant.

Looking at cultures, we noticed clear similarities and differences, as well as intermediate situations (see Table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance/Relevance for the Alliance</th>
<th>Clear Similarities</th>
<th>Similarities with Some Differences</th>
<th>Clear Differences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>Scarce-plentiful time</td>
<td>Being-doing</td>
<td>Hierarchy-equality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control-harmony-humility</td>
<td>Competitive-collaborative</td>
<td>Direct-indirect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Universalist-particularist</td>
<td>Formal-informal</td>
<td>Active-reflective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Monochronic-polychronic</td>
<td>Stability-change</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium/Low</td>
<td>Past-present-future</td>
<td>Individualistic-collectivistic</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High context-low context</td>
<td>Protective-sharing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What-who</td>
<td>Affective-neutral</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Generating-questioning</td>
<td>Deductive-inductive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Proactive-reactive</td>
<td>Analytical-systemic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Planning-emergent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Key similarities and differences between two cultures

8 Again, I have eliminated some details and will not describe the context to protect confidential information about this strategic alliance, which is currently under way.
Below are some examples (among 22 dimensions) of these findings, in summary form. They should give you a sense of the type of insights that can be gained from this exercise (see Figures 1-5).

I insisted that our “suggestions” were meant to stimulate further dialogue, reflection, and action. I highlighted our coaching bias: as facilitators, we add the most value when we help people devise for themselves their own solutions and actions. In my experience, pertinence as well as ownership is best achieved this way, maximizing performance as well as satisfaction.

**Figure 1. Example COF dimension results: Scarce-Plentiful Time**

- **Orientations assessment [ % of occurrences]**
  - Scarce: Clear 23.5, Mild 20.5, Neutral 15.7, Mild 20.5, Clear 2.0
  - Plentiful: Clear 53.9, Mild 58.1, Neutral 53.0

- **Descriptions and Illustrations**
  - Asset (productivity) and potential pitfall (constant rush without necessarily devoting time to what matters the most)
  - FR: peoples seem to take more time for building relationships
  - NDL to the point – tighter timeframes

- **Suggestions**
  - Clarify vision and strategy should help devote time to what is really important
  - Give permission (to self and others) to regularly slow down. Strive for effectiveness as well as efficiency.
  - Paradoxically, it is often by treating time in a plentiful fashion that you can appreciate its scarcity

**Figure 2. Example COF dimension results: Being - Doing**

- **Orientations assessment [ % of occurrences]**
  - Doing: Clear 15.9, Mild 26.5, Neutral 25.4, Mild 24.5

- **Descriptions and Illustrations**
  - Results normally distributed, more on the Doing side.
  - A recognition that it is important to invest time to build good relationships between people, to get to know each other, to “get the basic rights”! Also strong motivator for many people we have interviewed.
  - Learning from the others, growing by broadening one’s horizon is also a motivator for people.
  - “We need quick wins”. “Define/measure success”.
  - “We need to show that this cooperation is a success”

- **Suggestions**
  - To increase performance (Doing), building constructive relationships and engaging in personal/team development is called for (Being).
  - Establish a culture of regular feedback exchanges around behaviors and their impact.
  - Do not overlook the human/relationship source of motivation when planning meetings/workshops.
  - The trust built this way facilitates subsequent collaborations.
Even when acting as consultants, we displayed another bias: favoring unity in diversity rather than polarization. The descriptions and suggestions should make clear that each group has valuable lessons to teach and to learn, and that both groups will sometimes need to go outside their respective comfort zones.

**Integration workshops with mixed project teams - Collaboration with the integration team**

After the initial phase, we launched a series of workshops with various project teams combining Dutch and French professionals.

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**Figure 3. Example COF dimension results: Hierarchy - Equality**

![Graph showing distribution of hierarchy and equality orientations assessment](image)

**Descriptions and illustrations**
- The Dutch are used to a “no nonsense” approach favoring quick decision processes and autonomy.
- FR: “you need to discuss things upfront/pre-sell/agree – to avoid discussions in meetings”. At NDL people speak up their ideas in meetings. The FR way is regularly perceived as a barrier that reduces effectiveness in meetings.
- However, in its majority FR people declare they would prefer a more equalitarian approach.

**Suggestions**
- As much as possible, promote more empowerment at FR (learning from the Dutch way)
- For the Dutch, learn to engage in “Constructive Politics” when necessary (learning from the French way) particularly in delicate, controversial situations

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**Figure 4. Example COF dimension results: Direct - Indirect**

![Graph showing distribution of direct and indirect orientations assessment](image)

**Descriptions and illustrations**
- NDL: say what you mean and go to the point. Dutch may come across as much more assertive, too blunt, even aggressive at bringing their ideas or criticizing (“direct kritiek”)
- FR: more caution is exerted before voicing opinions in delicate situations (particularly with superiors)
- No serious difficulties reported. What about after the “honeymoon period”? (a)

**Suggestions**
- Strive to leverage directness and indirectness by combining their underlying values: clarity and sensitivity
  - being clear and firm with the content while being careful and sensitive with the form
  - i.e., direct on the substance and indirect on the process (as much as necessary to avoid loss of face)
working in specific domains where synergies were sought after. Our intervention could primarily be considered as “global team coaching” since our main goals were (1) To help each team become most effective, particularly by making the most of its cultural diversity; and (2) To facilitate the definition and commitment around specific team deliverables, which would add maximum value for the alliance.

We quickly saw that there were indeed more cultural similarities than differences between team members. We also noticed that, by and large, team members were getting along reasonably well, to the extent that some participants initially questioned the need to spend one day and one evening of their time in an integration workshop. The perception by some on the French side was that “We don’t have a problem. The issue lies with our management. They don’t appreciate what we can offer.”

Figure 6 illustrates a typical scenario. The mixed project team comes up with a brilliant idea. In the French hierarchical organization, unlike the more equalitarian Dutch, the idea is then presented to a manager, who presents it to his manager, and so on. By the time the proposal reaches the top level, many crucial elements have disappeared, having been inadvertently filtered out by middle executives who didn’t necessarily master the technical aspects. Good ideas are sometimes consequently thrown out. On one occasion, a French project member found himself by chance travelling in the same plane as his CEO. He mustered the courage to approach the top leader directly and they had a long conversation. The CEO understood the idea’s potential and decided to accept a proposal that had been previously misrepresented and rejected!
However, the majority of French executives would not have given themselves the permission to speak directly to the big boss. In fact, many were reluctant to make waves by either pushing ideas too forcefully or by offering constructive criticism to their superiors: “This is too risky!” Even if the French hierarchical culture had not seemed like an issue on first analysis, it was an obstacle because the project teams lacked the empowerment necessary to bring tangible breakthroughs for the alliance. French members were also overly cautious with new ideas. They knew that each new proposal would require going up the corporate ladder again to obtain the necessary authorizations. The Dutch were becoming impatient, longing for action (see Figure 7 on next page).

To bring about positive change, our team coaching had to complement individual leadership development and organizational progress. Often, these constitute separate, yet hopefully interconnected, interventions. In this particular case, leadership development initially took part in the context of the team workshops. Participants had the opportunity to discuss their personal cultural orientations and were encouraged to learn alternative cultural approaches from their colleagues when necessary. Many French executives began to realize that they had to take initiative themselves, going beyond their own cultural assumptions, to promote empowerment, learning from the Dutch example. They developed as leaders by expanding their worldview and associated repertoire of behavioral options.

**Figure 6. Throwing out good ideas**

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At the same time, I had the chance to work with the CEOs directly, as well as with the integration team in charge of supervising the various projects. This allowed us to address organizational progress as a whole. In particular, it became clear on the French side that empowerment was a two-way street. The top team decided to play its part by delegating more authority, granting permissions to make decisions within broader and clearer boundaries. Also, the top executives encouraged project teams to solicit their input early on, rather than devoting unnecessary time to building formal and lengthy proposals that might end up being rejected. French project members, on the other hand, had still to overcome personal fears and cultural habits by seizing the granted power and taking action.

Against their original cultural tendencies, the top team, together with the integration team, took the time to organize a festive event for all mixed project team members. This was a unique chance to build relationships and to inspire everyone. At one moment, both CEOs held hands while jugglers were throwing flying objects around them. A futurologist discussed the opportunities and threats in their industry. A company famous for its service orientation in another sector gave some provocative messages. Their main common client’s CEO shared his enthusiasm and expectations for the alliance. And I took the opportunity to encourage participants to make the most of the integration workshops, and to challenge each part to play its part for resolving the empowerment issue.

By the end of the year, the workshops resulted in the realization that more Being had indeed helped more Doing together. More Being meant getting to know and understand each other.

**Figure 7. Reflection versus action**

*Let us carefully think about this idea!*

*Let’s cut to the chase!*

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better (particularly cultural differences and ways of working); overcoming occasional misunderstandings and frustrations, which were damaging the mixed project team’s performance; developing personal relationships (becoming “buddies”); and some (albeit still limited) personal and leadership development.

In one instance, two team leaders who were previously upset and no longer speaking with one another, understood the cultural differences behind their issue. Consequently, this was no longer viewed as a personal problem. They realized that they ultimately shared the same goals and developed a personal connection. It took this workshop for them to come together.

This resulted in more Doing: focusing energy on adding value to the alliance through achieving quick synergies and starting to propose more ambitious gains, which implied deepening the partnership.

It also became clear that several challenges revealed during the interviews now required decisions by the top team.

- *Time and priority issue:* mixed project team work was in addition to the team members’ main job.
- *Need for a clear vision for the future:* There was a ‘chicken and egg’ situation: the lack of time and limited leadership development often led to a reactive and cautious approach (with some positive exceptions). Teams waited for the top to clarify the vision, while the leaders waited for mixed project teams to show results and make proposals!
- *Need to clarify how the alliance could be a win-win to ensure full commitment:* The shared (yet unspoken) perception was that win-win would not happen solely through an exchange of best practices and quick synergies.

Consequently, rather than focusing on culture per se, I decided to concentrate on the vision when working with the top team.

**Top team coaching**

The top team coaching intervention started with one-to-one phone conversations with both CEOs. They did not know exactly what to expect from this session and appreciated the suggestion to focus on the vision in the limited time available (one evening and one day which ended up, at the last minute, as one evening and one morning!). It seemed important to establish the fundamental reasons for deepening the strategic alliance in a mutual beneficial way, to articulate a common vision, and to envisage the necessary actions to make the vision a reality.

These conversations allowed me to understand that my mission was realistic. There was still sufficient alignment between the two
CEOs’ goals and it seemed possible to articulate a common vision and path forward. Both were also in agreement with my proposed agenda for the meeting.

I started summarizing what had been accomplished in that year (2009) and quickly moved to letting them voice the various reasons for partnering. Both sides mentioned important arguments in favor of the alliance. I challenged them about possible conflicts of interests. Competition was still present but seen as a marginal issue. One simple rule was confirmed: avoid bidding separately.

Without revealing the specifics here, a common vision did emerge involving excellence at all levels (customer experience, operations, economic performance) and commitment to innovation in all areas (e.g., IT, security, sustainable development). They crystallized the vision around a breakthrough concept in their industry, agreeing to focus first on local excellence, which would also be the cornerstone to international expansion. I used the following visioning model (see Figure 8) to facilitate the next discussion. What does this vision imply? How can you foster alignment in crucial interconnected areas so that your vision can become a reality?

**Figure 8. Visioning model**

![Visioning Model Diagram](https://example.com/visioning-model.png)

For example, among the motivators, the following are some of the enablers cited: pride in being the best; pleasure in the collaboration; curiosity – an opportunity to go beyond national horizons, exchange ideas, and have knowledgeable sparring partners. Moreover, knowing where the partnership is heading was an important source of motivation. Conversely, not having this vision created uncertainty, which was an obstacle.
Regarding competencies, the top team identified several gaps. Most of these could be considered leadership qualities: creativity, farsightedness, entrepreneurial skills, result-orientation, empowering behaviors, etc.

As far as culture is concerned, the shared view was that leveraging cultural diversity between the two organizations did not equate to building a uniform culture. While appreciating and possibly leveraging differences is valued, uniformity is not. It is essential to leverage Universalism and Particularism. In other words, strive for coherence and economies of scale while preserving flexibility (notably tailoring to specific circumstances).

The role of the integration team was stressed. It served as a challenger, daring to provide constructive criticisms to the top team, and an enabler for the mixed project teams.

**Integration team meeting**

In my subsequent meeting with the integration team, we discussed the top team’s session outcomes. I encouraged them to take up the top team’s invitation to be challenged, particularly to ensure the top leaders would follow through with concrete actions after the consensual views expressed during our meeting: communicating the vision, initiating management/leadership development for staff, etc.

We discussed possible next steps:

- **Strategic Human Resources:** The integration team could both promote this idea and work in concert with HR management from both organizations. The goal is to ensure all HR levers are aligned with the vision and help promote the various routes of progress. For example,
  - Establish a leadership/management-competences model (which may include variations but with sufficient coherence between the two);
  - Tie reward system and promotions to leadership/management excellence (as compared with the model);
  - Offer training and coaching to help develop the necessary competences;
  - Take into account these specific “soft” managerial/leadership skills in addition to technical expertise when engaged in recruitment and selection processes.
- **Organizations:** Adapt structure and work processes to maximize synergies while preserving the desired level of independence between the two organizations (in alignment with the vision).
• **Mixed project teams:** Focus on select projects which can add significant value for the alliance. Coach these teams to help them advance on a high-performance journey.
  
  • Build on outputs from work with the top team;
  • Conduct systematic assessment of team’s strengths and weaknesses to determine avenues of progress (which are likely to be different for each team);
  • Build on strengths and address obstacles to success;
  • Enable concrete behavioral changes, addressing the psychological as well as the cultural dimensions;
  • Provide experiential activities, including role-plays and feedback exchanges;
  • Facilitate action planning that builds on these insights.

At this time, it will be up to the integration team and the top team to build on the initial momentum. They have an opportunity to make history in their industry. They have successfully passed the first hurdles, but the race is far from over yet. There will be many distractions, many projects competing for the leaders’ attention and the companies’ resources. It will take audacity and perseverance to commit to this innovative, common vision and to invest in human development (individuals and teams) to make this strategic alliance a success. Here lies our limitation as external coaches: only the coachees can progress courageously and resolutely on their journey.

**CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Coaching is “the art of facilitating the unleashing of people’s potential to reach meaningful, important objectives” (Rosinski, 2003, p. 4). Systematically integrating culture into coaching unleashes more potential by tapping into the richness of cultural diversity. Cultural differences become an opportunity rather than a problem.

What is needed, however, is a dynamic and inclusive view of culture, rather than the traditional static, binary understanding of culture. This also reflects on how we use the Cultural Orientations Framework: to open new conversations, possibilities and choices; and to foster human growth by leveraging differences rather than establishing a limiting, fixed “absolutely valid” assessment.

Beyond culture, I advocate for a global, multiple-perspectives approach (Rosinski, 2006, 2010). Global coaching is not limited to culture but can call upon various, interconnected variables as
needed. In a new phase, the psychological perspective might take precedence over culture (for example, referring to transactional analysis, developing an assertive “OK-OK” attitude to build and maintain constructive relationships). The spiritual perspective might also come to the fore as top leaders reflect on the meaning of their enterprise and its broader impact on society.

Our approach consisted of a combination of activities. While some didn’t conform to a purist’s view of coaching (i.e., being non-directive), they maintained a coaching “spirit” or intention nonetheless: it was all about enabling people to unleash their potential to reach meaningful, important objectives. Still, we made clear to announce which “hat” we were wearing at any given time: consultant, presenter, or coach.

Moreover, while this particular situation may be quite different from your reality, it has been my general experience that, whatever the context and whenever possible, we should coach simultaneously at the individual, team, and organizational levels, striving to bring about alignment and mutual reinforcement for maximum impact.

How useful is the concept of “global coaching culture” in practice? First, coaching (and global coaching, in particular) is seen here less as a professional practice or leadership style (among other possible styles) than as a general philosophy, outlook, and mindset that permeates everything. “Global coaching” is viewed as a “culture,” that includes underlying norms, values, basic assumptions, and fundamental beliefs, as well as the associated visible behaviors and practices.

Several ingredients of such a culture were apparent in the case study. The concept underscores a vision of such an ideal cultural context, as well as a possible path forward toward this sought-after “global coaching culture,” which can be approached without being fully reached.

However, it is questionable whether the “(global) coaching culture” concept per se would make/have made a real difference. My impression is that the ingredients matter more than this particular conceptual envelope. A more critical concept is the necessity to move from a simplicity paradigm to a complexity paradigm that can embrace the interconnected nature of our reality and foster unity in diversity (see Rosinski, 2010). What is also crucial is the sense of personal responsibility, choice, and power which coaching reveals and promotes. In the end, what may count the most are the coach’s congruence, authenticity and determination in embodying the “global coaching culture,” thereby setting a constructive example.
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