Mike’s Musings:
Hints and Help from Mike Jay:
The Future of Executive Coaching

Mike Jay

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The Future of Executive Coaching

In some ways, the future of executive coaching mirrors the leading edge of leadership development, at least in my view. I see some basic “camps” forming around several lines or research disciplines that are quickly rising to the top of the pack. I’ve labeled each and provided examples according to their relationship to David Kolb’s Learning Style Paradigm as a way to depict differences:

**Behavioral:** Performance/Productivity/Behavioral Sciences

**Affective:** Emotional Intelligence/Resilience/Affective Neuroscience

**Perceptual:** Subject-Object/Adult Development/Cognitive Neuroscience

**Symbolic:** Spiral Dynamics/Integral/Systems Science (This particular group being an opportunity to consider the metasystemic role of synthesizing all branches and disciplines, albeit a Herculean task; only a few have the insight for leading.)

Realizing that we have to mention the past and present with the future, we can’t take our eyes off the bottom-line behaviors that must be the ultimate shape of executive coaching. The issues of “how” we get there is where the past, present and future converge and diverge.

I often bridge these time dimensions through the “integration of personal freedom with business reality.” This phrase continuously reminds me that, at the end of the day, performance counts. I believe the future of executive coaching lies in how we get there.

I don’t have the space here to go into depth, only to begin to shape a multilogue. Here are some ideas to consider.

**Behavioral**

This is the largest camp today and over time will hold and perhaps gain in prominence, especially in times of “short-term crisis.” We’ll have every consultant worth their salt in the world driving coaching as another part of their methodology, even though no one will define coaching as a single standard. So, we do have the “leadership dilemma” proposed by Bennis and Nanus in *Leaders* where, in 1987, they searched for a definition of leadership and encountered 800+ definitions. I suspect that number has at least doubled or tripled by now! The performance realm functions largely in the behavioral realm with some moving into system design to affect behavior — but remaining largely a behavioral approach.

Therefore “executive coaching” will become whatever you can sell to clients in the performance camp!

**Affective**

Clearly this camp is widening rapidly. From its educational roots in emotional intelligence, and now with leadership and business focus through Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee in *Primal Leadership*, [2002] we’re having a full blown network of emotional intelligence emerging in executive coaching. Emotional Intelligence as defined by Goleman is “The capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships.” This system focuses on the limbic system (3 brain systems: autonomic, limbic, executive [neo-cortex]) and functions to improve results through attention to emotional competence.
Perceptual
One of the best treatises for executive coaching in the realm of perception would be to pick and research the Santiago Theory of Cognition by Maturana and Varela. With there being a basis for all things cognized; working through the adult development literature from most recently: Robert Kegan, to Michael Commons, William Torbert and Kurt Fischer, one can gain a quick (however not easy) picture of why adult development is so critical to executive coaching. An interesting piece of information is that the number of executives in their forties has increased remarkably in the past ten years and therefore mid-life issues are clearly a part of executive coaching. Understanding type dynamics as put forth through Carl Jung’s theories is in my view another emerging frontier in executive coaching led in part through the work of Catherine Fitzgerald.

Symbolic
This probably seems like a strange label for executive coaching and I’m certainly open to other ideas here. However, it may be an apt description for the huge tsunami of work converging as a result of using abstraction and metaphor to explain complexity. Whether it is complexity theory, requisite organization, integral psychology, organizational design or metaphorical research, I'm seeing more and more people attracted to linguistics, narrative psychology and other areas of consilience like Spiral Dynamics Integral, The Integral Institute, The Sante Fe Institute and others. These initiatives are popping up around the world to deal with increasing levels of complexity occurring as a result of the geopolitical globalization that is confronting executives today.

Well, that’s a short introduction to the future of executive coaching as I see it from the catbird’s seat along the Oregon Trail. I’d welcome your ideas, comments and questions at musings@leadwise.com.

You’re welcome to view my personal notes from a 2003 conference on Coaching for Business Results held in the Financial District of New York City by The Conference Board. The website is: http://www.executivecoachsummit.com/cbr.

In closing, this is an extraordinary time in the world and in executive coaching. Pressure on executives has never been greater and the demands from all areas of their lives will increasingly create the need for executive coaching in my view. I suspect and believe that the executive coach will require significantly more training and awareness than most have at this point in time. As the discipline matures and the lines between camps blur, executive coaching will become a much more sophisticated discipline than most people currently realize. This is due, in large part, to the increasing sophistication of executive work in response to increasingly complex life conditions over time.

Mike Jay
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“To grow up to succeed and be happy is to develop the mind and character necessary to satisfy our needs, achieve our goals, and fulfill our dreams. But what needs and which goals and dreams? That is the first question we must answer. Only then can we seek to discover what kind of mind and character produce success and happiness. . . .

I have learned that we grow for many reasons, but if three of these are absent we begin to die psychologically. To grow, we must be in an alive relationship with others, whether as workers, partners, parents, or friends, even as communicants and believers in God. . . . [The] greatest growth occur[s] when a trusting and accepting relationship encourage[s] . . . vulnerability and openness to the influence of a respected person [we] love. . . . However, just being in an alive relationship is not enough; another impetus to grow must be present, a basic drive. . . . to grow. Our drive to grow. . . . goes hand in hand with the need for more alive relationships. Societal agents, such as families and schools, can subdue if not snuff our drive to grow.

A third necessary impetus to growth is to have a vision of what we want to become. A hopeful vision of the future inspires us to grow up.”

-- Douglas Heath
Fulfilling Lives:
Paths to Maturity and Success
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