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CONSIDERATIONS ON THE EMERGENCE OF
ORGANIZATIONAL COACHING
International perspectives

Michel C. Moral and Sabine K. Henrichfreise

INTRODUCTION

If many books have been written addressing organizational change, very few mention organizational coaching. None provides frameworks and perspectives that can assist coaches working in multinational companies or on cross-border challenges. Most approaches rely on either the Organization Development (OD) paradigm (Lewin 1947; McGregor 1971) or the Corporate Culture Change methods (Schein 1985). Models were either ‘commitment based’, trying to convince employees and middle management by showing positive images of the future, or ‘compliance based’, changing behaviours by imperatives. These models only go so far in providing guidance and clarity for coaches immersed in the complexity of global business. The two authors have published a book on this subject in France (Moral and Henrichfreise 2008). This chapter summarizes its key ideas and includes new international experiences from their organizational coaching activities.

Coaching for executives and high potential managers developed in the USA and in Europe during the 1980s. Team coaching for executive boards or for project leading teams started to be a reality at the beginning of the 1990s. Logically, organizational coaching should have emerged early in the millennium. In fact, its development has been slowed down by the existence of several strong ‘compliance based’ methodologies like, for instance, business process re-engineering (BPR) (Stewart 1993) and performance management. These methodologies assume a top-down approach with an ‘external expert’ or ‘guru’ role for highly paid consultants. They give token attention to inclusive, action-learning approaches which position organizational players at all levels and locations with shared responsibilities for change. It is in this latter kind of organizational change paradigm that executive coaching is starting to have an impact and which is the focus of this chapter.

CHANGES IN THE ENVIRONMENT

The organizational challenges face top level management and the executive coaches who they are increasingly engaging to assist them. Invariably, these challenges have strong international
dimensions, often related to shifting labour markets. With the rapid development of Chindia (China-India) during the last decade, Western countries are facing a situation where one billion new workers are potentially available all over the planet at a very low salary rate. In order to cut production and administrative costs, the occidental multinational companies are moving their workloads to countries where infrastructure and personnel costs are low. More and more plants, call centres and administrative tasks are implemented in Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa or Latin America. Market changes are now very fast, and competition between enterprises is looking more like a kayak race in the rapids, rather than a rowing contest on the Thames. If they want to be effective, coaches need to be informed about such trends. Plus, they need to be professionally and personally equipped to deal with international and organizational ‘white water’. The concepts and examples that follow may be of assistance.

**RECENT APPROACHES TO ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE**

If we consider the many theories of organization, from the very beginning, with Frederick Taylor and Henri Fayol, to the most recent ones, we eventually come to representing an organization as a system interacting with its environment. Within this system, four subsystems are possible entry points when one considers triggering a change:

1. The corporate culture. Many authors have considered changing the organization by changing its culture: Edgar Schein, of course, but also Ronald Burt (1999), John Kotter and James Heskett (1992), Gareth Morgan (1989), Millward (2003), Weick and Quinn (1999), Giroux and Marroquin (2005), etc.;
2. The corporate structure, which is more or less represented by a combination of the organization flowchart and the corporate processes, both being implicit or explicit depending on the country and the activity;
3. The information technology, which is providing new opportunities not only in terms of communication between people, but also in terms of managing data, to extract from it information and perhaps knowledge. Originally, the Socio-technical System Theory (STS) (Trist and Bamford 1951) considered the tight relationship between the social and the technical systems. Recent technology development makes it possible to have organization patterns that were beyond our imagination a few years ago. Not only is the functional structure, designed by Frederick Taylor in 1911, finally possible to implement, but also, since then, a multitude of other organizational layouts have been created. Enterprises are more and more like cyborgs, half human, and half cybernetics; and
4. The decision system, which carries objectives to execution, usually from top to bottom.

This four-subsystem representation is similar to how Dr Tony Grant at the University of Sydney (Grant and Greene 2003) identifies four elements in the coaching process:

- behaviours (equivalent of the decision system above);
- emotions (corporate culture);
- situation (structure); and
- cognition (technology).

There are tight interactions between the four subsystems. Acting on one of them usually strongly impacts on the other three. Any change process that takes account of only one
subsystem is doomed to fail because resistance will be overwhelming. The message is that while there are four potential entry points, it is necessary to traverse all four subsystems to facilitate sustainable change. Let’s look at an international example.

A medium-sized European company, specializing in telecommunication systems, decided to develop its business in the Americas and in Asia. A group of consultants recommended working on their corporate culture (i.e. subsystem 1 above), and a number of seminars were held with the different divisions – run by outside consultants. The objective was to develop a new set of values and behaviours. Resistance was high. The process did not work and the enterprise pursued its development unchanged. Later on, an organization manager was hired. He immediately noticed that the prevalent forces were the executives in charge of product lines. Also he noticed that the distribution managers, organized per geography, had limited power. He proposed shifting a number of key responsibilities from the product lines to the distribution lines. For instance, the decision to promote and increase the salary of the marketing groups was transferred to the distribution executives. The executive in charge of developing business in the Americas and in Asia became a king in an instant, and his first-year achievements far surpassed business objectives. The initiative was done in tandem with further and related virtual seminars on corporate culture and structure. These were run by managers with the assistance of executive coaches. The power of the intervention came from the fact that it interactively worked across subsystems 1, 2, 3 and 4.

**RESISTANCE AS AN OPPORTUNITY**

According to Tannenbaum and Hanna (1985) resistance is due to the lack of closure which prevents organizational members letting the past go. Another view is that change may create a threat to self-esteem (Jetten, O’Brien and Trindall 2002). Also, the analysis of potential gain and loss by people has been considered by Prochaska, Redding and Evers (1997) as a good predictor of resistance. But, the research on resistance and organizational inertia is insufficient overall and urgent attention is needed from the community of researchers.

What we know for sure is that resistance to change is inevitable, but not unhealthy. In the outside expert model, those who resist are often viewed as ‘not getting it’ and either demonized or excluded from the processes of change. In the complex international systems which make up large contemporary corporations, such approaches make little sense. Executive coaches who are savvy in such systems use resistance as information and as energy to accelerate the transformation. Coaches expect resistance and their sole concern is how to use it. Those who initially resist are engaged within the system (although some may need to leave the organization if they will not or cannot work with the transformation).

**AN ANALOGY WITH PHYSICS**

Physicist Louis de Broglie had the idea of ‘matter as wave’ and a consequence of this concept is what is called the ‘tunnel effect’. Unlike the classical mechanics of particles, quantum mechanics allows light as well as particles (such as electrons and protons) to appear even where the ‘wall’ of potential should prevent them from appearing. The analogy of tennis balls being bounced over a brick wall illustrates the effect of particles tunnelling through walls of potential (see Figure 1.1). Imagine thousands of tennis balls (representing particles) being simultaneously thrown to the ground with a given energy in each ball of, say, 100 units. The maximum bounce
of each ball is 100 units. If the wall is 150 units high, logically no tennis ball will bounce over the wall. But, quantum mechanics demonstrates that particles with energy lower than the wall of potential can go through it. More precisely, some of them, not all of them, will appear on the other side. This is called the ‘tunnel effect’ because it is as though there were a hole or a tunnel in the wall of potential, allowing some of the particles to pass through it. According to quantum mechanics, matter with appropriate energy can go through the wall, since particles, as well as light, have particle–wave duality. Waves, according to Schroedinger’s equation, can do what particles, according to Bohr’s laws, cannot.

In our tennis ball illustration, the scenario would be that a bunch of some 10,000 tennis balls is thrown on the ground with energy of 100, and that some of them would reach the other side of the wall. Tennis balls are not dual and therefore remain as matter. But, there are interactions between the balls inside this chaos of 10,000 tennis balls bouncing around everywhere. Some energy can be transferred by several balls to others, which then have enough impulse to fly over the wall.

However, it is our purpose to discuss organizational coaching, not physics or tennis. The tunnel effect is potentially a very useful concept for coaches working with executive clients who are facing very high and solid walls of resistance to vital change processes.

**LOOKING FOR A TUNNEL IN THE PROCESS OF ORGANIZATIONAL COACHING**

There are walls of potential – in the form of resistance – in all coaching, as shown in Figure 1.2, and it is much higher when we deal with international organizations. (As noted earlier, high-impact coaching views resistance as potential.)

Coaching helps a client change. Systems Theory considers that there are two levels of change. The first level of change (change 1, in Figure 1.2) is limited to do more of the same, for instance automate the processes to increase productivity and make more money. The second level of change (change 2, in Figure 1.2) is a shift of paradigm, for instance re-engineering the processes to access totally new areas of business and to double income.
To achieve a second-level change, the client has to reach a point (shown as A, in Figure 1.2) where everything becomes uncertain. A change of this nature requires considerable energy. For instance, a married couple may be in a stable state (state 1) in their relationship. Before they decide to have a baby (state 2), there are often months of discussion, contemplation and hesitation.

In international organizations, high and solid walls of resistance/potential exist between state 1 and state 2, i.e., between the current state and the desired state. In individual and team coaching, it is not a big issue because the height of the wall is usually not that intimidating and we have now developed sophisticated coaching tools to jump over or remove most of them. In organizational coaching, the walls are high, very high – and solid. The challenge for coaches is to find and utilize methodologies to work with organizations to harness energy and produce a tunnel effect which would allow change processes to proceed through the various walls (see Figure 1.3). The alternative of trying to knock down the walls requires enormous resources.
and saps organizational energy. Plus, it is unlikely to work – primarily because the resulting conflict will generate further resistance and higher walls. (Some conflict is, of course, a necessary part of any change process.)

**THE TUNNEL**

Our experience with enterprises demonstrates that we need to distinguish three categories of situations. The first one, illustrated in Figure 1.4, is the purely hierarchical organization: each person has only one manager.

Such organizations still exist. They are quite happy with normative change methods, as the vertical descending flow from objectives to execution usually works well. Bottom-up approaches are problematic because of the resistance factor, and pilot approaches are not very successful, due to the ‘not invented here’ syndrome. Probably the good old OD is still the best to trigger a change 2, to a matrix organization.

The second category of organization is the matrix, as shown in Figure 1.5. In these organizations, the main concern is reactivity to market changes. It is like a rowboat trying to react like a kayak in the rapids. Frequently, the decision system generates so many layers of control and such a level of uncertainty and frustration within middle management that this type of organization tends to give prevalence to only one of the dimensions of the matrix. The real functioning is more similar to a pure hierarchical system, where there is little chance of finding a ‘tunnel’. Wise executives have understood that frequently switching prevalence, from one dimension to another, is a way of adapting to the fluctuations of the environment. For these organizations, change 2 consists in moving towards the third category of organization. This is the hypermodern organization, also called ‘cyborg’ (cybernetic–organic) type of organization as shown in Figure 1.6.

In science-fiction literature, a cyborg is a human being part of whose body is made of electromechanical devices, and who therefore is a (cyb)ernetic (organ)ism. Very advanced organizations spend more than $US50,000 per employee to have an extremely sophisticated internal information system which allows management and sharing of all data, information and knowledge of the enterprise. Cyborg organizations are even more advanced as the information system is flexible enough to cope with frequent changes of structure. In Figure 1.6, teams (business entities like a branch office in a country) A and B are assembled in January to form a business unit. Later the same year, in June, a new business unit is created with
B and C. Such organizations have been designed to face rapid changes in the business environment.

Cyborg organizations are more and more common because of two major trends. The first is the decrease in the size of the teams functioning as a small enterprise within large organizations. For instance, in the 1980s, when IBM was still hierarchical, only a country subsidiary had control over the profit, thus a unit of tens of thousands of people. When the matrix layout was put into place in the 1990s, the IBM European business units (the product divisions for example) had control of the profit. Their size was several thousand people. Over time, the size of the unit functioning ‘as a business’ dropped to several hundred people. The second trend is that the information system now provides the glue that holds these small units together. More
precisely, it is supposed to provide the glue by managing the data and by helping transform these data into information and eventually into knowledge to be shared not only with the members of the organization, but also with customers and subcontractors. This intellectual capital is now more widely considered as an asset.

In the organizations represented in Figure 1.6, a Business Unit, the entity in charge of a business segment on the market, is a sub-organization, obtained by assembling several units functioning as a small enterprise, say A and B. If the market is changing, it is possible to create a new Business Unit, by assembling B and C. Adaptability is at its maximum level compared to the hierarchical (Figure 1.4) and matrix (Figure 1.5) organizations where a complete reorganization is needed to cope with a change of the market structure.

In fact, we need to consider two different situations when we are trying to initiate a change through a ‘tunnel’:

- move a matrix organization to a cyborg organization;
- move a cyborg organization to some kind of cyborg+ organization.

**MOVE A MATRIX TO A CYBORG**

Matrix organizations are not uniform. Some of them have already implemented an information system, which provides more or less the flexibility of a cyborg, except that the organizational flowchart is still rigid. The executives are not used to reigning over a kingdom whose borders change continuously and they hesitate to reshape their business unit with market fluctuations. Sometimes the corporate culture is the cause of the rigidity. For instance, in the field of imagery, enterprises involved in the ‘argenté’ technology, such as Kodak or Fuji, were too slow when the wave of ‘binary’ technologies appeared. Exactly like a tsunami, the wave caused devastation, forcing the whole ‘argenté’ supply chain to adapt or die. This was also true for all industries in the West where the cost of personnel is high: production has been displaced to countries where salaries are ten to twenty times less than in Europe or America. The automotive industry, clothing industry, etc. had to react quickly to declining margins. Currently, the balance between the euro and the dollar is forcing the European aircraft industry, especially Airbus and Dassault, to rapidly move production to the dollar zone. In these examples, the market change was sudden and all these organizations had difficulties implementing appropriate and timely responses.

Many matrix organizations are busy extending their business from the European and American regions to Eastern Europe, Latin America and Asia. Deeply involved in this challenge, they have no time to think about a new, creative way to higher levels of success, i.e., becoming a cyborg. Instead, they remain fixed in the matrix paradigm and concerned with doing more of the same. Coaches can be willing partners in maintaining this state which appears at the time – from the perspective of the organizational players – to be healthy.

An illustration of this situation comes from our recent involvement in the organizational coaching of a medium-sized company, specializing in financial services. The objective was to expand its international operations in order to become global. Due to the prudence of the executive team and to the very rigid corporate culture, we had to go through a very cautious process, working just with the top 200 managers. Our role as coaches was to work with them in groups of twenty through a two-day seminar. We facilitated discussion on a number of key issues, such as:

- Creating an above-country structure, for instance a worldwide headquarters;
- Having local persons as general managers of the subsidiaries;
• Including Asian or African cultures in the executive committee, which is still very European;
• Forcing the subsidiaries to use the same processes;
• Putting into effect a unique working language.

The process followed a predictable pattern. There was initial resistance to changing the status quo. The group coaching medium was useful in allowing a sharing of concerns and a building of trust and commonality among top-level managers. The company made progress on each of the key issues and people were generally satisfied. As coaches, we felt we had added value and we received very positive feedback. However, looking at this from the helicopter view, there was little substantial change. The result was a move from a matrix to a more sophisticated matrix. It was a first-level change process and the organization was still in state 1.

A second-level change would be to move such a matrix to a cyborg. Such a change would imply, in addition to the awareness and strong will of the executive committee, having access to many more than just the 200 top managers. Approaches, like World Café (Brown et al. 2005) described later, are then mandatory. That is, the process needs to harness more energy from more organizational ‘tennis balls’ in order to achieve a tunnel effect and thus navigate the walls.

MOVE A CYBORG TO A CYBORG+

Cyborg organizations are in continuous change and it is difficult to identify a ‘stable state 1’ and a ‘stable state 2’ as in Figure 1.2. Most organizational change theories (Lewin, 1946, 1951; Argyris, 1971; Porras and Silvers 1991; Srivastva and Cooperrider 1990; Schein, 1999; etc.) assume that the initial state is so solid that a phase of organizational destabilization or an ‘unfreezing’ is needed, followed by change and then a ‘refreezing’ to a new state (Lewin, 1947). For an achieved cyborg organization, a single, linear organizational process such as this is meaningless. Responding to environmental fluctuations is a permanent process and change happens through multiple interrelated processes that tap into all of the organizational sub-systems. As shown in Figure 1.6, the change occurs by redistributing the small units functioning as a business into a business unit able to cope with a new market challenge. The timeframes might be quite short and new structures are in a constant state of forming and reforming in response to or anticipation of market and environmental demands – all with global associations.

One-to-one executive coaching traditionally saw a coach working with an executive on a relatively stable set of goals over say a six- or twelve-month period. In the cyborg model, the coaching challenge is to assist executives to deal with rapid changes in responsibilities where predictable chains of command and stable goals are the exception rather than the rule. Flexibility, open-mindedness, creativity and a capacity for trust-building and collaboration are essential qualities. Coaches will increasingly be asked to assist clients to work developmentally on building up these kinds of skills and qualities.

Cyborg organizations require a pool of executives who are immediately ready to leave established business units and accept, in a flash, new responsibilities in a newly formed entity which combines elements of one or more business units. The goals of the new entity will not necessarily be clear, neither will the power and decision-making processes. It also means that the senior executive team has to acquire sufficient experience and wisdom to manage the managerial resources in this way. In this kind of fluid and dynamic environment there is a role for coaches in assisting executives to find some kind of clarity and focus.
This kind of change and highly volatile organizational model is still unusual, and we have limited experience in how to add high coaching value. However, the aim here is to raise awareness of the trends and challenges so that coaches can – like the executives they coach – avoid paralysis and work in-the-moment to design strategies that will be appropriate to the context.

In the next section, we describe a case study where the coaching interventions were constructed with the cyborg organizational paradigm. It is presented not as ‘best practice’, nor something that could be transplanted in a new context. It aims to illustrate the complexity of coaching in the international business environment and to stimulate reflection by coaches on how they might approach their current challenges in different ways.

**CASE STUDY**

In 2006, a French business was being acquired by a company based in Switzerland. The Swiss company was a technical leader in its field, operated worldwide, and was organized in a ‘three-dimensional matrix’ (functions, business operations and cross regions), had about 3,600 employees, managed a network of 40 representations and affiliates in the world and had presented a turnover of €520 million in 2006. The managing director of the French business – now a subsidiary – contacted an international business coach to help them succeed in their post-merger integration process.

Two weeks after the first phone conversation, the business coach was contacted by the human resources director (HRD) of the Swiss headquarters asking for support to reawaken the pioneering spirit of their leaders, to implement a culture of human innovation (and not only technical innovation), to prevent their leaders from becoming ‘control freaks’ and ‘useless globetrotters’ and to promote values like collective improvisation and creative relationships. In addition, they wanted to preserve their strong image of an ambitious, fast-growing, highly innovative company.

At the first meeting between the coach, the managing director and the HRD the different requests and their connections were explored. Included were items or themes such as, ‘How much time are you are willing to invest?’, ‘Do we need success indicators?’ and ‘How can the coach model the pioneering spirit when intervening?’ The discussion was fluid, different points of views were creatively analyzed and all participants agreed that a standard culture change process in ‘three steps’ would be the ‘security path’, attracting the group of ‘control freaks’ and disappointing the tribe of pioneers looking for something more unique, innovative and organic.

The ‘control community’ was searching for ‘managed’ change, the others for chaotic transformation. The subsidiary was interested in becoming a part of the overall organization, the ‘brain’ of the organization wanted culture change. Both were compatible in the sense that there was a need for developing a common spirit, innovative cooperation and shared values.

**ORGANIC REQUEST, COACH COMMUNITY AND THE TUNNEL POSSIBILITY**

When coaching a globally acting organization, we have to look at three different levels of interaction: the dynamics of the client system, the agility of the coaching system and the interaction of both. In addition to this, however, we must first find a set of answers to three core questions:
1 What requests are being made of the coach(es) by the organization, and from where did they emerge?
2 Can a single person coach an organization effectively?
3 How can we, as coaches, create the possibility of a tunnel effect when coaching an organization so as to support the client in his or her desire for transformation?

THE EMERGENCE OF THE ORGANIZATIONAL COACHING REQUEST

The coaching request of an organization can emerge from everywhere. As coaches, we are generally used to receiving these requests from the company’s top representatives, i.e., its managing director, its board of directors, its HRD. As it is, we might question the fact that top representatives have developed their own analyses and identified their own demand. Instead, let us imagine that they are somehow expressing a hidden request of the living system as a whole. In that case, we can furthermore imagine that the ‘organizational living system’ is already engaged in a sort of unconscious transformation process and that we, as coaches, can rely on its energy.

In this perspective we can also assume that an organizational coaching request could emerge from alternative sources – say through a subsidiary or from any other cell of the organizational periphery. In addition, this organizational request can emerge – simultaneously or not – in its different ‘phenotypes’: a desire for post-merger integration, a wish for cultural change (as expressed by headquarters), a request for developing leadership, a proposal to foster creative collaborative work, and so on. It is even possible to imagine that one specific request could change its phenotype when travelling throughout the organisation: a desire for post-merger integration finally becomes a request for culture change when approaching the centre, i.e., the headquarters of the organization.

After consideration, we decided to respect the original request as expressed by the managing director of the French subsidiary, to consider it as one face of the hidden, overall request of the organization and to honour the request for culture change, expressed by the executive committee. Furthermore we thought it possible to invite our clients to create meaningful connections between these phenotypes so that they would get a whole new picture of what was at stake and sense the overall hidden organizational request which wanted to emerge – much like putting the pieces of a puzzle together. To initiate that ‘connection creating’, we proposed a ‘wave of interviews’ with the intention of sensing the different phenotypes of the overall organizational request expressed in its various forms throughout the company.

A COACHING COMMUNITY TO MIRROR THE CLIENT’S ORGANIZATION

When we come to realize that an organizational coaching request can be expressed throughout the organization in terms of its different forms – training, individual coaching, leadership seminars, reorganization projects, mergers and acquisitions – we have to accept that even the most brilliant person cannot coach a profound organizational request alone. There is not only a need to combine various competencies, such as consulting, facilitation, coaching, creativity and intercultural sensitivity, but we also must take into account that coaching an organization means managing different interventions, at different places, at the same time, through different people in more than one language. Hence it follows that we have to create a ‘mirror image’ of the client organization by creating a coaching organization, meaning a community of coaches able to connect, create and contribute in a unique way.
A ‘standard’ network of connected individual coaches, as is regularly found, will not be sufficient. Instead, we need a community of coaches who are individually able to let go of their personal approaches in order to give way to some sort of collective creation. The community has to be capable of using their system as a ‘mirror image’ of the client’s system so as to sense the emergent opportunities and risks, to co-create appropriate interventions, to explore collective coaching and leadership and all questions which may arise during the coaching process.

Finally, these coaches have to be willing to take the risk of being part of this community today and of being excluded tomorrow, not because it is their own decision, but because the client system rejects a specific coach or because there will inevitably be ‘victims along the way’ in organizational coaching done through this kind of engagement. With respect to financial remuneration, innovative ways of ‘getting paid’ are needed because such a community cannot live with the traditional idea that one coach ‘claims’ the client and is therefore able to ask peers for a ‘perpetual annuity’ in terms of a fee percentage.

We decided to create such a coaching community by grouping together five different coaches who represented four different nationalities, were of different educational backgrounds, each speaking two or three languages and, as a whole, presenting various kinds of expertise in terms of facilitation and coaching skills. A previous successful, common coaching experience was an additional criterion for at least two of us. Furthermore, the coach who had been contacted by the client decided to experience the role of the ‘meta’ coach, meaning his role was to stay in the meta-position, interconnecting the different interventions, acting as the client’s contact point and choosing his or her direct system interventions very carefully. The coaching community met via phone conference calls and regular face-to-face meetings to ensure more thought-provoking conversations, to clarify possible interrelational cultural viruses and to allow space for co-creation, learning and exploring.

**ORCHESTRATING A TUNNEL EFFECT**

To instigate the possibility of creating a tunnel effect, we discussed various solutions:

- a The possibility of setting up a linear intervention map that would be deployed simultaneously throughout the whole system and that would hence create different energy disturbances at different levels and locations at the same time;
- b The option of accepting the various subsystem requests without any further discussion but of connecting them in terms of purpose, emergence and change through permanent conversations, both within the coach system and between the coach system and the client system at the top level;
- c The option of working with the executive committee to help them change the visible structure of the system (the organizational structure) and nurture the invisible living part of the system (i.e., its information, knowledge and communication flow) in addition to helping them change their collective leadership style through team coaching; and
- d The last option we discussed was to combine all these options ‘into one spirit’ and to add events of some overall connecting and emergence value, creating large group interventions such as Open Space events and World Cafés.

In addition, we discussed whether it would be necessary to start our intervention with work at the top level before dealing with the other ‘phenotypes’. Some of us found it difficult to accept that an organization can be coached without starting at the top level; others were convinced...
that this would be the best way to go. By exploiting our passionate and fruitful discussions as a possible mirror behaviour of our client organization, we started to gain awareness of the amount of energy required for the client system to accept and adopt our proposed approach of ‘orderly chaos’, wherein we consider an organization as a living and evolving system that accounts for the phenomena of emergence, evolution, bifurcation, hesitation and flow.

Coaching this organization by instigating a sort of creative chaos and maintaining the just-necessary order through regular conversations and specific schedules with the managers of the different units seemed, to us, to be the most effective approach to creating the possibility for generating sufficient energy to ‘pass through’ the tunnel of resistance and to stabilize the system on a new higher level.

We asked the client for a second meeting at which we presented them with our idea of using a community of international business coaches rather than the ‘one coach fits all’ methodology. We shared with them our different ‘intervention designs’, linking them to their specific objectives of reawakening the pioneering spirit and of looking for organizational innovation. To honour their search for an innovative approach to organizational coaching, and to assist their leaders to abandon their current ‘control trip’, we proposed our last option (d), the option of creative chaos, based on the idea of ‘letting go of control’ so that collective intelligence and system capabilities for self-organization could emerge. To our surprise, our proposal was accepted, as well as our recommendation to conduct a wave of interviews throughout the organization with the intention of sensing the unifying source for organizational coaching.

**TUNNEL INTERVENTION, TRIPLE POINT AND TIPPING MOMENT**

We conducted our ‘wave of interviews’ throughout the organization by talking to 30 people in different countries, representing the diversity of the organization. It turned out that the desire for optimized integration was a common ‘song’ expressed not only by the companies which had recently joined the group, but also by headquarters. Implicit in this request was the need for creating a common basis of understanding, the desire to be part of a real community and the need for acceptance as a high-value contributor. In other ‘cells of the organism’ we heard the need for more space to connect with others and to exchange, others asked for team coaching, and again others argued for a failure culture as a basis for innovation. We heard complaints about missing regulations, shadow management and the total absence of an inspiring and federating vision.

**Designing the ‘tunnel intervention’**

When combining these different ‘phenotypes’, the client started to realize that the source for organizational transformation was an overall implicit request for deeper, creative connections, a search for shared meaning and identity, and a need for freedom to explore. On this basis, we proposed to coach a two-and-a-half day event with about one hundred key players from different countries and functions. The purpose of this first event, as coordinated with headquarters, was to bring people together, make them exchange their respective successes and launch the platform to instigate a federating vision. With our support, the Executive Committee worked out an overall inspiring theme, implicitly referring to the organizational transformation request: ‘Integration and connection, a never ending source for creating our future.’

The event was conducted as a World Café (Brown et al. 2005) for the first day, with the
objective of having people connect through meaningful conversations. On the second day it was conducted as an Open Space Conference (Owen 1997; 2004), to enable the group to work out concrete actions, projects and initiatives. Combining both methodologies was important to create sufficient energy to pass through the tunnel a first time, to make collective intelligence emerge and to motivate different emerging leaders to take action and responsibility for launching future actions.

**Generating a momentary ‘triple point’**

In addition, we decided to provoke a momentary organizational ‘triple point’. In physics and chemistry, the triple point of a substance is the temperature and pressure at which three phases (gas, liquid and solid) of that substance may coexist in thermodynamic equilibrium. There is a moment where pure water, pure ice, and pure water vapour can coexist in a stable equilibrium. What is important to know is that at that point, it is possible to change all of the substance to ice, water or vapour by making infinitely small changes in pressure and temperature.

To use this triple point as a metaphor for our coaching process, we wanted to create a combination of time and pressure, enabling the one hundred people to achieve a state where they could collectively appreciate the value of the past, sense the emergence of the new, and feel the freedom of choice. Then, they could experience simultaneously the world of chaos, protection and emergence. At this point, little interventions like encouragement, a speech from a member of the board of directors (or an outside speaker) or a specific language can cause a group to ‘collapse’ to one of the three possible states: remaining in the past, embracing the future or getting stuck in the process of choice. Since our client’s values were those of pioneering and innovating, it was relatively simple to make the system collapse into the future state, even if there was a small group of ‘past promoters’, which is quite normal in such a coaching process.

However, even if this event was a tremendous success in terms of connecting, exploring the future and sharing feelings of being an integral part of a larger community, one intervention like this is not sufficient to stabilize the system at the new level and to trigger different daily behaviour, management or leadership patterns. Not only was it important to launch specific projects on cooperation and integration, but it was also crucial that the company’s formal structure nurtured this new way of thinking and connecting, and hence be adjusted to adapt. The various ongoing integration processes should be managed consciously so as to integrate the human dimension. In the new adaptive structure, new behaviour, such as risk taking, would be rewarded, whereas former behaviour, such as ‘control mania’, was to be ignored (which is more effective than being punished).

**Leveraging the ‘tipping moment’**

We therefore helped the company and its various leaders regularly fuel the ‘tipping moment’. As Gladwell (2002) expresses in his book, the word ‘tipping point or moment’ comes from the world of epidemiology. It’s the name given to that moment in an epidemic when a virus reaches critical mass. It’s the boiling point, and as he explains, ‘The virtue of an epidemic, after all, is that just a little input is enough to get it started, and it can spread very, very quickly’. Inspired by this metaphor, we invited our client to identify their seven per cent of pioneering leaders, those willing to take risks and to bet on collective intelligence more than on the
well-spread managerial, ‘I know what to do approach’. Simultaneously, we also enabled the system to maintain the necessary speed to get the new philosophy spread very, very quickly through different interventions launched simultaneously.

**COACHING THE INITIAL REQUEST OF THE FRENCH SUBSIDIARY**

One of us was appointed to coach the French subsidiary’s merger integration phase, but not as a huge step-by-step integration project. Instead the coach helped the various teams identify so-called ‘leverage projects’, such as ‘making a common offer’, ‘orchestrating visits and meetings’ and ‘optimizing the installation of a new and innovative test facility’. For all these projects, the human dimension was part of the agenda, as was cultural awareness. Also, gaining effectiveness as an international team was a strategic objective. After six months, we organized a World Café with 20 highly involved people to guarantee an exchange of experience, new ideas and ways of propagating this newly acquired knowledge throughout the organization. At the same time, one of our coaches helped the subsidiary’s Managing Director structure his team. The coach also assisted in developing their management skills and their way of working and taking decisions together.

**FOSTERING PERIPHERAL ALLIANCES**

Another coach was asked to encourage a cooperation between the French subsidiary and the German subsidiary in order to leverage ‘periphery collaboration’. The possibility of demonstrating intelligent and effective cooperation between sub-cells on the basis of individual initiatives impressed the executive committee. Consequently, their members started discussing and exchanging on processes of collaboration, integration and co-creativity when visiting the various subsidiaries, offices and factories. After nine months, these people were perceived as bridge-builders and challengers instead of useless globetrotters and headquarters control freaks. Some of these managers were even integrated, in some way, into the subsidiaries. Integration can indeed work in both directions.

**NURTURE INTERCULTURAL SENSITIVITY**

Another coach agreed to organize and facilitate cultural awareness seminars to increase understanding of the different cultures, businesses and ways of doing things. Since they were connected to ‘Integration and connection, a never-ending source for creating our future’, these seminars were not launched as separate training activities. As an integrated initiative, they helped increase connections between people and to spread a common spirit.

**CULTIVATE THE DIVERSITY OF COACHING**

Individual coaching was carried out in various forms and in different locations, including in headquarters. Interdisciplinary and cross-regional co-development groups were launched and peers helped peers create new solutions and share individual challenges. Coached by a few of us, these groups made it possible to maintain the network of conversations and collective learning,
hence combining the development of individual skills and promoting collective intelligence on an ongoing basis.

**HUBS, TRIBES AND VIBES**

After 28 months, the company culture leveraged the idea of the organization as a living system of hubs, tribes and vibes. Initiatives taken to organize ‘living hubs’, i.e., creative events of exchange, connection and conversation, spread naturally without being over-exaggerated.

‘Living tribes’, such as subsidiaries, functions, project groups and cooperation teams, developed an important sense of community for the duration of their existence. When a project was over, new tribes emerged to take the next step or to explore something new. One tribe (a commercial project team) even suggested organizing a World Café with clients and suppliers to extend their objectives and to get a bigger picture.

Finally, the company experienced the power of thinking in energetic ‘vibes’ (from the word vibration), rather than controlling the effects of particles working together. In quantum physics, an object is both a wave and a particle and it depends on the observer and his or her focus of attention as to which of these two dimensions finally take form. The company’s internal language integrated words and expressions, such as ‘communication wave’, ‘wave of rumours’, ‘negative vibes’ and ‘energetic vibes’.

In addition, some leaders developed tools, such as ‘energy barometers’ and ‘cooperation indicators’. This company’s workforce included an impressive number of engineers and especially chemists, quantum physicists and other creative people coming from 40 locations around the world. It thus represented the necessary diversity; the wave aspect of the business was clearly going to be easier to leverage than with a population of mono-cultural mechanical engineers.

Nurturing this idea of living hubs, tribes and vibes is a strategic task when an organization wants to maintain its organizational energy at a level high enough to maintain the system on the edge of sensitive disequilibrium, the state where ongoing creation, learning and agility is possible without falling into counterproductive chaos.

**THE TRIPLE RESULT**

The living culture changed. The so-called initial post-merger integration became a major lever of organizational transformation. By the way, this form of post-merger integration, as conducted by an intercultural coach, became the reference and business case for future integrations. Open Spaces and World Cafés were integrated as the ‘normal’ way of meeting and were described as a regular ‘living hub’ for connecting ideas, sensing future opportunities and asking those questions that no one asks individually. The value of technical innovation was strengthened and connected to the value of human innovation, which created more inspiring relationships with the customers and hence an even better image and – new business.

The organization structure evolved and continued to adjust with the synergy of the living system. The matrix organization was maintained as a reference, but ‘improvisational cooperation of tribes beyond borders’ was highly encouraged. Individual mobility from one unit to another was facilitated, and the group started to create a pool of executives who were ready to immediately leave their current tribe, i.e., a business unit, to create, connect or integrate a newly formed or existing tribe. In the beginning, there was little interest, but later the interest grew.

The leadership style was renewed. Through coaching and training, current and future leaders
learned to think together, to assimilate the idea of an organization as a living system and to develop other leaders. They recognized that diversity was the fuel for creativity, that living systems strive for identity and meaning and that if you want to keep a soulful company, employees need to express their soul in that business. They acknowledged that they had to combine the world of measurement with the realm of emergence, to create a breakthrough by creating and leveraging connections instead of analyzing parts and controlling indicators. They understood the possibility of simultaneously striving for individual excellence and for collective improvisation, to combine objectives and goals with the duo of intention and identity. They finally dared to ask the question: ‘Do we have to abandon the idea of permanent re-engineering and focus instead on regular organizational re-energizing?’

**WHAT OUTCOME FOR THE COACHING COMMUNITY?**

The coaching community turned out to be a permanent collective resource for perceiving the client’s system, its future opportunities, and its possible resistances and failures. Three coaches completed the entire 28-month coaching process, one was ‘rejected by the client system’ and one decided to leave the coaching community after nine months. Two new coaches were integrated, thus enabling the coaching community to itself experience and explore the issue of inspiring and effective integration. The community kept abreast through regular phone conversations and three face-to-face meetings. Emotional viruses were eliminated and the discussion of options was encouraged. At the end of this experience, this ‘coaching tribe’ was dissolved. Several coaches regrouped for new projects, others went their own way and reconnected later. Even others stayed together to create a learning community where each member had the possibility to ask their peers for advice, to show their vulnerability and to create new ways of coaching individuals, teams and organizations.

In this way, this ‘coaching tribe’ perhaps became a model for the new emerging reality for coaches, meaning getting connected for one project, then continuing one’s own way, then reconnecting differently for the next time, thus demonstrating that the art and mastery of creating living hubs, tribes and vibes is not only important for global businesses to leverage, but also for globally acting coaching communities. The tunnel effect is not only of major interest when working with a globally acting organization, but also for inspiring coaches to get to the next level of collective intelligence, creativity and wisdom.

**CONCLUSION**

As analyzed by Christopher Langton (1989; Langton et al. 1992) complex systems show four categories of behaviour; steady, periodic, ‘edge of chaos’ and chaotic. The fourth category is a permanent mess while the first two are inflexible. The third one is potentially truly adaptable and living systems behave this way, combining preservation forces with transformation forces, to make homeostasis and adaptation coexist.

Provoking tunnel effects to help organizations pass the walls of resistance invites us as coaches to shift our reference frames and to see organisations as living systems with its dilemmas, unpredictable bifurcation, and phenomena of emergence, hesitation and flow. Globally acting organisations represent a terrain propice for this kind of transformation since the genuine diversity of people, cultural patterns and notions of speed can be leveraged for creating the necessary amount of transformative energy. Theoretical studies (Kaneko and Suzuki 1994) suggest that
evolution, itself driven by a changing environment, leads the system to this ‘edge of chaos’. This is our ambition, as organizational coaches, to help locate this exact point where adaptation becomes possible without ruining the organization’s heritage or ‘genotype’.

The role of the coach is to find the most appropriate entry to the tunnel of change. The first step consists in analyzing the four subsystems (culture, structure, technology, decision process) and encourage clients to consider all of them – instead of focusing only on the one familiar to the HR community (culture) or to the management (decision process). Rather similar is the Ken Wilber (2000) Integral Model of four quadrants, or the Bolman and Deal (1997) Four Frames Model (structural/systemic, cultural/symbolic, psychosocial, and political).

Coaching is in fact a flexible process where the route is not to force resistance but either to use it or to stay away from it. Compared to other approaches, it needs to be ready to quit the rigid frame of a methodology. On a sailing boat, the rudder blade is useful not for maintaining a direction but for understanding what the boat wants. Once the skipper has gained this understanding, he or she can change the sheets of the sails to keep the heading. Listening to what the organization wants is the key to this type of coaching.

Bibliography


