

I am delighted to send you a copy of the first Whyte & Coaches Research Bulletin.

As you know, we were one of the first coaching groups in the world to emerge from research undertaken at a university, and one of the first to introduce evidence-based practice into Australia. We remain committed to the ongoing development of executive coaching as a global practice, and have now formalised that commitment in the form of our own ongoing research program. We hope these twice-yearly Bulletins will yield insights that will be of value to you in your efforts to maximise the impact of coaching in your organisations, and would love to hear from you any thoughts generated in response. Have a very happy Christmas, and may 2010 be a great year for you and yours.

Ann Whyte, Managing Director

Executive Coaching in Australia – a discussion

The Study

There have been few studies of the executive coaching industry in Australia and just one published study of purchasing clients (Dagley, 2007). In January 2009 we conducted our own survey. We interviewed 41 executives from 29 different organisations, all with responsibility for purchasing coaching services, now or in the past. 23 of the 29 organisations are clients of Whyte & Coaches. The study revealed a diversity of views and expectations, differences reflecting the ambiguity that still exists in defining executive coaching, an ambiguity with implications for the development of industry standards and regulation.

Background

Dagley's 2007 survey of 17 purchasers of executive coaching services focused on three questions:

1. How executive coaching is used;
2. How effective coaching is; and
3. The factors that make for a successful coaching assignment.

We were interested in exploring any changes in perspective that may have evolved since 2007 given that coaching continues to grow and develop. We were particularly interested in understanding:

1. Whether or not there is emerging a clear segmentation of the executive coaching market, in terms of services required.
2. The importance that clients currently attach to formal coaching qualifications.
3. Clients' views as to the future of executive coaching.

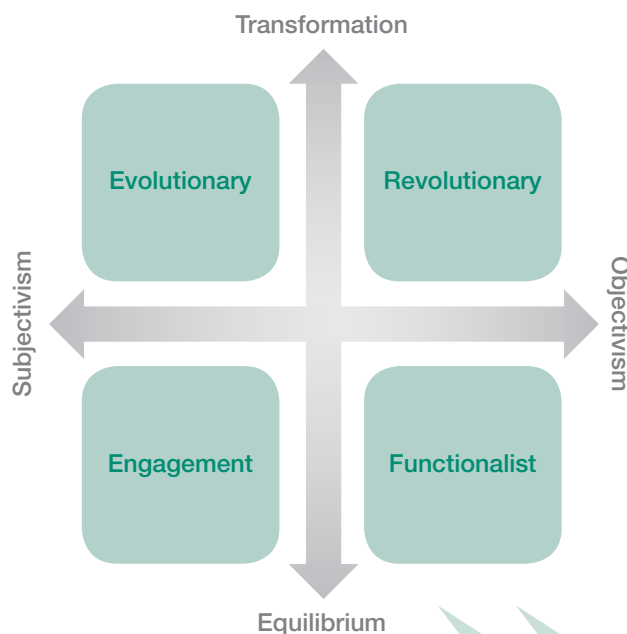
Results

The detailed results of the survey were distributed to Whyte & Coaches clients in January 2009. In this paper we discuss those findings with reference to the work of other authors.

Brockbank and McGill's coaching map

Different respondents placed different emphases on the alignment of personal and organisational goals and the capacity of the executive coach to work from the coachee's agenda. On that basis we reviewed the results of our study with reference to Brockbank and McGill's (2006) map of coaching approaches. The map identifies four types of coaching based on two axes; subjectivism/objectivism and equilibrium/transformation.

The **objectivist** view supposes the existence of a single objective reality which the coachee may or may not understand, whilst the **subjectivist** view respects the coachee's perspective as one of multiple versions of 'reality'. **Equilibrium** as a learning outcome assumes that the coachee should work within the 'rules' as defined by the status quo of existing structures, while **transformation** allows for outcomes outside of those rules. Brockbank & McGill's map therefore presents us with four different types of coaching:



Functional coaching

Where the coach is an expert, whose role is to advise the coachee how they may best contribute to the achievement of organisational goals.

Engagement coaching

Where the coach seeks to work from within the subjective world of the coachee, employing a non-directive approach, again in service of organisational goals.

Evolutionary coaching

Where the coach not only acknowledges the coachee's subjective world, but also encourages the coachee to challenge the status quo. Where such coaching happens in the workplace it is often offered in the name of personal development, where the development of the individual is perceived to be for the benefit of both individual and organisation (Brockbank, 2008).

Revolutionary coaching

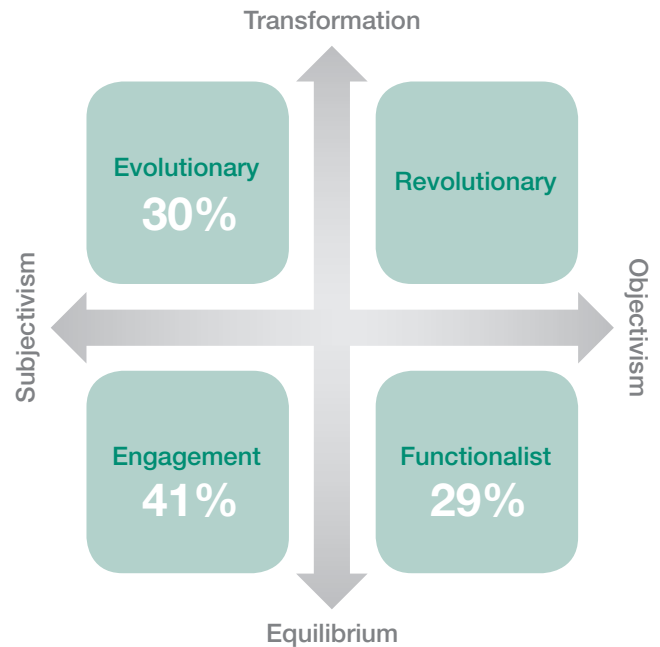
Where the coach seeks to enable the coachee to transform their beliefs in line with a 'grand narrative'. This is not seen by Brockbank to be relevant to executive coaching.

We plotted our results against the Brockbank and McGill map as follows: A client who expressed the view that goals should be established in alignment with organisational goals, and talked primarily about the importance of the coach's own business experience, *without* making explicit mention of the coach's ability to engage with the coachee's perspective of the world, we categorised as **Functional**.

If the client expressed the view that goals in an executive coaching assignment should be established in alignment with organisational goals, and talked about the importance of the coach's own business experience, and talked about the ability of the coach to engage with the coachee's perspective of the world *without* mentioning the possibility that coaching goals might be personal, we categorised their response as **Engagement**.

If the client talked about all of these things, including the possibility that some coaching goals might be personal, then the response was categorised as **Evolutionary**.

On this basis we were able to categorise all responses as either Functionalist, Engagement or Evolutionary. This analysis revealed that our respondents regard coaching quite differently. 41% described Engagement coaching, 30% described Evolutionary coaching and 29% described Functional coaching.



Segmenting the market for executive coaching

If we look around the various executive coaching offers available in the marketplace today, we see significant differences in the extent to which they emphasise the interpersonal ability of the coach vs. the coach's previous business experience. And significant differences in the extent to which personal agendas are encouraged to fall into the scope of the assignment.

Whilst *all* of our respondents required that executive coaches have previous business experience, not everyone mentioned the coach's interpersonal skills. This is important, because whilst both 'Engagement' and 'Functionalist' coaches may articulate their value to the organisation in the same way, each may possess fundamentally different skill-sets. This is not to say that some coaches in the 'Functionalist' space don't exercise expert interpersonal skills. The point is that until we bring more clarity to the way that coaches and clients across the industry talk about executive coaching, it will remain challenging for clients to match the right coach to the right assignment.

The relevance of counselling skills is a particular area where there is a wide range of opinion. Some of our respondents see counselling skills as relevant to coaching, whilst others seek to clearly differentiate coaching from counselling. We argue that the desire to clearly differentiate coaching from counselling is often based on oversimplification and generalisation.

Respondents to the Coutu and Kauffman (2009) survey of executive coaches are fairly typical in that they collectively differentiate coaching and counselling in the following terms:

- » Coaching focuses on the future whilst counselling focuses on the past;
- » Coaching helps executives to discover their own path, whilst counselling sets cure as the primary goal;
- » Coaching advises individual leaders on business matters whilst counselling is based on medical ethics;
- » Coaching assumes an equal relationship between the executive and coach whilst counselling presumably, does not; and
- » Coaching works with healthy individuals whilst counselling treats dysfunctionality.

None of these distinctions stand up to scrutiny. Zeus and Skiffington (2002) say:

“Coaching, like therapy, is clearly a psychological process. When a coach is dealing with the inner psychological world of the coachee, he or she is functioning within the realm of therapy. Coaching then is similar in many respects to solution focussed therapy.”

The differences between executive coaching and counselling may then be essentially quantitative rather than qualitative, in that the executive coach may be more likely to work with healthy individuals focussing on the future, but nevertheless will be exercising very similar skills to counsellors/therapists practicing post-modern constructivist modalities. In other words, whilst someone may seeking counselling services is likely to have different needs to the person seeking coaching services, the underlying skills of the effective counsellor are likely to be similar to those required by an effective executive coach, particularly one operating in the Evolutionary or Engagement space.

Not everyone would agree. Boyatzis, Smith and Blaize (2006) highlight the significance of personal goals in a coaching assignment:

“Coaching others for their development is different than coaching others strictly for the organization’s benefit. The latter can be seen as an instrumental or compliance perspective in approaching others.”

Sherman and Freas (2004) on the other hand, exclude personal agendas altogether from the definition of executive coaching:

“We don’t do that stuff [life planning, career counselling, health and nutritional advice, New Age aura readings, and skills training]. Our role is to help coachees produce business results for their employers.”

This is an issue then in terms of defining executive coaching, and in developing a typology or language that enables us to discern different forms of executive coaching. In the meantime purchasing clients should anticipate talking to potential service providers who may not all mean the same thing when they talk about ‘executive coaching’. This analysis is consistent with that of Clutterbuck (2008) who suggests that the primary task today is to define what we mean by coaching, rather than measuring its impact.

The importance of coaching qualifications

Respondents to this study emphasised the importance of business experience and (in some cases) interpersonal skills, especially empathy, listening skills and the ability to challenge effectively. This is consistent with some of the comments made in Dagley’s study, referring to the coach’s ability to identify with the pressures of senior executive roles.

We found less convergence when it came to the importance of formal coaching qualifications. Only 39% of our respondents mentioned the importance of formal coaching qualifications. This was still 16% more than Dagley found in 2007. We wonder then if there is an upward trend, driven by what respondents to our survey described as the challenge of discerning the competent coach from the incompetent.

Standards and regulation

About a third of respondents spoke of the need for improved standards and regulation, expressing a fear that the absence of a regulatory framework would curb their organisations’ enthusiasm for using executive coaches.

For respondents who placed most emphasis on the experience of the coach, this may be less important. Indeed a handful of respondents suggested that industry standards would be of little relevance in making such appointments. It is difficult to see how meaningful standards may be currently established to cover both subjectivist and objectivist coaching types in the absence of greater clarity as to what executive coaching actually is.

As Sherman and Freas (2002) say:

“Until a body of knowledge about coaching wins acceptance, we'll remain sceptical of current efforts to introduce universal standards and high barriers to entry.”

Developing an effective typology may be part of the solution. This further places the onus on purchasers of coaching services to understand what is happening in their own organisation in the name of executive coaching. In their recent survey of executive coaches Coutu and Kauffman (2009) report that only 3% of 245 coaches surveyed say that they are frequently hired to address personal issues. Yet 76% of coaches have assisted executives with personal issues at one time or another.

Conclusion

Different clients have different expectations of executive coaching. Some clients value the coach's ability to advise coachees with reference to their own past experience, whereas others value the coach's ability to work with the coachee's own agenda. Some clients value both. Some clients define executive coaching solely in terms of working to goals that are clearly consistent with specific organisational goals, whilst others value the coach's ability to work with the coachee's personal agenda. In the latter case, the link between personal goals and organisational goals may be less explicit. These differences reflect a diversity of thought and approach within the field of executive coaching that presents challenges to an industry contemplating a more rigorous approach to standards and regulation.

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