

## **Coaching & Mentoring as an Aid to Organisational Change Management**

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**'Coaching & Mentoring as an Aid to Organisational Change Management' explores the nature of the material which is discussed within Coaching & Mentoring relationships which occur in an organisational context. It suggests that issues of an individual, group or organisational nature may present themselves and that the mentor needs to be aware of which is which, so as to tailor his or her intervention accordingly. It illustrates with the use of a case study, develops a model of intervention which can be used in the majority of Coaching & Mentoring relationships, at the same time highlighting factors which need to be kept in mind, including unconscious processes at work within the individual and the organisation.**

A 30-year-old marketing executive rushes forward to greet me, apologising for being late and having had to cancel the previous arranged meeting.

"Boy, do I need you! We've just centralised the marketing function and need to get the team up and running as soon as we possibly can. I haven't had chance to get to know people as we've been given full accountability for meeting the year end targets and there's only five months left, we're £50m light and I've just had to make that my first priority".

It transpires that there had been a recent restructure in which the marketing department, previously decentralised, had been brought together. All posts had been advertised, creating varying degrees of anxiety in the majority of staff. Some senior executives were made redundant, a few had been given new and challenging jobs, many had got jobs they were not immediately enamoured by. There were a number of vacant posts, for which people were to be recruited from outside. Everything was in a state of confusion, the department having to maintain current business levels, develop the business in order to meet the current year's stretching targets, design a marketing strategy in line with the new corporate strategy, learn new jobs, cover for vacancies, work together as a team, deal with the loss of respected staff, overcome individual disappointments. John asks me to make things all right.

Maybe one would not start from here if one had a choice - but this is where we had to start from. Let us look at some of the ideas that were coming into my mind.

### **Individual Issues for John**

What were John's anxieties, which had him rushing around? Were they to do with this being his first senior management position responsible for a significant number of highly talented staff and not knowing how to manage them? Were they to do with his feelings of being an impostor - more experienced marketeers having been made redundant? Were they in some way connected with his having got the balance in his life out of equilibrium? Maybe they were to do with his lack of a real personal vision and hence being very reactive in all that he did.

## **Team Issues for John**

The team that John had inherited was not a team. It was a group of individuals all of whom had been through a relatively traumatic six months. Each individual bore the scars of the recruitment process, the jostling for position which that had entailed and the learning dip or disillusionment experienced depending on whether they had been successful. This group of people needed to be working in an open, communicative and co-operative way to ensure that the department's goals were addressed in an as effective and timely manner as possible.

## **Organisational Issues for John**

The centralisation of the department was one of a number of structural changes which the organisation as a whole had been through. This was a result of a envisioning process, which had changed the direction in which the company was going, and which spelt out in clear and unequivocal terms the preferred strategy of the organisation.

This clarity was not, however, reflected in the prevailing working culture. This culture was very much based on a sense of crisis management, conflicting demands for time and resource beyond human capability to resolve, and a form of presentation which emphasised style over substance.

The resulting effect on the department was a lack of clarity of priorities and accountabilities, a demand to be doing detailed tactical activities when long-term strategic issues were pressing to be addressed, and an over-emphasis on the way things were presented which had the effect of distracting from the content and used up an inordinate amount of time.

## **Models of Intervention**

Initially all that you have to work with is initial impressions, what the client presents and how the client presents it. Depending on who else you may be seeing in the organisation - for example, if the Coaching & Mentoring programme was part of a wider intervention such as team development or organisational development - you may later have all sorts of data from the organisation, from groupings within the organisation and from individuals.

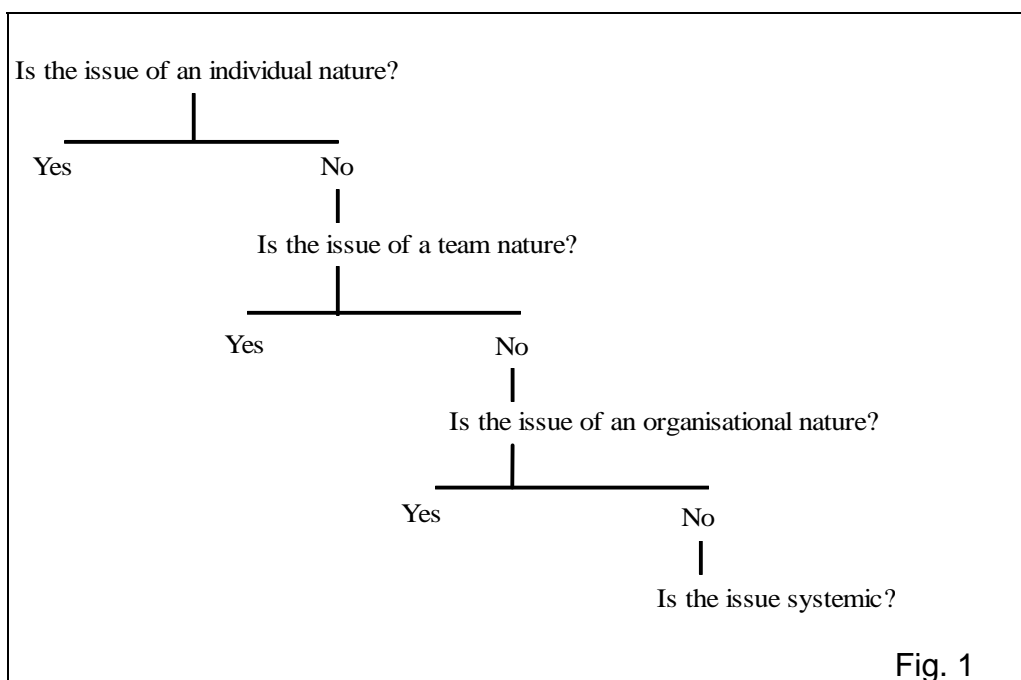
Initial impressions will have been formed from how the original appointment was made, why this particular client approached you (or how contact was first made), impressions formed from the building, levels of activity within the offices, greetings, etc. Impressions such as ideas, perceptions, sensations, feelings, images, notions. At this stage I would not allow these impressions to force judgements to be taken.

What the client presents - be it an experience, an issue, a problem, a question, a proposal - is normally, and quite naturally, the main concern of the client. On the one hand it forms the basis of our contract - this is what we are to work on, explore, resolve, etc. A productive experience for the client with regard to the issue would be seen as an indicator of success. On the other hand the issue or presenting problem might not be what lies at the heart of the clients concerns or aspirations. For example, someone may believe that their team needs team building and call me in to see how best it can be achieved. However what may be underlying this concern the manager has at his/her inability to manage peoples under-performance. A solution may indeed be some form of team development, but the primary task for the mentor would be to improve the effectiveness of the individual manager.

How the client presents is another important focus for me. Indeed it is often the major focus for the work. How the client chooses to relate to me, the chosen words, what he/she says, the manner and mannerisms, the unconscious communications, his/her reactions to my interventions. All these things provide material with which to explore the client's world and personality, how he/she may limit him/herself to the infinite possibilities before him/her, how he/she may be more open or closed to change than he/she believes. Within the typical brief for individual development will be the permission not just to look at the current and future skills, knowledge and experience of the client but also to look at what intra-psychic and inter-personal dynamics are operating and bring them to the clients attention.

The initial session provides an example of every session. Later sessions obviously have the benefit of the data, insight and progress achieved from the previous ones. They can also benefit from data gathered from others within the organisation, together with team and other organisational interventions and experiences. However in the same way that a therapy client may tell a therapist of a dream which in some ways encapsulates the whole process which the two participants are destined to undergo, the initial session can lay out the ground (i.e. the task, the obstacles, the map and the indicators for success) for the future relationships.

There are two ways of viewing the process within each session. A simplified flowchart (Figure 1) demonstrates one way. I find this an extremely useful and accurate way of explaining the process. However it might come across as being too neat, too conceptual and not quite how these things materialise in practice.



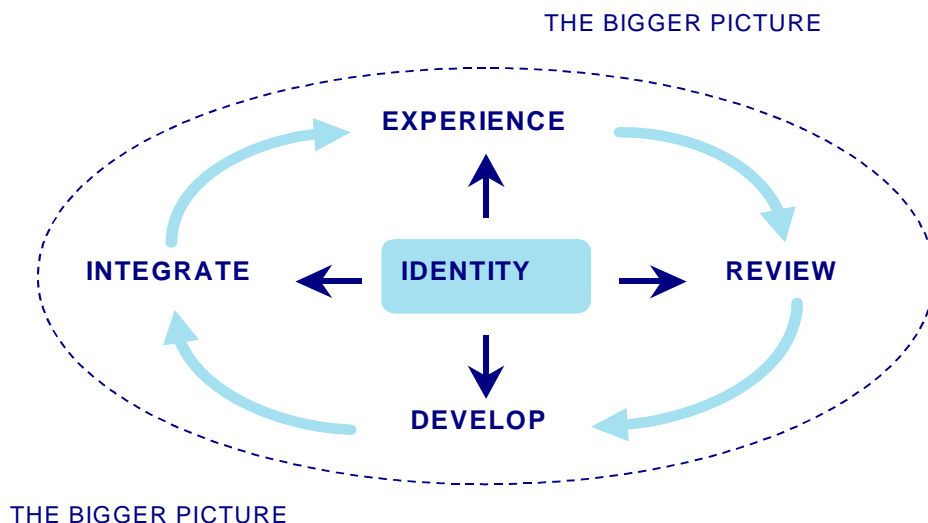
When we arrive at wherever the issue is located we can commence using the basic model of understanding (see Figure 2). The model has three components: the identity of the subject; an adaptation of the learning cycle; and the bigger picture or context within which the subject is operating.

At the core of the process is "identity", an awareness of who one is - the strengths and weaknesses, competencies, core values, potential, past experiences, current

reality and future concerns and aspirations. These can be brought into full awareness, on an ongoing basis, from in-depth interviews, observations, organisational analysis and feedback loops, for example.

The process for transformation is structured around the learning cycle for a number of reasons: it is a sensible structure for each session; it is a concept which has learning, and therefore behavioural change, at its core; and it is adaptable for individuals, teams and organisations. If we define learning as the process of acquiring knowledge, through experience, which leads to a change in behaviour, then we can describe the process as follows:

- Experience is what managers have and do. It includes observations, decision-making processes, activities and behaviours.
- The review of experiences within the context of the "bigger picture" and who one is (identity) is a vital part of the learning culture. It is only in pausing for reflection, on an individual and group level, on what has gone well and on what can be improved, that individuals and teams can move forward.



*Mike Green, 1995*

- The next step is to develop ideas, strategies, new behaviours and creative solutions into a more efficient and effective way of doing things.
- Integration is the key to the success of any development initiative and confirms that true learning and development has taken place. Individuals and teams need to integrate their new perspective into new behaviour within the organisation context and with a knowledge and understanding of the "big picture".
- The "bigger picture" in this context is how external forces may impinge on the individual, team and organisation's development and how the individual, team and organisation can influence the "bigger picture". It is the context in which any changes will be made and the realisation that the organisation is an open system, itself within a larger system.

As mentioned above, the model is adaptable for individuals, teams and organisations. For the individual, the bigger picture is generally the team, together with the vision, mission and values of the organisation, all within the context of the

marketplace and economy. For the team it is primarily the organisation; and for the organisation the bigger picture is primarily the market and larger social, technological, economic and political environment.

Thus we can see how interventions on each level will affect not just that level but all others. On an individual level the interventions might work on each person's "bag and baggage" (projections, transferences, emotions and hidden agendas) insofar as they spill into the work arena. On a team level interventions are designed to raise the team's awareness of how it is functioning on a task, task process and emotion process level. By addressing inter-personal issues, uncovering hidden agendas, building trust, the team works towards higher levels of business effectiveness. All this would be done within the context of what the organisation needs to do to realise its vision, through achieving its goals, in a manner consistent with its espoused values.

### **Unconscious Processes**

An important dynamic at work in groupings of any size is the unconscious component, i.e. what an individual, team or organisation is unaware of in terms of what they or it does - that which is not consciously intended. "For example, a staff group talking about their problems with the breakdown of the switchboard may at the same time be making an unconscious reference to a breakdown in interdepartmental communication. Or complaints about the distribution of car-park spaces may also be a symbolic communication about managers who have no room for staff concerns" [1].

Taking the last vignette as an example, if you were with someone discussing their reaction to the new restrictions on parking spaces you may wish to look at how the individual was to deal with the situation. There may be anxiety about communicating this to staff, or there may be the emergence of a sense of being undervalued, or indeed, it may become an opportunity to explore why the person is still in that job and has not gone for the one with a guaranteed parking space!

Whatever emerges is valid. However, what I believe the mentor should also be aware of is what the organisation is unconsciously communicating to the individual. If indeed the organisation states that "people are its greatest asset" (as organisations often do) but produces feelings in its employees of being undervalued, then all the counselling in the world will not change that situation.

In a recent article [2] a possible approach is clearly stated: "With rare exceptions ... the psychotherapist is accustomed to working with problems as residing in individual patients. Work, family and partner relationships are contextual. When one shifts to the organisational setting it is useful to turn this on its head - the apparent pathology of the individual is a symptom of organisational illness. If the organisational problem is identified and tackled, the individual's symptoms will evaporate".

Ignoring the language of the psychotherapist and also the tendency to look for problems (pathologies), this highlights the uncertainty, which lies at the boundary between the individual and the organisation. Indeed if the idea that it is possible for one grouping within an organisation to "dump on" or, for example, scapegoat another grouping or individual is accepted, then I believe it would be fair to say that some of the feelings an individual holds within himself are not his/her own.

When working with an individual within an organisational setting one cannot ignore the group and organisational context. I believe it is more than just a context.

Conscious and unconscious phenomena impact directly on to the individual and as such need to be highlighted, explored and used - grist for the mill of understanding and transformation!

## **Conclusion**

To return to our original scenario, John had many anxieties about his role - his own level of competence and the balance in his life between work and his young family. The more he doubted his confidence, the more time and energy he put into doing his job, the less time for his family. By looking at the areas of competence, planning training and other activities to fill the gaps, by getting to trust his subordinates and delegating more work to them, he found he could distance himself more from the operational detail, concentrate on more strategic issues and slow down.

The more he got to know his team and their competencies, the more he involved them in decisions and empowered them and in turn, the more they responded to the new collaborative ethic. This was not an easy task - it took time and effort, and John had to be strong to be able to show his vulnerability - trusting others before he could rely on them. John also recruited people who had not only the abilities to do the job, but also the personalities to contribute to the new way of doing things in the organisation.

The more John and his team developed, the more they were able to take a lead in embodying the corporate values and show an enthusiasm for attaining the vision. However, the movement forward within the marketing department did disturb the balance within the organisation. The organisation unconsciously elevated them, only to attack them for the way they did things. Persistence was seen as obstinacy, confidence as arrogance.

To light a candle is to cast a shadow. One of the tasks of managing the boundaries within organisations is to be aware of, and respond to, the processes, projections and assumptions which emerge when one part of the organisation grows and develops. The whole system is changed as a consequence and the resulting turbulence is not only to be expected but also needs to be attended to. In the same way that a family which does not acknowledge the developing natures and needs of its constituent members would ossify and become dysfunctional, so too will an organisation.

I hope that I have not given the impression in this paper that meeting someone in a one-to-one relationship within an organisation is an unduly complex and ultimately impossible task or that it is to be engaged in with a checklist mentality. All we have, whether we are mentee, mentor, client or constituent, is who we are. Our only task is to be who we are and to understand the other person as fully as possible.

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## **About the Author**

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Michael is a Director of Transitional Space Ltd., a consultancy specialising in aiding individuals and teams to develop themselves and their organisations through coaching & mentoring. His career has spanned Finance, Human Resource Management, Psychotherapy and Organisational Development.

Michael has devised and implemented numerous projects that have used external coaching & mentoring and internal coaching as an integral part of the organisation's development. These have ranged from full-blown corporate transformation projects, through top team coaching & mentoring, to tackling individual behavioural and performance issues.

He has published papers on individual and top team coaching & mentoring and coaching & mentoring for organisational change. He has lectured on Organisational Behaviour at the Universities of Bath and North London at undergraduate and postgraduate levels and is a Visiting Executive Fellow at Henley Business School where he tutors and coaches in People Management, Leadership & Change and Personal Development.