WHAT IS EXECUTIVE COACHING?

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the practice of executive coaching as an effective, practical method for developing the capabilities of senior leaders. First, the literature is reviewed on executive performance requirements, leadership development and coaching. A working definition of coaching is offered that encapsulates and extends existing practice in the context of personal and professional development. Then a working theory of executive coaching is presented to explain how diagnostic methods, intellectual challenge and dialogue are used in a psychological process called "perspective transformation" that over time can induce a useful reorientation in an executive's personally held assumptions, role requirements, and behavioral habits. The process and practical benefit of such a transformation are discussed. The sources of coaching professionals and their requisite capabilities are reviewed along with the major risks and benefits of executive coaching. Finally, as an area in need of more inquiry, some questions are offered for additional research.

BUSINESS CONTEXT

A primary driver for the greater use of executive coaching is the contemporary nature of change faced by business and industry. Induced by increasing levels of competitiveness on a global scale, the direction, speed and intensity of this change demand highly capable leaders who can take organizations to unparallel of levels of performance. In this context, executive coaching helps leaders interested in personal and professional development, as well as managing business change through stronger vision, mission and strategic thinking (Harrison, 1999; Kinlaw, 1993; Mitsch, 2002).

Senior management and human resource (HR) executives recognize the need to find leaders who are up to today's challenges and since developing future leaders is one of their strategic responsibilities, they are constantly seeking new and innovative ways to produce the best possible cadre of potential leaders (Ulrich, 1997). Executive coaching has emerged as a new and major tool available to HR for the growth and development of executive talent (Corporate Executive Board, 2003).

Higher levels of executive performance include crafting robust visions, missions and strategies (Bennis, 1989; Hambrick, 1989; Kotter, 1988, 1990; Tichy and Ulrich; 1984); creating highly adaptive, collaborative organizational cultures (Collins and Porras, 1994; Kotter and Heskett, 1992; Lorsch and Mathias, 1987; Tichy, 1983; Toffler, 1985); deploying rigorous systems, operating mechanisms, and procedures to channel information rapidly and accurately (Charan, 1998, 2002; Ouchi, 1978; Flamholtz, 1978); designing flexible organization structures (Nadler and Tushman, 1997); developing learning organizations of diverse people whose loyalty is likely to be to themselves rather than the organization (Garvin, 1993; Goleman, 2000; Senge, 1990); and calibrating the whole organization and control systems to achieve a balanced

scorecard, alignment in purpose, tasks and achievements, and teamwork (Kaplan and Norton, 1996; Lencioni, 2002; Peters and Waterman, 1982). Heightened social forces expect management to balance their scorecard with multiple constituencies and sensitivity to cultural diversity (Covey, 1992; Hofstede, 1992; Kaplan & Norton, 1993). Clearly, executive competence is complex and requires many ways to foster such development.

Of the many ways that people can be developed to assume greater leadership capability (i.e., running a start-up or a turn around operation, special assignments, mentoring, training, stretch assignments, and executive education), *executive coaching* has emerged as a widely used executive development tool (Corporate Executive Board, 2003; Sherman and Freas, 2004). The range of specific coaching issues is quite wide, as Table 1 shows. Although a relatively costly form of development, executive coaching has grown in favor because it provides focused, achievable development that often produces immediate results against specific goals (Verlander, 1999).

[INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

A WORKING DEFINITION OF COACHING

Executive coaching has been defined as guidance through mentoring (Cook, 1999); action learning (Sherman and Freas, 2004); behavior modification (Fournies, 1987); functionally as counseling, mentoring, tutoring and confronting conversations (Kinlaw, 1989) providing feedback on behavior using techniques and effective questioning (Landsberg, 1996), guiding and critiquing, supporting and nurturing (Maister, 1997) and as a facilitative one-to-one, mutually designed relationship (Mitsch 2002). My own working definition is as follows:

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Executive coaching is a conference that uses dialogic skills and diagnostic tools to facilitate learning in the personal and professional capabilities of senior management levels, by resolving differences between current and future role requirements, and the executive's existing perspectives.

An executive's learning needs may be *professional* in the sense of having to do with technical (functional) role requirements, career advancement, performance objectives or special task skills. Or, they may be *personal* needs such as behavioral, cognitive, and emotional development having to do with how the leader works with people and achieves results. In recent years, companies have also used executive coaching in a new area of application, helping managers *transition* from a newly acquired or merged company into the culture and operations of the "parent", acquiring company (Corporate Executive Board, 2003).

Fundamentally then, coaching is the <u>facilitation of learning</u>. In general, the goal of this learning is to help executives to: 1) build and enhance self-directedness so they can act with greater autonomy, effectiveness, confidence, and business acumen; 2) learn to trust their own judgment; 3) mobilize personal, continuous improvement with a conviction that change is both possible and desirable; and 4) enable them to create faster, bigger, better, cheaper organizations (Cook, 1999, Knowles, 1980; Verlander, 1999). In a psychological sense those learning goals constitute a coaching effort designed to transform how executives perceive the world and act in it. Therefore, in most executive coaching situations, a degree of transformation is required of an executive's thought process in relationship to particular personal or professional problems.

From an existential point of view, an executive who is being coached has the opportunity to learn how to coach others. The experiential learning cycle (Kolb, xxxx) suggests how this can occur. The experience of being coached forms the basis for observing how it feels and works which, upon reflection, suggests key concepts and theories of coaching. These concepts can be formed into a coaching model which can then be tested for efficacy. Subsequently applied in

practice, the experience of using the coaching model becomes another basis for more observations, reflection and improvement.

Executive coaching is also a <u>process</u> of multiple sessions targeted at specific developmental goals. It requires a professional coach who is skilled in facilitating learning using 1) excellent conversational skills that induces *dialogue*; 2) data from surveys or interviews; and 3) various psychometric instruments to elicit a deeper understanding of cause and effect relationships, behavioral habits, and patterns of perceptions. In a practical sense, virtually all coaching situations help executives to increase their knowledge, skills or abilities in one form or another, in order to solve a problem or to handle increased responsibilities.

Coaching <u>methods</u> emphasize a rigorous *discussion* of issues; an *analysis* of data gathered from the use of diagnostic tools such as personality questionnaires, learning style inventories, and stress tests; *interviewing* colleagues; *surveys* to identify development issues, strengths and weaknesses; *application* of new concepts and skills to work problems; and *multiple sessions* over an extended period of time.

A currently popular method is the use of a so-called "360 leadership survey" instrument wherein leadership behaviors are assessed in confidential surveys by multiple raters: direct reports, peers, the person's immediate manager, and perhaps customers and other functional managers. The three-sixty survey data are aggregated in a feedback report usually organized by competency. Among other things, for each class of rater the executive's own "self assessment" is then analyzed against each of the rater's perceptions. Significant gaps in perception between "self" and "others" suggest areas to be addressed in the coaching, especially where the executive received low ratings and perceptual gaps indicate a pattern of behavior. Written comments in the

feedback also help to identify specific behavioral issues that need to be improved (Corporate Executive Board, 2003).

The return on investment from coaching is high so long as the executives are willing to learn and change and the coach is professionally skillful, especially in using dialogue to foster a perspective transformation. Fundamentally, such a transformation is the new condition against which all newly learned behavioral competencies can be applied by the executive in the executive's role.

COACHING AS PERSPECTIVE TRANSFORMATION

Executive coaches use a range of data gathering methods and psychometric instruments to assist them in diagnosing cause and effect relationships in an executive's behavior. These tools and instruments help to uncover, or at least suggest, such things as: 1) underlying assumptions of thought; 2) behavioral habits, 3) espoused values, 4) ethical standards, and 5) theories of what constitutes appropriate personal and professional performance, etc. Collectively, these can be thought of as an executive's perspective or what Senge (1990-1) calls a set of mental models.

ARC Diagnosis. One useful tool that can be used to examine an executive's mental models and perspective is called the "Automatic Reactions Cycle" or "ARC" (see Figure 1). Analysis of recurrent cycles can provide insights into the foundation of an executive's current perspective, or mental models, and the underlying reasons *why* the executive behaves in repetitive and predictable ways that may be unproductive and dysfunctional in the workplace. In practice, ARC has been tested as a reliable diagnostic tool for both the executive and the coach. Drawing upon Senge's (1990-1) work on ladders of inference and mental models, the concepts

under girding ARC suggests an important coaching principle*: Only when an executive's repetitive, dysfunctional mental habits are surfaced, examined and challenged, can a perspective transformation occur and performance truly improve,* (for more on perspective transformation, see: Mezirow, 1978, 1981). In fact, it could be said that the goal of executive coaching is to achieve a perspective transformation that enables the executive to use more effective and efficient behaviors in fulfilling current and future roles.

[INSERT FIG. 1 ABOUT HERE]

Figure 1 shows how the old and new ARC cycles work. The coaching analysis starts by examining the old cycle and identifying the executive's early developmental experiences that produced coping or defense mechanisms to overcome social and interpersonal insecurities (we all have them). The coach then examines how these mechanisms are used later in life in the workplace as the manager's professional, public style. From childhood the coping mechanisms create a façade behind which masked insecurities are hidden and emotions are contained. Under normal workplace conditions the manager functions quite well – perhaps quirkily but acceptable! The coach then explores how stress and pressure impacts the executive's behavior. Many leaders revert to earlier more primitive, irrational coping levels when their behavior moves out of the "normal range" to the *extremes* on the fight - flight (controlling and avoiding) continuum. This "extreme" behavior is what employees and colleagues experience and unfortunately usually remember. Significantly, e*mployee's reaction to this unusual behavior is perceived by the executive in relationship to the executive's coping mechanisms and masked insecurities.*

Research on how the brain works suggests that environmental stimuli, for example, employees' responses, can trigger very strong reactivity in the (executive's) "emotional brain" (i.e., the limbic system). Thus, employees' reactions are often interpreted and distorted by the executive, who then draws (erroneous) conclusions about why people are behaving the way they are. These distorted interpretations and conclusions have the effect of playing into the executive's early childhood experiences and reinforcing the coping, and defense mechanisms. Thus, beliefs are deepened and the need for existing defense and control mechanisms is re-validated. The cycle repeats itself and the executive does not evolve and grow. Employees are left feeling bewildered, nervous and anxious. For more explanation of experimental research on how the emotional brain works see, for example, Bennet (2004), Goleman, (1995; 1998-1), LeDoux (1996; 2002).

ARC Perspective Transformation. The work of the coach is to first clarify and carefully validate the automatic reaction cycles that constitute the executive's existing perspective, and then replace dysfunctional ARCs with new ones. The ARC diagram can serve that purpose. Once there is agreement about the old cycle, the coach and executive work together to recognize and break the cycle at the point when the executive is about to respond automatically (usually when under extraordinary pressure). The coach then helps the executive to create new, healthier, more appropriate behavioral cycles, thereby fostering the formation of a perspective transformation. The key competencies and skills needed by the coach to do this well are high emotional intelligence, using dialog to explore work-related triggers, giving feedback, and providing positive reinforcement. Over time, with effort, persistence and patience, the executive will be able to apply a set of mental models that are realistic, more appropriate, and emotionally intelligent in pressure situations (Goleman, 1998-2; Senge, 1990-1).

Integration and Differentiation of Experience. In a technical psychological sense, coaching produces a more differentiated and integrated cognitive experience which in turn changes emotional reactions and perceptions. The meaning of experience becomes more rational as we integrate new understanding of experience into our perspective formation (Mezirow, 1978). A transformation of this understanding has the *potential* to produce balanced cognition, accurate differentiation, and less perceptual distortion. This then, enables the executive to perceive the world as it really is, not filtered through untested often erroneous assumptions and the lenses of childhood coping defense mechanisms, governed by immature emotions. Executive coaching in the hands of skilled professionals has the power and potential to produce those kinds of liberating outcomes.

Please note that despite the underlying psychology at work in coaching, the coach does not have to be a psychologist or fully understand the psychological process at work. The coach just needs to use the tools available to surface the issues, carefully explore them with the executive (letting the process of dialogue do its work) and ensure that the cognitive and behavioral changes are practical and ethical in the life of the executive.

The ARC analysis is an excellent way to get started. However, as the coaching progresses over the long-term, executive coaches may use several diagnostics for various purposes. For example, personality, leadership and learning styles diagnostics for career and transition coaching; surveys in support of leadership development, and for some executives, interviewing colleagues and direct reports as a way for the external coach to gain a deeper understanding of the executive's strengths and weaknesses. The actual diagnostics used depends on the issues being coached and whether or not it is a long-term assignment.

LONG-TERM EXECUTIVE COACHING

A good deal of executive coaching as currently practiced is long term in nature. However, whether a single session or many sessions extended over a six month period of time, the process of launching executive coaching is essentially the same: assessing "fit and chemistry", clarifying developmental goals, establishing rapport, and exploring current realities. After the launch, long-term coaching has certain requirements and characteristics. The process is usually as follows:

1. An initial meeting with the sponsoring manager (either a line executive or HR) is held to discuss the purpose, process, expectations, logistics, and development issues of the coaching.

2. A first meeting with the executive in question is held to check "fit" and agree on the purpose, process, expectations, logistics, confidentiality, and the development issues. A specific coaching plan is developed with clear goals.

3. Subsequent meetings are typically two hours per session every two weeks. Diagnostic instruments may be administered to supplement discussions. Interim assignments may also be made and progress against goals is constantly assessed.

4. Telephone sessions may be substituted for face-to-face meetings.

5. After three months a check-in session is held with the executive and sponsoring manager (and perhaps HR), to ensure things are on track, progress is satisfactory, and any re-alignment needed between all parties is accomplished.

6. At the end of the coaching contract a final meeting is held with all relevant parties to assess the coaching process and results against objectives.

The Mid-point Check-in. At three months the check-in meeting answers the following questions:

- Are we on the right track?
- Is there something you'd rather be focused on?

- What adjustments do I need to make?
- How can we make our sessions more useful?
- How can I be more helpful?

In addition to any realignment needed, another important purpose of the check-in is for the coach to role model the values underlying coaching by being personally open to learning, change and development.

WHO ARE THE COACHES?

Most corporations use *external* resources for their executive-level coaches (Corporate Executive Board, 2003). The reasons are threefold: 1) companies have limited internal coaching resources; 2) internal coaches often generate a lot of questions about confidentiality and the political appropriateness of lower level employees coaching more senior managers; and 3) external coaches tend to be specialized in the field and bring a great deal of experience working with a wide range of management and organizational psychology issues.

Internal Coaches. One of the strategic services provided by HR is change management. Working as strategic partners with management, internal coaches add value by fostering culture change through leadership development (Ulrich, 1997). Many internal coaches are excellent and have a very good working knowledge of the company, its culture and its strategic /operational intentions. In addition, internal coaches may be working on succession planning teams identifying and planning the development of the company's future leaders. All of this makes them ideally suited to provide coaching services to individuals over the long-term. In-depth insights accumulated over several years can be invaluable when providing career, role change and transition coaching. Long-term coaching also creates the possibility that the internal coach can become a "trusted advisor" (Maister, 2000). However, it remains the case that because

internal coaches have political and confidentiality problems in doing their work, most companies turn to external consultants to provide the service.

External Coaches. Recent research indicates that the use of external executive coaches has seen substantial growth in recent years (Corporate Executive Board, 2003). External coaches come from many backgrounds and vary in quality. Coach's backgrounds range from training, organizational development, and social work, to psychology and group therapy (Sherman and Freas, 2004; Verlander, 1999). The selection of coaches is difficult but easier if two things are remembered. First, executives must feel there is a good "fit" and good "chemistry" in the coaching relationship. This "fit" is so critical that executives are usually given the option of choosing a coach from a pool of eligible candidates. Secondly, it is important that the coaches always remember the focus of their coaching. It is business coaching not therapy. Therefore, executive coaches must be able to effectively relate to and understand the executive's situation, role, challenges, and organizational context. In short, the best coaches always keep an eye on the "fit and focus" of their work.

Coaching Competencies. Importantly, conducting executive coaching has its own set of skills separate and apart from the skills imparted by the coaching. The best coaches keep a business focus to their work as they seek ways to help the executive grow and develop. In addition, experience indicates that executive-level coaches should at least have the following twelve competencies:

1. Keeps confidences, has integrity, and is trustworthy.
2. Asks relevant questions and listens carefully and respectfully.
3. Has a track record of successfully coaching different levels and functions.
4. Uses inter-personal skills and emotional intelligence effectively.
5. Articulates and explains things simply and clearly.
6. Accurately diagnoses symptoms, tests and re-checks assumptions.
7. Gives straightforward feedback and advice.
8. Overcomes resistance, disagreement and conflicting points of view.

9. Prevents client transference.
10. Administers and interprets psychometric instruments.
11. Facilitates learning in various ways.
12. Facilitates dialogue with confidence.

Even though few coaches have been top executives, they need to have a good grasp of the "executive-level role" -- its tasks, responsibilities, political, and emotional requirements. For this level it requires a *coaching style* that is focused, respectful, assertive, engaging, clear, seasoned, and positive (Cook, 1999; Corporate Executive Board, 2003; Fournies, 1987). If the fundamental goal of coaching is perspective transformation, the execute coach must: 1) be an objective observer and point out aspects of the executive's thinking and style that the executive cannot see; 2) be able to ask questions that makes the executive think and see things differently; 3) encourage the executive to try new behaviors; and 4) emphasize the practical application of ideas and solutions.

Notice that the competencies and requirements of the coach neither include experience with the executive's job nor working at the executive's level. Ironically, it is helpful but not essential that the coach has a business background or line management experience, and it is not necessary that the coach be able to perform the executive's job. Just as the number one tennis player in the world does not expect the coach to be able to play at that level, executives do not expect their coaches to be former CEO's. In part, this is because most executive coaching focuses on political, career, and interpersonal style issues that can be handled by professionals from many disciplines. In this sense, "fit" trumps experience in coaching relationship. Table 1 provides a view of the range of executive coaching issued addressed in coaching.

Intellectual Challenge. Regardless of the coaching focus and background of the coach, executives do expect to be intellectually challenged in the process. Intellectual challenge is a form of polite confrontation. It means testing the executive's assumptions and conclusions;

explaining new realities; exploring different ways of thinking, describing alternative responses, and suggesting alternative courses of action. This is done while at the same time being highly emotionally intelligent, such as simplifying complexity, showing empathy and discussing the difficulties of making personal style changes given the executive's age, role and organizational life (Verlander, 1999).

[INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Inexperienced coaches may feel intimidated by a "tough-minded" combative executive whose style may be a problem at work as well as the reason for the coaching. Learning how to handle an executive's dismissiveness, denial, rationalization and debate is important in the professional development of coaches.

Coaching Derailment. Finding a good professional coach can be difficult. Thus, some companies use the services of firms that specialize in executive coaching. These firms are often in the recruiting, career transition or outsourcing business and usually have a network of talented, independent coaches from whom they can choose a pool of candidates to put before their clients. But mistakes happen and relationships changer, so that even seasoned executive coaches can fail. In addition to poor "fit and chemistry" research has shown that coaches fail for the following reasons (Caruso, 2004; Corporate Executive Board, 2003):

1. Coaching is not aligned with organizational strategy
2. Executive is forced into the coaching
3. Coach is out of range of expertise
4. Coaching is based on organizational rumor and gossip
5. Coach and executive become mutually dependent
6. Executive is not held accountable for change
7. Coach cannot penetrate defense mechanisms

When a coach is derailed, executive coaching firms interested in long-term client relationships will work very hard to draw from their network to find another coach who seems

more suitable. Two or three failures, however, signals that the problem lies probably with the executive and not with the coach. Since human resource development is essential in today's business environment, when this happens the focus of any future coaching will include how the executive perceived and handled being coached.

RISKS AND BENEFITS OF EXECUTIVE COACHING

Risks in Executive Coaching. There are few risks associated with executive coaching, but they do exist. All parties to the coaching whether at the executive-level or not, should be aware of the following *risks*:

1. <u>Confidentiality</u>. This cannot be overstated as a perceived risk and concern. Even seasoned, mature executives worry about the confidentially of the process and it has many causes. They worry about:

   - Admitting responsibility for poor performance.
   - Acknowledging political problems and areas of personal weakness.
   - The use of psychometric instruments.
   - The perception by others of needing to be coached.
   - Survey data being seen by others.
   - A file being kept that will affect their career.
   - Colleagues having unrealistic expectations.

   All of those concerns must be treated with the utmost seriousness by the coach and the coach must periodically raise and discuss the confidentiality agreement to reassure the executive. Also, accessibility to data, feedback reports, and coaching progress must be agreed upon at the first meeting, prior to the start of the coaching. Confidentially must be maintained, before, during and after each coaching session as part of the "coaching contract." Even when asked, "How did it go?" the coach's standard response is, "Very well, please speak to him/her directly about it". Normally a record of the executive

coaching session is *not* made. However, if coaching is an open and public process adopted by the organization for leadership development purposes, or at the other extreme, if it is the first step on a formal performance review process because of a persistent problem, then records may be kept. This is contracted with HR and the executive at the start of the coaching process.

2. Dependency. This is common in all forms of human services work. In executive coaching, especially long-term coaching, the executive projects feelings on to the coach. This "transference" may take the form of hostility, affection or dependence. It can arise for example, when the executive experiences relief from stress and is able to discuss difficult issues confidentially and without risk. If the dependency is strong, the executive can become attached to the process *and* the coach, develops unrealistic expectations, and may resist giving up the coaching. This dependency must be dealt with by the coach who re-establishes professional distance and realigns expectations where necessary (Brammer & Shostrom, 1977; Basch, 1980).

3. Records. Executives may not be forthcoming during the coaching if they believe that what is discussed will go into a permanent file. However, if HR is heavily involved, the coaching stakes are high, or may be the last resort, HR will monitor the results very carefully and keep a file for legal purposes.

4. Poor Coach. Coaches come in all forms and styles and the fact is that some coaches are better than others. So long as the executive knows that if necessary the coach can be changed, this risk can be mitigated. For this reason, many executives expect to choose their coach from a small number they interview beforehand in order to get the right "fit".

5. <u>Investment Size</u>. Some companies complain that the cost is too high. And it can be expensive, especially if the coaching does not work. A cost/benefit analysis can put the investment into perspective when the value of solving executive's problems is realized.

6. <u>Unwilling Executives</u>. Executives have to be willing and able to be coached. That means *willing* to learn new things, change points of view, broaden perspective and admit personal responsibility, and *able* to learn the skills necessary to overcome performance problems. If either willingness or ability is missing, coaching will not work.

Benefits of Executive Coaching. For more discussion on coaching risks see Cook (1999). On the other hand, the *benefits* of coaching are substantial and compelling:

1. <u>Just-in-time Coaching</u>. In general, coaching can be conducted on a time continuum from immediate and just-in-time to extended and formal. When coaching is quick and "just-in-time" it usually does not require multiple sessions. Nevertheless, the coach must be able to quickly prepare, be specific, and be patient especially when providing hands-on guidance to show an executive how to do something. In other words, while the speed, dynamics and focus along the time continuum differs with each type of coaching, the underlying values and professional coaching skills do not.

2. <u>Return on Investment</u>. The return on coaching investment is substantial if the executive saves time, is more productive, reduces turnover, communicates more efficiently, solves problems quicker, or influences more effectively (Mitsch, 2002).

3. <u>Performance Improvement</u>. Obviously this is the overall goal, especially when practical, ethical solutions are produced.

4. <u>Personal Development</u>. Potentially, all coaching improves intellectual skills and can improve emotional well-being as well, especially if perspective transformation

occurs. This development may produce higher levels of energy, morale, potential, motivation and enthusiasm (Maister, 1997).

5. Employee Morale. When the leader is more capable, enthusiastic and motivated, other employees may then be able to deal better with today's work stresses (Cook, 1999).

6. Emotional Intelligence. During coaching the executive often learns how stronger emotional intelligence skills can unblock barriers to progress, foster stronger team work, or enhance political savvy (Goleman, 1998, 2000).

7. Focus. Executive coaching provides a concentrated effort to solve specific problems or sets of related problems. Focus and depth are favored over breadth.

8. Accelerated Development. The practical focus of coaching accelerates the learning and development process, especially when compared to other training and development methods.

9. Permanence. Once a perspective transformation occurs, the changes will be permanent until the new perceptions and behaviors are deemed ineffective.

In sum, the benefits far outweigh the risks. Each risk can be mitigated and so long as the coaching relationship is one of trust, the benefits will steadily accrue.

CONCLUSION

Executive coaching for developing leaders has become a major intervention in many companies. It has become a valued way to: 1) stimulate change when managers at any level need a "wake up call"; 2) identify and develop talented leaders for rapidly expanding global operations; 3) accelerate personal and professional learning and development; and 4) sharpen the performance management process.

As a development tool, the benefits of executive coaching outweigh the risks in part because of the growing acceptance by senior management of having a personal coach and the rising quality of the executive coaches. Formal and long-term face-to-face coaching can be significantly enhanced with good preparation, using diagnostics, facts, insight and dialog to foster a perspective transformation. When accomplished this transformation breaks old cycles of habits and replaces them with realistic cognition, emotionally intelligent behavior and practical solutions.

Finally, executive coaching is also a way to accelerate the creation of the "leader coach". The approach to executive coaching described here can be a learned *competency* that bridges theory and practice, a *tool* that can transform how executives lead, and a *concept* that encourages leaders at every level to coach each other on the journey of building a learning organization.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Even though executive coaching practitioners have accumulated a great deal of experience, the field has been neglected in the literature. While there are more articles being written, most of the books are written by American authors writing about experiences in U.S. companies. This alone suggests that additional research is warranted. Some additional research topics include:

1. How prevalent is executive coaching outside the United States?
2. In what ways do non-native American executives working for U.S. companies accept personalized coaching as a legitimate and useful developmental tool?
3. What factors differentiate effective coaching practices from ineffective coaching?
4. What field or fields of psychology provides the dominant underlying constructs and methods in current coaching practice?
5. What role does gender play in the effective practice of executive coaching?
6. Should coaches be professional certified and if so, how?
7. How does executive-level coaching differ from coaching other levels?
8. How can executive coaching enhance cultural sensitivity in multi-nationals?

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Figure 1. The Automatic Reactions Cycle.

1. FORMATION

OLD — Unconscious development of personality traits and behaviors are formed

NEW — Uncover internal drivers and barriers that have shaped behavior and personality

2. COPING PATTERNS

OLD — Old brain strategies used to defend against and survive negative experiences

NEW — Understand which negative coping strategies have developed

3. PROFESSIONAL STYLE

OLD — Personality habits and public style defined by coping patterns and mechanisms

NEW — Understand how negative coping strategies impact leadership style

4. TRIGGERS

OLD — Stress and insecurity trigger weaknesses overcompensated by old brain, fight - flight defense behavior

NEW — Assess how style works under pressure and stress and how using E.I. affects response controls

5. IMPACT

OLD — Others react to heightened fight – flight behavior

NEW — Understand the impact of normal and stress induced behavior on others.

6. REINFORCEMENT

OLD — Perceptions reinforce automatic assumptions about self and other people

NEW — Consciously decide to test perspective and try new ways of responding to normal and stressful situations

7. COACHING STRATEGY

Develop a set of learning goals and practice new patterns of behavior to induce a perspective transformation
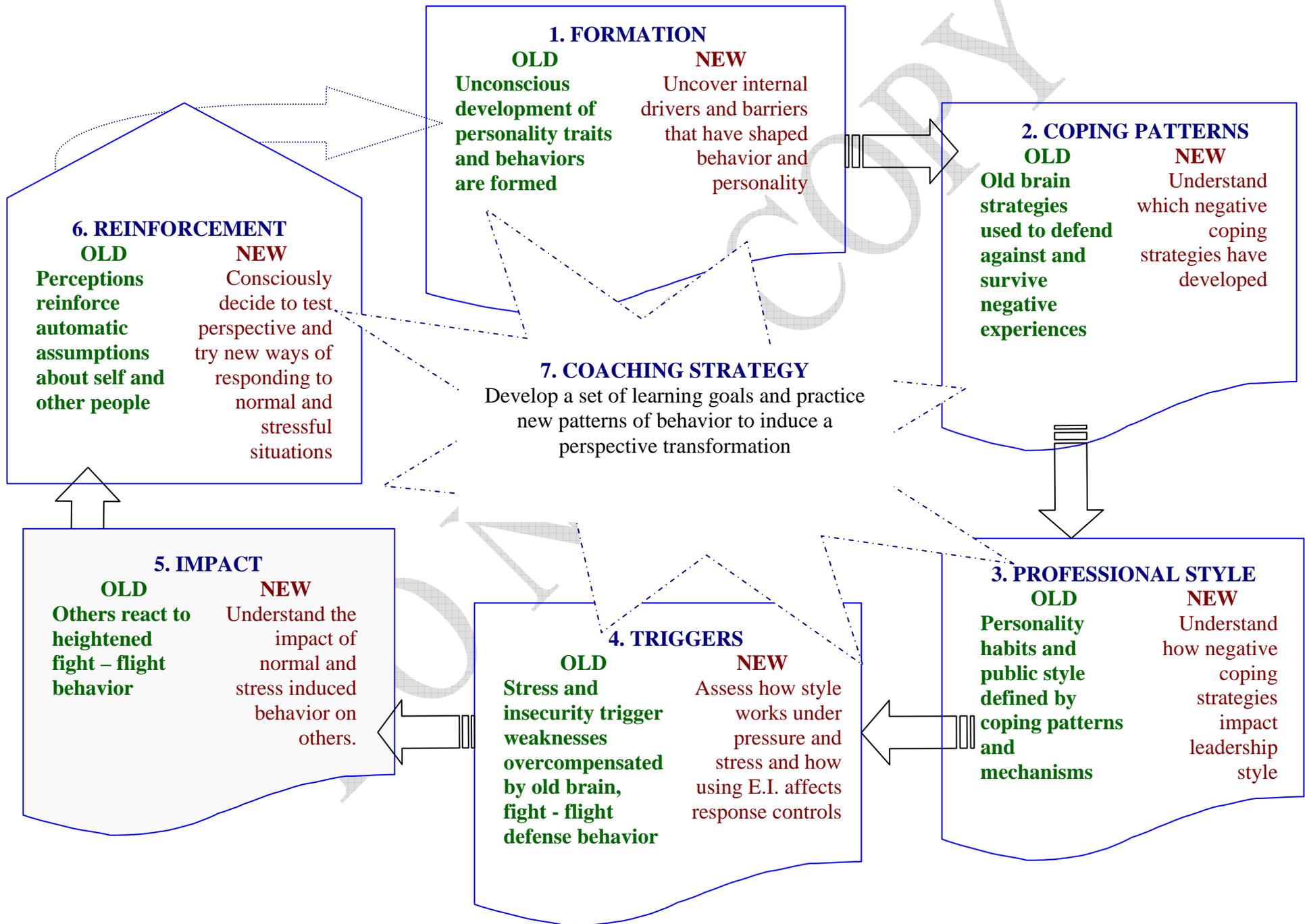
Table 1. Typical Executive Coaching Issues

- Understanding new responsibilities
- Transitioning to a new position
- Controlling emotions
- Getting along with one's manager
- Developing emotional intelligence
- Avoiding inappropriate language
- Political savvy

- Taking control of one's career
- Improving interpersonal skills
- Becoming less abrasive
- Resolving conflict situations
- Listening more effectively
- Working with different personalities
- Supervising people