



**International Coaching News**  
2ND EDITION - BUSINESS COACHING - JANUARY 2013

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AN APPROACH TO  
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ISSN 2050-6724  
9 772050 672001

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# Editor's Note

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*Welcome to the 2nd edition of the online International Coaching News (ICN) magazine. Since its launch in September 2012, we have had a growing number of writers contributing an array of exciting articles, and unsurprisingly our readership has grown to more than 20,000 people in just a few months. The January edition is packed with more than 30 carefully selected articles on Business and Executive Coaching, Holistic Health Coaching, Marketing Coaching and much more. As a world first, we are publishing in English, Romanian and Hungarian.*

*Contributions from esteemed writers and experts namely Malcolm Nicholson, Patricia Lustig, Ken Keis and Richard Norris, include a variety of topics such as 'Coaching as a tool for organisational development', 'The powers of assessments in coaching and business', and 'Executive coaching supporting organisational renewal.' This quarter's issue also includes a book review by Cristina Palma on "Co-Active Coaching" written by Henry and Karen Kimsey-House, Phillip Sandahl and Laura Whitworth; and Tamar Kasriel's "Futurescaping" reviewed by Eleanor Cooksey.*

*This edition is more than just providing you with helpful coaching tools, personal development ideas and professional development techniques. It provides you with the access to some of the world's greatest coaches and training companies, and provides you with access to 20,000 people who are commenting and sharing ideas on this life-changing initiative.*

*If you would like to increase your profile, and would like to be published, or indeed if you wish to share ideas on coaching and personal development, we would encourage you to submit them through our web form at <http://www.international-coaching-news.net/write-for-icn/> or email me at [editor@international-coaching-news.net](mailto:editor@international-coaching-news.net).*

*For advertisers interested in tapping into our 20,000 people strong reader base, feel free to contact our media consultants at [advertise@international-coaching-news.net](mailto:advertise@international-coaching-news.net). Remember to subscribe to get your free copy today when you log on to <http://www.international-coaching-news.net/subscribe>.*

*We have much to look forward to in 2013 and we hope to inspire you with what ICN offers. Look out for our 3rd edition which will be on Life Coaching coming out in March-April 2013.*

*All the best,*

*Shariza Signe,*

*Editor, ICN*

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# EXECUTIVE COACHING

## GLOBAL MINDSET AND WORKING IN COMPLEXITY

“The coaching needed to be of a certain kind that could accommodate a range of outcomes and scenarios that was a lot more complex than a simple GROW model conversation and sending them off to do their homework.”

By Malcolm Nicholson

The following is taken from an interview with Dr Geoffrey Abbott, a leading authority on international coaching. He is a lecturer, author, executive coach consultant, and Director of the Centre for International Business Coaching, (see [www.internationalbusinesscoaching.com](http://www.internationalbusinesscoaching.com) )

Nobody denies that the nature of business now is fundamentally global. Even if an executive is sitting in front of a computer in an office – and travels nowhere - work is inevitably and increasingly international and interconnected. We are virtually connected through the movement of the financial markets and international capital, mergers and acquisitions and through the growing power and influence of the “BRICs” countries of Brazil, Russia, India and China. Business is undeniably international and global.

What is less clear is how well executives are coping with this new reality. A recent survey by IBM of over 1500 CEOs found that only half considered themselves prepared for the complexity of the global business environment that is unfolding. At lower levels and in smaller companies the situation is even more challenging. My experience is that the vast majority of exec-

utives and business people are struggling with the constant barrage of change – often coming at them in multiple waves and forms. They are not sufficiently across the breadth of business landscape to enable them to make sense of the kind of business situations in which they find themselves.



So, where does coaching fit in this highly complex, shifting landscape? Coaching at its best, informed by good theory and practices and case studies around international business in the true sense, is brilliant and uniquely placed to encourage people into new kinds of conversations that deepen and build their cognitive capacity and enable them to make sense out of circumstances that are extremely complex.

From systems thinking and cybernetics comes Ashby’s ‘Law of Requisite Variety’; If a system is to be stable the number of states (or variables) of its control mechanism must be greater than or equal to the number of states in the system being controlled.

More simply put, “only variety can absorb variety”. What that means is that if you have a complex situation, you will need a complex solution or at least a sufficiently elegant and sophisticated solution to meet the complexity of the situation. So for example, if you have a football team full of the greatest strikers in the world, playing against another mixed team of less illustrious players who are all playing in their correct positions, you can be sure that the mixed positions team will win because of their variety.

Similarly, in our minds, we need to be sufficiently complex and sufficiently advanced in our thinking to be able to make sense of the new kinds of business problems that are accelerated by activities like acquisitions and mergers, by environmental forces, by global financial forces, the ups and downs we have seen in the marketplaces, by resource shortages, medical, religious & social pressures to name but a few! They are not all new, but they are undeniably far more challenging for executives than they were in the past. The interrelatedness of these pressures provide the complexity. Once multiple forces are at work the resultant system acts like a complex adaptive system with emergent and unpredictable results that throw carefully constructed plans out the window.

The bad news is that this momentum towards uncertainty and change is only going to increase. Our choice is to be overwhelmed – or look for new approaches that can give us traction.

This is where coaching comes in. What coaches do, when properly informed and themselves coming from a fairly deep understanding of this nature of complexity, is to ask questions, challenge and introduce ways of thinking that can help executives become better at managing these problems. An effective leader in global business environments has a capacity to deal with uncertainty, ambiguity, complexity, and paradox. My view is that the latter is critical because it is a core ingredient of the former, though

not many execs or coaches realise that. To use a metaphor, it is much more fun and safer to surf waves than to fight against them. Coaching helps people turn the energy of the turmoil into productive change rather than inertia or panic.

“The coaching needed to be of a certain kind that could accommodate a range of outcomes and scenarios that was a lot more complex than a simple GROW model conversation and sending them off to do their homework.”

There is a fantastic Harvard Business Review article by Snowden & Boone (November 2007) “A Leaders Framework for Decision Making” that introduces the Cynefin Framework, (see sidebar below) which is based on the premise that the way a problem is categorised impacts on the nature of the leadership response. Few leaders and coaches work from a clear understanding of this kind and are therefore immediately limited in their effectiveness. The Cynefin framework helps leaders sort issues into one of four main contexts: simple, complicated, complex, chaotic & disorder. (The fifth context, disorder, applies when it is unclear which of the other four contexts is predominant. The way out is to break the situation into its constituent parts and assign each to one of the other four realms. Leaders can then make decisions and intervene in contextually appropriate ways.)

Increasingly, we are finding that the types of problems people are facing are in the complex context. This means they are not open to immediate solution, they need exploration, and, in the term used by Snowden & Boone, ‘Probing’. Too often, executives look for solutions that are cut out of data analysis, expert opinion and mechanistic models that – on their own - don’t work.

Coaching enables executives to step back and check out the nature of the problem situation. If problems are complex, coaching helps executives shine lights in dark corners, probe, discuss reframe and develop multiple solutions enabling them to be more aware of what they are facing, see things from new viewpoints, assimilate complex concepts, and address real-world problems and opportunities with multiple options & directions.



Let's look at a case study as an example. In my research dissertation a few years ago I was applying these sorts of approaches to one of the case studies where I coached a senior executive, a region manager of a multinational. He was a North American based in Central America, managing right across Central & South America. We explored the complexity of his regional manager role in Latin America where - at the same time - he was developing his own business, a coconut water importing business into the USA. So what we were working on was multiple levels of complexity around:

- His senior and responsible multinational regional manager role
- His Central American country manager role
- Development of what eventually became his own large scale coconut water importing business, harvesting, packaging and marketing the product (It's now a highly successful business).

Each individual role was challenging enough. Together they made up a leadership minefield. I'm not saying that coaching alone made it a success, but what coaching did was provide an avenue for him to explore the inter-relationships with the different forces that were going on in the moment, and to deal with things in a very broad way; to manage things like running a country office, running regional managers, succession, manage his own relocation back to the USA, family issues, complex customs issues and in-the-moment issues with a difficult country manager in Chile. He found that coaching was an invaluable aid enabling him to make sense of these difficulties and to also help him make sense of his own anxiety around his decision making. Many senior people who appear confident will, when you get them in the quiet reflection of a one-to-one conversation, admit that this stuff is scary! And they do face anxiety and self-doubt – they need to go out and persuade people to put money into their business for example, whilst at the same time need to give people faith in them as leaders in serious situations. They need to have that confidence yet also the humility at the same time. So coaching was invaluable. The coaching needed to be of a certain kind that could accommodate a range of outcomes and scenarios that was a lot more complex than a simple GROW model conversation and sending them off to do their homework.

Bringing it back, I'm heading an organisation called the Centre for International Business Coaching, and what I'm working on is drawing together the very latest thinking – and there's a whole range of stuff coming from a variety of approaches: from adult development (the work of Robert Kegan), Cross Cultural work (from Geert Hofstede and others), the GLOBE Values study – and so on. People we work with have a very good understanding of the conversational possibilities built on a foundation of sound research, theory and practice.

The high end of the coaching industry is starting to come to grips with the complexity and paradoxes leaders have to deal with. For example, five years ago workshops on complexity theory and coaching didn't exist. There are a few organisations in the coaching education market above a certain level that are helping good people add value above and beyond anything that was talked about a few years ago. Now the lights come on, we and others like Noble Manhattan are offering approaches that suit the nature of the problem situations that executives are confronting. We are now offering systemic possibilities to help individuals and organisations make sense of messes. We tend to get into organisations, and see their initial requests and then evolve and grow our responses.

To sum up, executives really need what has been termed by the Thunderbird School of Global Management a "Global Mindset". That is, they need to be able to work with and influence people who have completely different ways of seeing the world. Executives need to have the cognitive agility to move across different situations and adapt their ways of thinking and behaving so they get the impact they need to be successful. Coaching – done with the same flavour – offers a way of having powerful and deep conversations that offer up new possibilities to generate creative and innovative strategies for problem situations that are becoming increasingly intractable.

Dr Geoffrey Abbott is a leading authority on international coaching and a master coach in this field. He is a lecturer, author, executive coach consultant, and Director of the Centre for International Business Coaching, (see [www.internationalbusinesscoaching.com](http://www.internationalbusinesscoaching.com) )

His work gives attention to how coaching methodologies can promote cognitive complexity in executives, thereby better-equipping them to tackle the complexity of their business contexts. He is an expert on ap-

plying paradoxical thinking styles to coaching conversations. He believes coaching is most effective in the mode of 'serious play' – proposed by American philosopher and educationalist John Dewey as the idea state for problem solving.



Geoff is Corporate Educator with the Queensland University of Technology Business School, where he teaches and coaches in the Masters programs. He facilitates corporate leadership development programs and facilitates international programs on holistic systems thinking.

He is co-editor of the Routledge Companion to International Business Coaching (Moral and Abbott, 2011), to which he also contributed several chapters. He has written extensively on cross cultural and global coaching. He recently presented his international coaching research at the 2011 European Academy of Management Conference in Estonia.

He has extensive executive experience in corporate strategy for the Special Broadcasting Service, Australia's national radio and television multicultural broadcaster.

The Centre for International Business Coaching is based in Brisbane and has representatives around the globe. The Centre provides a variety of international coaching services, including open and customized seminars. See [www.internationalbusinesscoaching.com](http://www.internationalbusinesscoaching.com) for more.

The interview was conducted by Malcolm Nicholson, UK Director for the Centre for International Business Coaching, who is also coaching director of Aspecture (see [www.aspecture.com](http://www.aspecture.com)).

# coaching

## as an approach to Organisational Development

By Malcolm Nicholson

Summary: Organisation development initiatives often fail, and have not embraced coaching as a methodology. Coaching can contribute significantly to the acceptance and engagement with OD initiatives by a) challenging the thinking of OD initiative leaders and b) enabling managers to increase employee engagement by adopting a more coaching based management style.

In its 2011 factsheet on Organisational Development, the CIPD in the UK defines organisational development (OD) as 'planned and systematic approaches to enabling sustained organisation performance through the involvement of its people'. Egan (2002) explored the range of definitions for OD. While not a comprehensive review, he did identify 27 definitions between 1969 and 2003.

As the above may infer, OD is a relatively mature concept, and one which is "situationally" driven. OD to one organisation may be unrecognisable to another. However, from a Coaching practitioner's point of view, OD has been slow to embrace Coaching as a methodology.

Harvard articles show that 2 out of three business change initiatives fail – a staggering waste of time, resource, good will and profitability. Contributing factors to this failure rate vary, but undoubtedly include short term operational imperatives, change fatigue, lack of clarity, lack of leadership, psychological & emotional resistance to change and organisational culture. Yet organisational development and change is such a continuous process now that it underpins our entire working existence.

To change any organizational structure or process or result requires a change in people -Learning means a change in behaviour as

people change by learning an alternate way of thinking and behaving. So how can coaching contribute to the success of OD initiatives? I believe there are two levels at which significant value can be added by integrating a coaching approach into an organisation's existing OD methodology:-

Firstly, coaching at the executive level to challenge their thinking and secondly, developing a 'manager as coach' based culture.

Firstly, executive coaching. Top down views are often distorted. The hard to face truth is that many leaders get business results despite, rather than because of themselves, as they are unaware of the impact they have on their organisation. People are working harder, longer and with a more unrelenting weight of work than ever before, and need leadership. Vision, energy, authority and strategic direction are not enough to win the hearts and minds of people. Leaders need to impact the perceptions, emotions and subsequent motivation of their people on an individual basis.

Depending on the scenario, coaching at the senior level can enable leaders to be more cognisant of the impact they have on the organisation, and also challenge their thinking to develop a well thought through, original and relevant change programme. We all develop 'success formulae' – the tried and tested approaches on which we fall back when facing a challenge. However, the complexity, vector and velocity of change will often mean that the implementation of a previously tried approach will be unlikely to succeed. So a 'friendly outsider' who can challenge, support and reframe a board's deliverables will be a significant values add. (see Sidebar example Coaching an Executive Board to enable Organisation Development)

## Sidebar Case Study. Coaching an Executive Board to enable Organisation Development

The executive team of an NHS Trust were going through a period of significant centrally driven change in organisational approach and focus. Policy changes in the NHS meant that patient choice and competition were now impacting revenues – all concepts that were alien to the previous approach to providing NHS services.

A coach worked with twelve Executive & Clinical Directors to enable them identify their existing approach, (which included silos, long standing political divisions as well as complicity with substandard performance) and to quantify what was required to be a more agile and flexible organisation. The work started with 360 degree feedback, including that from around the board table. The board level coaching also identified approaches and behaviours to deliver and reinforce the changes throughout the organisation.

This was achieved through a combination of plenary sessions, which were used to scope, challenge and identify the approaches, and one to one sessions to ensure that the individual members had the buy-in, belief system and skills to implement it, or, if not, to rehearse and develop them in a safe environment. The Bolman & Deal Four Frames model was an ideal tool with which to challenge and test these.

*The executive all rated their coaching programme as 'good' to 'excellent'. All achieved their objectives and felt the coaching challenged their thinking to enable them to approach OD with a new perspective.*

Starting the process with individual coaching sessions will enable the coach to initially break down most barriers on a one to one basis, then gain an understanding of their individual, their style and objectives & agenda. This enables observation in the group setting of how each of the board members performs against their stated objectives, and how their stated strategies vary from the reality of what actually happens in the board sessions.

Additionally, the perspectives gained from the individual sessions can better position the coach to assist the individuals and teams to make sense of what is going on under the surface.

Trust and confidentiality in these circumstances can be major issues. Each board member is aware that the coach is working with their colleagues.

Without a high level of trust being built up by the coach, board members may hold back from discussing sensitive issues and therefore get limited benefit from the individual sessions. The coach clearly needs to hold back a considerable amount of confidential information, and often has to hold back from sharing relevant ideas or facts gained with another board member. The art is for the coach to manage a process of 'creative cross fertilization' (Dr G.Abbott 2005) which involves sharing themes and ideas across the group sessions without breaking confidentiality that might breach or compromise the integrity of the coach and the process.

Before using this model it is important to discuss its implications and details with the board. If there is significant resistance to the idea from participants it would not be wise to proceed. Resistance is likely to indicate that the relationships and the team dynamics are not at a point where people are prepared to make themselves vulnerable to their colleagues. Some individual sessions may assist specific individuals create an environment where higher levels of risk are considered unacceptable.

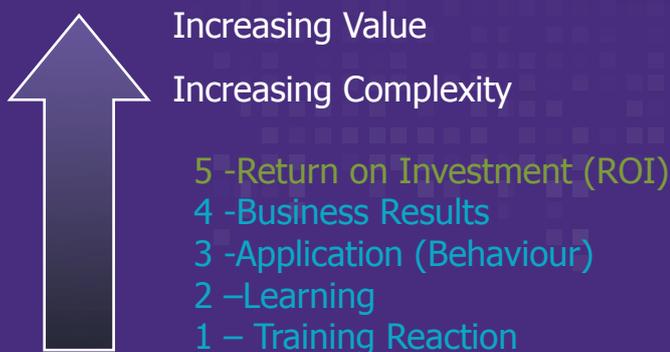
This would typically be followed up by gathering 360 degree feedback, to establish any trends or blind spots. A one day off site would then establish the 'feel' of working in the team as it currently is, followed by a range of outcome focussed exercises to establish the aspirational behaviours and outcomes. The role of the coach is to describe, in a supportive yet challenging way, and feedback to the individual or team the things that they cannot, or chose not to be aware of.

Subsequent one on ones and a follow up half day to ensure that the agreed 'Rules of the Road' are both practical and being adhered to. Significant focus should be given to the type of organisation that they want to be, and the vector with where the organisation currently is. This should provide a path for agreement of the key OD objectives.

In my experience, gaining traction with the rest of the organisation is now essential; a review of approaches that have previously worked and not worked should be conducted, ideally in the group setting, and a clear action and communication plan drawn up. However, the need for executives to provide leadership by winning hearts as well as minds is now essential.

The second element, the Manager as Coach, can be implemented concurrently or subsequently to the leadership coaching. John Whitmore's book 'Coaching for Performance' remains the seminal work in this field. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that Coaching as a style is not used as frequently as it could. There are many approaches to implementing coaching as a management culture; it is not the scope of this article to discuss these here. However, in my experience, the most successful approaches give focus to creating a 'compelling event[s]' – in other words a significant reason for doing things differently; additionally, those that provide ample time for action learning and feedback in the relatively safe environment of the learning group.

Follow will depend on the degree of perceived traction the programme has achieved. Measurement for the programme can be conducted by a range of methods, depending on the organisational appetite, sophistication and budget. In a widely accepted review of training measurement, Jack Phillips (HRD Trends Worldwide 1999), recommended the following levels of measurement for training and development programmes:-



\*Jack J. Phillips-HRD Trends Worldwide 1999

So, by introducing a coaching approach in to the board level an organisation is able to challenge the existing impact and influence that the board has within the business, develop a better solution and secondly, by getting managers to adopt a coaching style with employees will ease the inertia to change. Whilst this is not a panacea, the benefits will significantly justify the effort required to implement this approach.

*"Numbers are the end result. You change a business by changing the behaviour of its people."*

Dick Brown,  
Chairman & CEO – EDS