

The Organizational Underground: Organizational Coaching and Organizational Development outside the Formal Organization

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Throughout the Western world, we are now living in a time of turmoil and economic uncertainty, even chaos. Many contemporary economists and political analysts speak and write about a world that is in a state of “super-criticality” – a state in which minor aberrations in the economic or political system bring about major alternations (and even collapse) of the global marketplace. While the challenges imposed by this state of super-criticality has many profound implications at the macro level, there are also profound implications at the micro-level with regard to the lives lived in “desperation” by men and women who have lost their job or at the very least have given up hope of realizing lifelong dreams. They are living in the organizational underground, a world populated by the unemployed and underemployed.

We propose that organizational coaches have an extraordinary opportunity—perhaps even an ethical obligation—to begin doing work in this organizational underground. In this article, we identify some of the different categories of those living in this underground and the challenges associated with each of these categories. Using case studies of a woman and man who live in this underground, we suggest several ways in which organizational coaches might use their knowledge and skills in helping to address these challenges. Further, we offer ways in which these coaches might integrate organizational coaching and organization development principles and strategies to improve the lives of those living in this unorganized organizational underground.

The Organizational Underground

According to Don Peck (2010), in his recent *Atlantic* article “How a New Jobless Era Will Transform America,” Americans are living through a “slow-motion social catastrophe” with far-reaching and long-term effects. Having not fully recovered the 1980s recession, we now face the challenge of trying to recover from the current Great Recession. Economists are predicting various letters of the alphabet for recovery (V, U, W, L) with all indications pointing toward a long recovery period. The bottom line is that America is in a financial crisis and a jobs crisis. We call it a job crisis because not since the 1930s have we experienced unemployment and part-time employment above 17%. (Peck, 2010, p. 42) We propose that the significant number of people whose jobs have been lost and are now unemployed, or hours reduced, or salaries cut, or are underemployed, have created the *organizational underground*.

The organizational underground represents a large percentage of our adult population and presents many challenges to society and to organizations, to organization development and coaching professionals. Collectively, the organizational underground is the largest organization in the nation—one without pay, benefits, esteem, or positive economic impact. The challenges this presents to society are numerous. When unemployment is chronic, it becomes a pestilence that pervades toxically through families and society and has lasting impact long after recessions have ebbed (*ibid.*). We have yet to see the scars that will endure once the economy moves into stronger recovery.

The number of jobs needed to return to five percent unemployment rate, where we were at the beginning of the Great Recession, is a staggering ten million. The minimum time it would take to reach that number is two years, and that timeframe would only be realistic if job growth was immediate and sustainable. Many economists are predicting that the new floor for unemployment will be in the 7-8% range. One of the reasons is that business leaders are focused on short-term performance versus the long-term value creation. We would argue that the long-term blind spot of many corporate leaders has led to an ignorance of the housing market decline and unethical financial services industry practices. The opportunity for organizational coaches to facilitate change in the focus of business leaders is one of the most positive impacts coaches could have on society. “We’re about to see a big national experiment on stress,” Heidi Shierholz, an economist at the Economic Policy Institute, tells Peck (*ibid.*). Stress and possibly life time membership in the organizational underground.

Five Versions of Unemployment/Underemployment

The organizational underground is populated with a vast and highly diverse array of inhabitants. We have identified five categories in which to place these inhabitants—and are fully aware that there is considerable overlap between the categories, and that there are frequent transitions of inhabitants into other categories.

Unemployment

This category is comprised of those adults who are still trying to find a job or have given up trying to find a job. Part of the complexity associated with any assessment of job recovery is wrapped around this distinction. We know that the early stages of economic recovery usually produce an increased unemployment rate, because those who gave up hope during the economic downturn are now returning to the job-search market. They have renewed hope. Thus, during the first stage of economic recovery, the number of citizens who are returning to job search tends to offset the hiring of those already actively seeking employment. But what about the current economic recovery? Many economists and social analysts (such as those written about in the *Atlantic* article) believe that the job market will never fully recover. There simply are not enough new jobs in the new economy to offset job losses from the old economy. Some economists are calling this condition the “new normal” (Schwartz, 2010).

What then happens to those who are out of work but have renewed hope? What will happen when their hopes are once again dashed and they return to a state of hopelessness? How might an organizational coach help those twice (or thrice) hit by unemployment? There is also the challenge associated with young adults who are seeking their first full time job. Will they ever find a job that matches their personal hopes and dreams? Will they ever know economic stability? How might an organizational coach assist these young men and women as they face this new (and potentially discouraging) economic reality?

There is one other factor we must add to this challenging condition. Many of the unemployed are men (Rosin, 2010). A large portion of the forever-lost jobs are in the manufacturing sector—which has traditionally been populated by men. Furthermore, many of the new jobs require higher levels of education and training—which have recently been most often achieved by women (Rosen, 2010). It is fair for us to ask, “Where have all the men gone [with regard to jobs and preparation for professional careers]?” They have joined the organizational underground.

“Patch work” employment

Some of the unemployed have neither given up hope nor spent much time standing in line for a full-time employment application. Rather, they have patched together a number of part-time jobs. A little more than a decade ago, one of us was conducting a study of faculty members in the United States, while also doing quite a bit of teaching in several universities. One of the focal points of this study concerned faculty who were making a living teaching at several different universities and colleges within a specific urban setting.

In order to make a decent living, these men and women would have to teach 20 to 30 courses per year. And with all of this teaching, they would still not have any health benefits, retirement benefits (other than social security), and not much say over the course content they were teaching, let alone much say regarding the policies and procedures of the collegiate institutions in which they were teaching. In essence, urban areas throughout the United States had each created an “invisible university.” While each college and university within a specific city would pronounce something about their distinctive mission and educational philosophy, the fact was that more than 50% of their faculty members were part-time and teaching at each of these “distinctive” institutions. It’s hard to be distinctive when a majority of your faculty members are also teaching at other educational institutions. One of the faculty members who was interviewed suggested that he was a “migrant worker” who was moving from classroom (in college A) to classroom (in college B), “harvesting” the crop of students in each of these educational institutions.

Clearly, many of these faculty members in the invisible universities of America were living out a “patch-work” career. We find the same kind of career path among many other professionals who can’t obtain a full-time position with benefits and job security. Obviously, we also can point to the actual migrant workers and other men and women

who are burdened with a life of part-time, piece-meal, and unpredictable employment opportunities. The part-time faculty members working in invisible universities exemplify the broadening reach of this migrant, patch-work model of employment. The expanding size of this organizational underground is populated by people at all levels of the socio-economic ladder and at all levels of education and career aspirations.

Underemployment

During the early 1970s, James O'Toole (O'Toole, Hannot, Herman, Herrick, Liebow, Lusigan, Richman, Sheppard, Stephansky, & Wright, 1973) conducted an important study regarding work in America. This group was quite prophetic in proposing that the great challenge in American life may become not *unemployment*, but instead, *underemployment*. Young men and women were obtaining bachelor degrees and advanced graduate degrees, yet were finding jobs that had required only a high school diploma a decade earlier. O'Toole *et al* suggested that these young people were entering the workforce with extensive knowledge and expertise (acquired in a collegiate institution); yet, in many cases this knowledge and expertise would never be fully engaged (or even acknowledged) in the jobs they would perform during their lifetime. Based on O'Toole's findings, many social analysts further predicted that these underemployed men and women would be likely to suffer from depression and alcoholism (or a related drug abuse problem) during mid-life.

Today, we are finding that these dire predictions may be coming true. There certainly has been widespread discontent among men and women of the Baby Boom generation when they entered mid-life. Many personal and organizational coaches are making their living working with late mid-life clients who are trying to cope with this discontent. What about the younger generation, the Gen-Xers and in particular the Gen-Yers? They are even more educated than the Baby Boomers. They are more likely to accept jobs that are below their level of expertise and below their level of expectations (or at least the level of expectations held by their parents who sent them to college). How does a professional coach work with this new generation of underemployed clients? Do we tell them about the corrosive outcomes experienced by the baby-boomers who were underemployed?

Nonretirement

If the Baby Boomers have already taught us something about the impact of persistent underemployment, they now seem to be in the position to teach our society about the unique challenges associated with new models of retirement—or more accurately *nonretirement*. There no longer is automatic retirement at age 65. Legal mandates now allow men and women to continue working longer—even after receiving social security payments. Furthermore, it is not just a legal mandate; in many instances, it is a financial imperative. People must continue working because they can't afford to live on social security (even if it is supplemented by other annuitized funding). A somewhat more positive force is also operating. Many people want to continue working. They are healthy and wish to continue to be

engaged in a productive and meaningful life. In some instances, they finally have the opportunity to volunteer for jobs that are truly enjoyable and that contribute to the welfare of their community. They are privileged to become “sage leaders” who participate in community projects, teach in schools, provide support to those who need help, or simply gather a group of fellow elders together at a coffee shop every morning for an old-fashion bull session and gossip-swap (Quehl & Bergquist, 2012).

This new model of “retirement” or “nonretirement” may be nothing more than a return to premodern times when people worked throughout their lives rather than retiring at the arbitrary age of 65. Some may believe that “sage leadership” is nothing more than a needed return to an era when the older members of a society were honored and influential. We don’t fully concur with this assessment. We believe there is something more here than just a return to old forms. The Baby Boomers and some of their older compatriots are re-inventing seniority. They are creating a new model of generativity (Erikson, 1982) that is founded on recent neuro-biological discoveries suggesting that the brains of mature men and women can still be modified and strengthened (often framed as “neuro-plasticity;” cf. Doidge, 2007; Medina, 2008). Senior men and women can still create and sustain new ventures during their senior years.

Given the “graying” of America and many other nations in the world, there are many profound implications spinning off from the notion that nonretired men and women can remain vital (physically and psychologically) for many years. These implications include a challenge for professional coaches: how do we best work with mature men and women who are reexamining their long-standing assumptions about life after 65 and are considering ways in which to be “sage leaders.” Just as it may take a village to raise a child, so it may take a community to acknowledge and support the exceptional experience, talent, and energy that these sagacious leaders can offer their community. In this setting, the new organization is the community in which the sage leader will be operating and the organizational coach can play a clear role at both the individual and community level.

Internship employment

One of us [Bill] recently received an email from the son of a colleague asking for advice on building a resume. This young man was about to graduate with high marks from a prestigious West Coast university. He also had started a small software business that was yielding him a nice income. The draft resume he intended to send out was directed not only to prospective employers, but also to those who were reviewing applications for internships. It was hard to imagine that a young person with this much demonstrated talent would have to settle for an internship. However, that is often the case. If a job isn’t available, then a young person can keep busy, accomplish something, and further build her resume by working for nothing. Furthermore, the internship option is apparently not restricted to the young. People at all ages are now opting for internship assignments, especially if they have been unsuccessful for many

months in finding a job. Internships become an effective means of building a stronger resume when facing the competitive challenges of a tight and shifting job-market.

Obviously, an internship experience can be of great benefit to both the intern and the organization or community being served. In recent years, many colleges and universities have initiated and heavily promoted “service-learning” opportunities for their students (Jacoby, 2003). Some of the pull toward postgraduate internships undoubtedly can be attributed to this pregraduate emphasis on the value of service-learning work. We must be careful, however, about offering too much encouragement and offering too much support to those people who are opting for an internship rather than paid work. Non-payment for work is not the answer to our current economic/employment challenges. We must fit internships into a variety of career paths that interweave learning opportunities and the “pilot testing” of specific jobs and careers with sustained and fully-compensated work in a chosen vocation. Professional coaches can certainly play a key role in helping someone venture along this multi-strategy career path. Coaches can specifically provide valuable counsel and support for the young person (or person in mid-life) who is at a choice point regarding the use of an internship to yield new learning, provide greater meaning in life, and/or help build a stronger resume.

The Shattered Covenant

Life in the organizational underground is filled with hope and opportunity—once an inhabitant examines the available options (with the assistance of a professional coach). This life, however, is also filled with a sense of hopelessness and loss—even a sense of betrayal (what we are calling the “shattered covenant”).

Identity and career

Sheldon Stryker, Distinguished Professor of Sociology at the University of Indiana, took the basic premises of symbolic interactionism and applied them to the concept of identity. In his 1968 article, “Identity Salience and Role Performance,” Stryker outlined five axioms of using generalized symbolic interactionism. Later symbolic interactionists added concepts to the theory, most notably new types of identities beyond the role identities supported by Stryker (1968). The first is *social identities* or identities that are equated to membership in a particular group, such as racial, ethnic, or class identities (Burke, Owens, Serpe, & Thoits, 2003). The second identity type, *personal identities*, consists of personal characteristics, such as stubborn, intelligent or trustworthy (*ibid.*). Burke argued that these identity types (role, social, and personal) could be viewed as “isomorphic, but having different bases or sources.”

Burke and others continued to contribute to symbolic interactionism in the 1980s and 90s by presenting evidence that individuals resist changes to the self both in which identities they hold and the meanings associated with those identities (Burke & Stets, 1999). This work led to the identification of the self-verification process, wherein actors

test the personal meanings of their active identities against the meanings in social contexts and then work to correct discrepancies (Burke et al, 2003). Discrepancies between internal meanings and social meanings often lead individuals to feel insecure and unhappy resulting in a lower self-esteem (*ibid.*). It is important for us to recognize the impact that lower self-esteem triggered by recession is having on our society.

The recent recession has significantly impacted men. Many of the industries hit the hardest have been male-dominated industries (construction, financial services, automobile), which resulted in about 75% of the job losses being experienced by men. In November 2009, 19.4 percent of all men in their prime working years (25 to 54) were not working (Peck, 2010). We have not seen the fallout of this staggering number, yet history tells us that higher rates of male unemployment correlate directly to higher incidence of spousal abuse, drug and alcohol abuse, and suicide. There are likely to be significant societal changes that will last for many years.

The national divorce rate fell slightly in 2008, which is not surprising because divorce is costly. According to W. Bradford Wilcox, the director of the National Marriage Project at the University of Virginia, the gender imbalance of job losses in this recession is particularly noteworthy. When combined with the depth and duration of the jobs crises, this poses a profound challenge to marriage, especially in lower-income communities. He writes, "If men can't make a contribution financially, they don't have much to offer." Wilcox believes that over the next few years, we may see a long wave of divorces, putting a large number of men back into single-adulthood. The social implications are profound (Peck, 2010).

Larry

We'd like to tell you the story of Larry, whom one of us knows. Larry lost his job of 18 years in April of 2008. He lives in Ohio and was a Mortgage Underwriter. His wife was a self-employed real estate appraiser who stopped receiving any income from this business more than three years ago. Their two children are grown and living on their own.

Larry was the main wage earner for his family and did not worry too much about his wife's appraisal business. Now he is 60 years old (not old enough to collect social security) and with no income coming into his household. He depleted his retirement income, which had dropped significantly in the last two year, and his unemployment benefits have expired. Larry has been employed full time since graduating high school in 1968. He is a hard-working middle class American who, like others of his generation, wanted to provide a comfortable style of living for his wife and children. Larry is proud that he and his wife were able to pay for college for one of their children and radiology school for his other. But now, his confidence and self-esteem are as shattered as the contract he sees broken before him. After 40 years of full time employment, he has been told he is overqualified in his field of work. With only five

interviews in two years and five rejections for over-qualification, Larry has given up hope of continuing his underwriting career. And without a job, who is he? In Larry's mind, he is a man without identity, a man without purpose.

Larry's case may seem extreme, but it is reality for thousands of men. Self-esteem and identity are powerful internal forces. So powerful that Marcia Reynolds (2010) tells the story of her own father who, when diagnosed with a serious illness that would prevent him from working again, could not release himself from his successful career identity to which he had attached himself so strongly throughout his entire life. While there were other ways he could contribute during his life, he chose to forego the recommended medical treatment; not long after, he died.

A skillful coach can assist in identifying and choosing multiple areas of interest and involvement that fulfill the psychological needs of the individual. These areas of interest may shift as a person ages. It is critical to assess current drivers and associated work, family, community, and personal interests, and help him to make viable choices.

The psychological contract/covenant

The noted organization development consultant, Edgar Schein, emphasizes the critical intersection between organizational goals and personal aspirations. This critical intersection is founded on the career of those working in an organization. Furthermore, career paths are often anchored in some assumptions about what makes for a successful and fulfilling career. Schein identifies eight basic anchors (Schein, 1985) that tend to remain salient throughout the career of contemporary employees (at least in the Western World): (1) technical/functional competence, (2) general managerial competence, (3) autonomy/independence, (4) security/stability, (5) entrepreneurial creativity, (6) service/dedication to a cause, (7) pure challenge, and (8) lifestyle.

We would suggest that in our contemporary world of complexity, unpredictability, and turbulence (Bergquist & Mura, 2005), these career anchors must be more clearly differentiated with regard to the type of "anchoring" that must be done. There are traditional *ground anchors* that enable a ship to remain in place without any movement (beyond a small radius). These are the very large and heavy chunks of metal that most of us envision when thinking of anchors. During the 20th century, many people could probably orient their career around one or two stable ground anchors. Given the unique challenges of the 21st century, however, careers may have to be oriented around a *sea anchor* rather than ground anchor. As the name implies, a sea anchor is thrown overboard when a ship is operating in deep water. This type of anchor is deployed to keep a ship facing into the wind and to keep the ship from moving very far from its current location. The ship does move—but in a particular direction and at a slow speed. Similarly, a 21st century career anchor may provide orientation rather than absolute stability, and may prevent rapid shifts but still allow for adaptive flexibility. In the case of those who are unemployed or underemployed, the adoption of a sea

anchor might be appropriate, and the illusion of a ground anchor might have to be abandoned. A skillful coach can assist an unemployed or underemployed client to recognize the need for this shift to a sea anchor.

Edgar Schein offers a second important insight regarding careers. He proposes that employees enter a new job with specific expectations regarding what they will obtain from this organization (usually aligned with their major career anchor(s) and what they believe the organization expects of them in return. In most cases, this is a *psychological contract* rather than legal contract between the employee and organization. It is not explicit, but instead resides within the head and heart of the employee. As a result, employees are often disappointed when they discover what really can be gained from their employment in this organization and from engagement in a specific job. They grow resentful that their contract isn't being fulfilled and as a result often abandon their commitment to the other half of the contract (their own commitment to the welfare of their organization). In the case of those who are underemployed, the organization usually fails either to meet the employee's expectations or to demonstrate how this employee's career anchors are aligned with their job. Since the psychological contract is implicit rather than explicit, there is usually no forum in which an employee can articulate the contract or renegotiate this contract with a specific person (boss, owner, etc.). An organizational coach who is knowledgeable about career anchors can provide valuable assistance in helping to make a psychological contract explicit, helping a client identify ways in which to enter constructive dialogues about this contact, and identifying ways in which it might be met or modified.

Just as a 21st century career anchor might best be modified and described as a sea anchor, we would suggest that the term "psychological contract" should be modified. We would offer a related term: "psychological covenant." Unlike a contract, the *covenant* can't be modified. It certainly can't be broken. Marriages, for instance, are usually considered to be covenants rather than contracts, and divorce is usually filled with a sense of betrayal on the part of both parties. Violation of a covenant within an organizational setting can similarly lead to a sense of betrayal and resultant anger. Even when a person is unemployed, there is often a pervasive sense that a societal covenant has been betrayed: "I thought/felt that this society would provide me with a job – and perhaps even a meaningful job. I am now unemployed and see no prospect of getting a job. This society (government, community, family) is at fault, and I hate what it (they) has done to me!" An organizational coach can be of greater assistance helping someone address the challenges of a broken covenant than addressing the challenges of a broken contract. The coach can help a client understand that a deep need for control is at play. The shattered covenant creates a powerful and uncomfortable tension between the need to control and the evidence of lack of control. On Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the lower you go, the more important the need for control becomes. A coach can help her gain a sense of control, which is often greater than the actual act of controlling.

Career paths

As we attempt to make sense of the expectations held by men and women who are currently seeking employment, we must acknowledge not only the content and outcomes of the anticipated or desired career (the career anchors), but also the structure of an anticipated or desired career. Michael Driver and Kenneth Brousseau (Brousseau & Driver, 1994) offered a taxonomy of career paths (which they called “career concepts”) many years ago, that still seems to be salient in the second decade of the 21st century. They first identified the traditional path (“Linear” career concept) that is so commonly found in 20th century corporations (and so vividly illustrated in the TV series *Mad Men*). The assumption is made that a successful career consists of upward movement through a hierarchical organization. A visual analogy might be the inclined plane. The young, ambitious corporate employee aspires to the C-suite with all of its associated power and prestige. Metaphorically, she moves up an inclined plane toward the top of a corporate pyramid. Career advancement produces not only increased status, but also a new job with new challenges and new responsibilities. Work never gets dull as long as there is room up on the organizational pyramid for this employee.

Unfortunately, there is only so much room at the top of the corporation, unless it continues to expand in size. Furthermore, there are many “glass ceilings” related to various discriminatory categories (gender, race, ethnicity, disabilities, etc.). A young woman, fresh out of a highly successful college career, assumes that she will move rapidly to the top of the organization, only to bang into a series of glass ceilings. She feels betrayed and soon either falls into a state of depression and a sense of powerlessness or looks for other pursuits, including the initiation of her own business (Hardesty, 1987). If the organization ceases to grow or even downsizes, there is little room at the top for a competent person. Mergers, acquisitions, and alliances make movement up the inclined plane of the pyramid even more unpredictable and perilous.

Driver and Brousseau’s second career path (the “Steady State” career concept) is also traditional—but it is often overlooked as a viable career model. This is the steady state path which is traveled by those who are essentially doing the same job when they are 50 or 60 years old as they were doing in their 20s and 30s. On the one hand, we have day laborers and migrant workers who spend their entire life digging ditches or picking fruit. There also are family farmers, craftspeople, and artists, who chose to direct efforts throughout their life to a specific task that requires unique expertise and extensive experience. The steady state career path is also populated by professionals—physicians, architects, accountants, engineers, technicians—who receive extensive education and training, usually resulting in a diploma and certification.

The major challenge for these steady state workers during the 20th century concerned stagnation and burnout. How does a school teacher continue to be excited about her students after 40 years? What keeps a nurse focused on her work after delivering many babies over 35 years? Why wouldn’t the cabinet maker “rest on his laurels” after building

a strong reputation and making good money for each of his works of art? During the second decade of the 21st century, there is an additional challenge: the steady state is no longer very steady. This second career path requires stability—a society in which change in tastes and needs is a slow (even organic) process. Today, there is little stability in any sector of Western societies. The worlds of education, nursing and cabinet-making are changing as a result of shifting customer needs, new technologies, and economic crises. Can anyone expect, realistically, to be doing the same job for 30 or 40 years? Can we expect organizations and regulatory agencies to hold still while we perform our professional job?

The third and fourth career paths identified by Driver and Brousseau seem to prophesize the shifting 21st century economy and employment picture—though both of these paths were also common (and like the steady state path often unacknowledged) during the 20th century. The third path (the “Transitory” career concept) might best be described as chaotic. This is sometimes called “the Hobo model” – though many of the people journeying down this path are anything but hobo-ish. They are consultants, inventors, and entrepreneurs. They are truck drivers and project team managers. And we shouldn’t forget the new “traveling salesmen” – those international travelers who hock their wares or their services in all corners of the world (exemplified vividly in the recent movie *Up in the Air*). When a new opportunity emerges, these men and women immediately jump in and learn to swim very quickly. We would suggest that many coaches fit nicely in this category. We are the early adopters, the folks working on the fringe, the advocates for “following your bliss” – the chaos-thrivers.

Unfortunately, there are many people who are journeying down this path out of necessity rather than choice. There are the women and men who follow military spouses from post to post, picking up work wherever they land. What about the spouses of path one corporate achievers who are required to move from site to site or office to office on their way up the inclined plane? What about the handyman who does whatever is needed to make a few bucks?

This third career path is likely to be even more common in the new economy of the 21st century. Much as the hobos who rode trains during the depression (and were honored in the songs of Woody Guthrie), the new hobos will form subcultures and build short-term partnerships and alliances (as illustrated once again in *Up in the Air*). More than 40 years ago, Bennis and Slater (1968) predicted the emergence of these subcultures in their description of the “temporary society.” More recently, Thomas Friedman (2005) vividly describes these subcultures in his analysis of the “flat world.” How might an organizational coach tap into these temporary societies that are being formed by the path three workers? Can these non-organizations—often called networks—benefit from the strategies and tools offered by organizational coaches and organization development consultants?

Driver and Brousseau's fourth career path (the "Spiral" career concept) is particularly salient when considering the challenges of our new economy. This is a spiral pathway represented by the movement of men and women through several different careers—each career building on and making use of the expertise and experience learned during the previous career. A school teacher leaves her job to become the executive director at a small non-profit organization. An electrical engineer moves over to project management in his current organization. The insurance executive leaves her job to acquire a graduate degree in theology and accept the pastorate in a small community church.

This fourth career path is not new. Along with the third career path, this fourth one often describes the way in which many women entered the job market during the 20th century. The big difference in the 21st century is that the third and fourth paths are often chosen by men as well as women. The new economy and employment challenges should suggest that both paths are likely to become even more descriptive of many careers. Clearly, those coaches who are trained in life planning and have access to many career development tools will be of great value to those who are preparing for new careers while on the spiral path. Coaches can help clients identify transferable skills and career overlaps, while also providing support during difficult career transitions. What expertise and tools might organizational coaches be able to offer the multi-career (path four) client?

Protean career

In his 1976 book *Careers in Organizations*, Douglas T. (Tim) Hall speculated about careers in the future in response to the broken psychological contract with his "protean career" concept. The term "Protean" is derived from Greek mythology. Proteus was the Greek God of Sea who could change forms at will in order to adapt to oncoming threats. Thirty-four years later, the concept is reality. As the organizational environment has transformed due to market conditions, so too has the workplace transformed. Now employees must be equally flexible and adaptive. Hall described protean career as an orientation that is controlled by the person. He defined this orientation as:

The protean career is a process which the person, not the organization, is managing. It consists of all of the person's varied experiences in education, training, work in several organizations, changes in occupational field, etc. The protean person's own personal career choices and search for self-fulfillment are the unifying or integrative elements in his or her life. The criterion of success is internal (psychological success), not external. (Hall, 1976, p. 201)

Psychological success means attaining outcomes that are highly valued when measured against one's own personal goals, as opposed to externally defined goals. It's also holistic, whereby the whole idea of protean career is not just about defining what's good for you, but also the family and the community. By defining all aspects of self and associated values, a detachment of identity to career lessens and an increase in self-awareness and identity of the

whole self increases, thereby minimizing impact to the self when a job is lost or another major transition occurs in one's life.

Hall and his colleagues (Hall, 1986; Hall, 2002; Hall & Moss, 1998) argue further that there are two career “metacompetencies” that enable individuals to be more protean: identity (or self-awareness) and adaptability. How can organizational coaches support the development of these two metacompetencies so that employees learn from their experience and develop other new competencies on their own? What responsibility does the organization have to develop employees for the possible next job within the organization or the possible exit door as the business changes? Would the impact of the current job crisis have been lessened if, indeed, organizations were accountable for teaching employees identity and adaptability? Would there be more community involvement and work/life balance today? Would we have been able to minimize the identity-crisis that is a core part of the job crisis today?

Grieving the death of an old self

We know from research that when a person loses their job, the emotions experienced are quite similar to the grieving process as the person is mourning the loss of identity and self-worth, or death of identity. Although we have seen emotions vary from anger, pain, fear, excitement, helplessness, and hopefulness, it is important to recognize the emotions while they are occurring, because emotions will vary from week to week, and often from day to day. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross's Grief Cycle (1969), one of the most recognized and referenced transition models, helps us to understand the emotional states of the grieving process. The expanded grief model includes the active states of denial, anger, bargaining, testing, and acceptance; and the passive states of immobilization and depression. From our work in the field, we know that a person will transition through the cycle at his own pace and often slip back into stages of the cycle that he already passed through, called “cycling.” This refers to the roller coaster ride that many people experience after what they perceive as a significantly negative event. We have seen people get stuck in a phase for long periods of time, called “sticking.” Very often, the stage of sticking leads to depression.

When the realization of inevitability occurs, the *depression* stage begins. We often see this stage as the longest and lowest in the cycle. The signs of depression can manifest in many ways, such as despondency, refusing help, long bouts of crying, verbalizing that they see no future. Getting stuck here can lead to serious physiological and psychological problems. Coaches can help identify the stage of the grieving cycle by reading the verbal and nonverbal cues of the individual. By meeting him where he is, the coach can help guide and support him through the stages of the grief cycle. It is important to make the distinction here between coaching and therapy. The skilled coach can determine if the individual is in need of therapy versus coaching. It is not uncommon for a person to work with a therapist and a coach simultaneously when stuck in a grief cycle. Often therapy is a springboard for moving through the cycle and being able to work effectively with the coach.

Larry

Let's go back to Larry's story. Larry's wife left their home to live with her sister and brother-in-law because she saw herself as a burden to Larry. His frequent angry outbursts, quite frankly, scared her. Yet, she remained supportive, caring, and frequently urged Larry to seek help through community counseling centers and their local church support groups. He refused to seek help. A man without a job for two years who now needs therapy? His self-esteem was practically non-existent. He became immobilized and got stuck in the depression stage for many months. Finally, when the feeling of helplessness was too much for Larry to bear, he reached out for help through his church. This single act moved Larry to the testing stage of the grieving cycle; as difficult as this was for Larry, it became the turning point of his two year unemployment period.

The Response

Without a response to this information, it's just that—information. We believe that we need to take action to shift the perception of the organizational underground and to help those in it to once again become contributing members of our society. To do this, we believe that we need to look at the organizational underground from both a systems and an appreciative perspective in order to take appropriate action in response to the crisis.

We must first create awareness that the organization underground of the unemployed and underemployed exists. We also propose that the underground operates as a system and, therefore, a systems approach to working with the underground is necessary. Recall the many underground cities that were created primarily out of man's basic need—survival. The Vinh Moc tunnels in Vietnam were home to over 400 people for over six years during the Vietnam War and included kitchens, sleeping areas, even a hospital. It was built for survival and clearly served its purpose, as not one person died in this underground city in those years.

One of the most famous undergrounds is the Paris Underground. While its *raison d'être* may have changed since the early centuries, it exists to this day. The vision of the Paris underground may not be pleasant. Most of us recall that Victor Hugo used the sewers in the plot of his famous ten-volume novel *Les Misérables*, published in 1862. Hugo's friend Emmanuel Bruneseau was commissioned to carry out an exhaustive survey of the network, providing the novelist with a detailed firsthand account of this subterranean world. In the novel, Jean Valjean carries a friend wounded on the barricades in the 1832 riots through the sewers to safety. Hugo writes that Valjean's "first impression was of being blind... a wafting, fetid smell reminded him where he was." The pair arrives at the main sewer ring at around 3pm. They set off again, seeing light in the distance, but find it impossible to get out: "The arch was blocked off by a strong grille." How much does our organizational underground differ from Hugo's encounter

with the Paris underground? Is there a strong grille preventing escape? Can the strong grille be a metaphor for our current economic policies or companies short-term financial focus?

Organizational development professionals must understand how the system operates, the dynamics of the systems, and associated leverage points and tipping points. From there, organizational coaches will determine how to work with the individuals in the underground, providing meaningful and impactful coaching that allows individuals to regain their sense of purpose, esteem, income, and pride. We see a critical need for organizational consulting work with the underground system. Consultants who have the experience to diagnose integrated systems and processes can play a vital role in moving this system forward for the betterment of society, as opposed to where it is today (in the early stages of formation and struggling for identity and greater purpose). We see this as the bridge to working with the broader community, advocacy, public policy, and pro bono coaching. Of equal importance to all of the above is how to work with our own hearts to understand our personal responsibility at the macro and micro levels of the organizational underground, and how our own calling might be part of the bigger game.

Personal Level of Coaching

“What a man can be, he must be.” Abraham Maslow, Psychologist

Maslow’s hierarchy of humans’ five basic needs include physiological needs; safety needs; needs of love, affection and belongingness; needs for esteem; and needs for self-actualization (1943). As we have previously discussed, impact on esteem during this recession is significant, and we would argue that the basic needs at the 2nd and 3rd levels are also impacted. For some in the organizational underground, addressing basic needs at lower levels in the hierarchy become paramount. We believe that organizational coaches have a role to play here in helping members of the organizational underground redefine or reframe “belongingness.” In addition, organization coaches can use a systems perspective to create connections between members and the greater virtual underground, thereby providing a “place” where members have affinity and a sense of belonging, allowing them to move up the hierarchy to esteem. Frustrated esteem needs can lead to feelings of weakness, helplessness, inferiority, and worthlessness. If coaches use Maslow’s theory in their work with individuals in the underground, the esteem level will need particular attention. It is a dominant need that, when not met, blocks self-actualization. The skilled coach will help her client determine which areas of esteem are not being met and causing frustration. She can work with her client to develop a plan that closes the gaps. Once that happens, self-actualization is possible.

When writing ways in which to maximize potential, Maslow used the term “self-actualization” and described a process leading to the achievement of full humanness. Those who subscribe to Maslow’s theory accept the premise that every human has an impulse toward growth. To attain self-actualization, Maslow posits,

A very important part of this task is to become aware of what one is, biologically, temperamentally, constitutionally as a member of a species, of one’s capacities, desires, needs, and also of one’s vocation.

What one is fitted for, what one’s destiny is. (p. 44)

In his research, Maslow found that every self-actualized person worked at a vocation—they were devoted to work or a cause that brought them great satisfaction.

Coaches can help individuals reflect and identify their purpose or calling through reflective and appreciative exercises. This may take time, for many individuals find it difficult to truly recognize a calling. Skilled coaches will know when to probe, when to remain silent, when to reframe, when to guide. We see a need for coaches to be versed in locus of control theory during this personal coaching. (Seligman’s learned helplessness and positive psychology link directly to this area of coaching.) While each of us has an internal and an external locus of control, the degree of emphasis that each of us places on internal versus external varies and will shift throughout our lives. The skilled coach will recognize where the individual’s locus of control lies and either help to shift the locus of control to become more internally focused or leverage the positive impact of an existing strong internal locus of control as a means of sparking positive action and optimism.

Managing transitions

There are many theories and models that help us understand and manage through transitions. Here, we will discuss three theories to illustrate how members of the organizational underground are affected, depending on their life or transition stage and to propose that the individual can move through transitions more effectively with the help of a coach who is versed in life cycle and transition theory.

"It is human to have a long childhood; it is civilized to have an even longer childhood. Long childhood makes a technical and mental virtuoso out of man, but it also leaves a life-long residue of emotional immaturity in him." -- Erik Erikson (1902-1994).

In Erikson’s eight psychological stages of development theory, each stage is concerned with becoming competent in an area of life (Erikson, 1982). If the stage is handled well, the person will feel a sense of mastery. If the stage is managed poorly, the person will emerge with a sense of inadequacy. Further, Erikson believed people experience a conflict that serves as a turning point in development at each of the eight stages. In Erikson’s view, these conflicts are centered on either developing a psychological quality or failing to develop that quality. During these times, the

potential for personal growth is high, but so is the potential for failure. If we look at the age demographics of the unemployed, the majority are in Erikson's Stage 7 Middle Adulthood, 35 to 55 or 65, the conflict is generativity versus stagnation, the events are work and family, and the outcome of this stage is that adults need to create or nurture things that will outlast them, often by having children or creating a positive change that benefits other people. Success leads to feelings of usefulness and accomplishment, while failure results in shallow involvement in the world.

During this stage we tend to be occupied with creative and meaningful work and with issues surrounding family. Strength comes through care of others and production of something that contributes to the betterment of society, which Erikson calls "generativity," so when we are in this stage we often fear inactivity and meaninglessness. There are many life transitions that naturally take place in this stage—children leaving home, aging parents, finding new meaning. Sometimes this is referred to as the *mid-life crisis*. This is the only stage in Erikson's theory where "work" is an event. What happens to society if those in the organizational underground cannot emerge from Stage 7 adequately? Stage 8 is the final stage, Maturity or Late Adulthood, with the conflict of ego integrity versus despair. What if these people die in despair because they could not psychologically come to terms with the work component of Stage 7 due to the radical changes in their work identity during this recession? What is the responsibility of the organizational coach to prevent or at least minimize this societal alteration?

Unlike earlier models, William Bridges' attention is focused on helping people discover, accept, and embrace their new identities in the new situation. Bridges defines transition as the psychological realignment that people go through as they internalize and come to terms with their new situation brought about by a change event (Bridges, 1980). Widely recognized as an organizational model for change, Bridges' model can also be applied to individual transition management. Bridges describes the components of managing transitions in three phases: 1) letting go; 2) the neutral zone; 3) the new beginning. We would like to focus on the neutral zone, where the old reality is gone but the new reality isn't functional or defined, making the future unclear. For some, living in this ambiguity is painful. For the unemployed or underemployed, the neutral zone is the entire period of unemployment or underemployment. Today, that period of time is not weeks, but months and years.

One of us [Vicki] interviewed an underemployed man who has been in the organizational underground since being laid off from his job as an Engineering Manager at a global company after 31 years of service. For over five years, he has been working in a job that is beneath his education level, professional training, and former income. "I don't see any way out. This is the only job I could find after looking for over a year to replicate my former position, salary, and benefits. It doesn't even come close to what I was earning, but I had to take it. My wife was on my back every day

asking me who did I network with, how many calls did I make? It was driving me crazy. I felt like a child, not a husband. I felt worthless. At least now I go to work every day and have a paycheck. I have my identity back.”

Coaches have a special role to play when working with someone in the neutral zone. The coach can help her identify what is lost (group membership, relationships, turf, sense of future, etc.), recognize the emotions she is feeling, and determine what she needs in order to live in the ambiguity of the neutral zone. Coaching effectively in this zone can prevent the sticking or recycling into stages of the grieving cycle. It is important for the coach to recognize that coaching in the neutral zone is also an opportunity to unfreeze old ways of thinking and help identify new ways of behaving or doing things before the new beginning, when freezing of new behaviors occurs.

Finally, we will examine Frederic Hudson’s (1999) Adult Life Cycle of Renewal, which has four phases and one transition phase. Hudson proposes that everyone cycles through these phases multiple times during their lives. Hudson tells us that these phases are normal, predictable and temporary. Two “Life Chapters” are periods of relative stability (“Go For It” and “Getting Ready”), and two “Life Transitions” are periods of profound change (“Doldrums” and “Cocooning”). Movement from the Go For It to the Doldrums (depending on current life situation) can be dangerous, because this move may produce a downward spiral of negativity and helplessness, creating toxins, and hindering one’s ability to move on to make a “mini transition” back to Go For It or to enter the Life Transition of Cocooning where contemplation and self-exploration dominate. Cocooning can also be a danger zone if she can’t sort out the state of one’s life in order to transition to Getting Ready, where she can plan and organize for her new Go For It phase. A skilled coach and one versed in Hudson’s model can help her to understand that these cycles are normal, healthy, and an integral part of adult development. The coach can help her mine each phase for meaning, purpose, and future relevancy.

Susan

Let’s apply these models to Susan. Susan is a 52 year old [Erikson’s Middle Adulthood] advertising executive who has enjoyed over 30 years of progressive career growth. A graduate of Cornell, Susan was recruited from a top advertising firm into their management rotation program. She was rapidly promoted in her first 15 years with the firm, proving to be a high potential candidate who managed creative teams effectively, sold and retained top clients, and flawlessly handled the media. Susan was recruited by her firm’s top competitor and became a top talent for her new firm. All the while, Susan managed her family life as well. Married with three children, Susan is the primary earner in the household. Susan’s husband owns an auto body shop in their town. The business has been in her husband’s family for two generations. Two of their children are in college, one in high school. The family leads active lives, with much community involvement. [While Susan has cycled many times in this timeframe, we see Susan’s phase as Hudson’s Go For It.]

Like many others during this great recession, Susan was laid off when her firm downsized hundreds of employees in 2009. Susan was devastated [Bridges' Letting Go phase]. While she was not totally surprised by the downsizing—as a senior executive she was aware of the financial hit the company had taken over the last two years—she held out hope that she would not be impacted because of her contributions and performance to the firm. She was wrong. She did receive a decent severance package and outplacement service, which eased the pain a bit. However, she was quite aware that some of her colleagues from the advertising industry, who had lost their jobs months ago, still had not had a single interview. Susan knew that she would be out of work for quite awhile and may have to consider career alternatives in order to sustain the family's quality of living and college tuition fees. For awhile, Susan was very angry and the anger was directed at several people—her former boss, her former company, her husband, her children, and herself [Kubler-Ross's Anger stage].

Fourteen months after losing her job, Susan is still unemployed and no longer receiving her state unemployment benefit [Bridges' Neutral Zone]. She has been fortunate enough to land a couple of consulting projects during the last year which brought in a little income, and she continues to market herself as a consultant to the advertising industry although these types of engagements are very limited because of the slow economic recovery [Hudson's Mini-Transition]. Many of her colleagues are doing the same, so the competition for any consulting or contract work is as high as the competition of a full-time job opening. Susan fears that her age is having a negative impact on her reemployment. With her success came a high salary and employers know that they can hire someone 20 years younger than Susan for a much lower compensation package.

The situation is tense at home. The family auto business is holding steady, yet Susan's husband is feeling the pressure of being the sole income provider. At Susan's suggestion, he laid off two of his workers and is working longer hours himself to increase the profit of the business to help with the tuition payments. The children are also tense. One is considering leaving college to work full time to help the family. Susan is adamant that she does not want him to quit college, yet the final decision is out of her control. Their junior in high school, the only daughter, has been acting out. An average student, her grades are now slipping, and she often stays out all night, preferring not to be around Susan who she sees as increasingly depressed and anxious. Susan's reaction to her daughter's change in behavior varies from ignorance to anger. In fact, Susan is both depressed and anxious. Her physical appearance has changed over the last year. She shows accelerated signs of aging (much like world leaders show rapid aging signs during high tension political times such as war). She has started smoking again after 15 years and is exercising less, even though she has more time to devote to her fitness. It would appear that Susan is on a downward spiral and her spiral is the catalyst for uninvited dysfunctional "guests" into her once vital family [Hudson's Doldrums; Bridges' Neutral Zone; Kubler-Ross's Depression stage.]

Yet, Susan has always been a goal setter and an achiever. Her career taught her to look at things from all angles and to take risks. Recently, Susan made critical decisions with the help of a counselor at a community job search group [Hudson's Mini-Transition; Kubler-Ross's Acceptance stage]. Susan was able to see the connections between her daughter's behavior and her own, and also to express her repressed feelings of resentment of having been the primary wage earner for so many years. After processing these emotions with her counselor and creating coping strategies for managing stress, Susan gained strength of mind, body and spirit. Recognizing and declaring that her family is the number one priority in her life, and her career is not, Susan was able to make choices [Hudson's Getting Ready phase]. She decided to continue to market her advertising consultancy, because it would give her flexibility to be more present for her daughter's final year in high school and to rebuild their relationship. Knowing that consulting work would be sporadic income, she added other career options into her strategy that were unrelated to advertising but played to her passions and strengths. Much like a patchwork quilt that has been tenderly pieced together, Susan would become a patchwork career woman [Bridges' New Beginnings; Hudson's Go For It].

Stress management

The word stress comes from the field of physics, where it refers to amount of force that is put on something. These forces are external and internal. But the real issue is the strain (another physics term) that occurs as a response to stress (Wheeler, 2007). For most researchers and clinicians, the working definition of stress is the situation that arises in you when life's challenges and pressures exceed your perceived ability to cope (*ibid.*). Your whole self is affected by stress—mind, body, spirit—which by definition allows for compartmentalizing the affects and drawing on specific resources to cope. Managing stress during transitions is crucial to maintaining health, mental and physical. Robert M. Sapolsky, author of *Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers* (2004), is a leading expert on the physiology of stress. He and others have presented solid evidence that stress affects most of the basic functions of living, including sleep, memory, managing pain, sexual activity, and getting nourishment from food.

It is important for us to note here the difference between acute versus chronic stress. Acute stress is temporary stress and useful, whereas chronic stress is less useful and can be harmful (Wheeler, 2007). The acute stress response is triggered when you sense a threat. The response triggers all sorts of brain and hormone reactions in response to the threat. Once the perceived threat is gone, your body returns to its normal state. Recall when an animal darts in front of your car. Within seconds, your body responds to the threat. You put on the brakes or swerve, your stomach tenses and heart beats faster, you might sweat. It takes a few minutes to feel normal again, but normal returns. You have coped with that stressor quite automatically. It is not uncommon to experience several acute stress situations each day. When stress is chronic, it's a much different story. When you cannot let go of the threat or continue to play out in your mind what might have happened – what your friends think about it, etc. – you keep that threat living in your

system. Do you know someone who is still angry about something that happened over ten years ago? Someone who explodes in anger when something doesn't go their way? Someone who is still grieving a significant loss from several years ago? These are signs of someone experiencing chronic stress.

Chronic stress affects the physical and emotional status of the individual. Physically, chronic stress can manifest in the form of back pain, headaches, enhanced cardiovascular reactivity, fatigue, insomnia, to name just a few. Emotionally, the impact is typically depression and anxiety. Susan found herself in chronic stress and was able to recognize that she needed help and with the help of a counselor, began to cope. Coping is the antidote for stress. Therefore, a skilled coach can help her through the primary and secondary appraisal process to determine a) is there a threat? and b) if yes, does she have control over the situation and can she minimize the impact of the threat through action? From there, the coach can help her identify and apply healthy coping strategies, which may be both cognitive and emotional (Wheeler, 2007).

Seeking gratification outside the workplace

As discussed earlier with Hall's protean career, the protean person's own personal career choices and search for self-fulfillment are the unifying or integrative elements in his or her life. It would appear that Hall was speaking directly to work/life balance or integration before the terminology became widely relevant. By defining priorities and values in all aspects of life and developing the identity and adaptability competencies, the individual does several important things. He begins to remove the conflict between work and personal life and allow life to become more fully integrated. This helps make the management of changes and transitions easier for the person, because there is a perception of control thereby shifting the locus of control to internal versus external. Research shows that those with a higher sense of internal locus of control tend to feel more in charge with their lives. They tend to see events as being a result of their own actions and decisions, whereas a higher sense of external locus of control may be more of a fatalistic view of the events and world around. There are, of course, pros and cons associated with each locus of control, and it is not unlikely that a person has a degree of both internal and external locus of control; however, we propose that for those in the organizational underground that a higher internal locus of control is needed for greater adaptability, persistence, and emotional well being.

Additionally, we propose that it is healthy for those in the young adult through maturity stages of the life cycle to intentionally seek gratifying work, interest, and activities in all aspects of life. Time and energy are finite which makes the importance of intentional decisions about areas dispensing time and energy very critical. The inclusion of time for leisure, physical, home, spiritual, community, etc., in addition to career, is essential for holistic gratification.

For example, if Larry had been involved in a community non-profit while working in his mortgage career that continued after he lost his job, might his immobilization period have been reduced or perhaps prevented? A skilled coach can help him identify those non-workplace activities and experiences that bring a high level of satisfaction, assess alignment with his values, and help him make new choices that will result in a greater sense of satisfaction and self-fulfillment.

Organizational/Community Level of Coaching

While many professional coaches have addressed the challenges associated with the organizational underground primarily by working with the individual who is alienated in some manner from the formal workplace, other strategies can also be deployed. An organizational coach who is also versed (as an organization development consultant) in the nature and structure of productive and innovative organizations, can address these challenges by working with clients to create new organizations, initiate community-based engagements, influence public policy, or examine the underlying ethical issues associated with this widespread alienation.

There are organizations that are providing *inplacement coaching* for their employees (Best Buy, for example) and there are firms that offer inplacement coaching as a service to organizations. While the premise of inplacement coaching services offered today is to retain critical talent, not all talent will be retained. We propose that the organizational underground will create a demand for redefining inplacement coaching and possibly a new industry, much like the outplacement industry was created as a result of recessionary economic factors and the need to assist many displaced workers. As the outplacement industry matures, we propose that inplacement could be the new market niche that teaches organizations to meet this need by coaching through their own organization development or internal coaching programs, or outsourcing this service if the organization does not have the capacity. Bottom line, we see a dire need for organizations to be accountable for providing coaching to all talent, not just the critical talent. While inplacement coaching would not have prevented our current unemployment and underemployment crisis, it may have lessened the emotional impact on people like Larry and Susan. By lessening the emotional impact, the ripple of effect of family and societal implications are also reduced.

Creating a new organization

We find in many coaching communities an emphasis being placed on cooperation and networking. This call for innovative collaboration is particularly appropriate when directed toward the organizational underground. Many organizational structures have been created in recent years that assist those competent citizens who have patched together part-time careers. *Hollow organizations* have been formed in which independent and part-time employees work together to take on a complex, time-limited project. These organizations are called “hollow” because they have little or no formal administrative structure and are highly flexible with regard to membership and market. Obvious

examples include the weekly farmer's markets that feature locally grown produce, and the monthly street fairs that feature the work of artists and craftspeople. We can also offer more technologically sophisticated examples, including many sources of knowledge (such as Wikipedia) and venues for purchasing and selling various products and services (such as buying groups and expos) – one could even offer the Internet itself as a hollow organization without central administrative control.

These new networking models—featured in Thomas Friedman's (2005) description of the emerging “flat world”—are not without organizational structure; rather, the structure is highly sophisticated and fluid. Organizational coaches and consultants can certainly help someone (or more often, a cluster of people) within the organizational underground to create a hollow organization. At the very least, the coach and consultant can assist their client in gaining access to an existing hollow organization.

A second kind of organizational structure, based on innovative collaboration, is commonly found (though often unacknowledged) in our increasingly flat world. This is the *virtual organization*. Unlike the hollow organization, virtual organizations usually require administrative support; however, unlike the hollow organization which usually is long-lived, the virtual organization is a short-term phenomenon. A need is identified and then men and women with many different skills and areas of expertise come together to meet this need. A construction project may be the most obvious (or at least the most visible) manifestation of the virtual organization. Architects, lawyers, accountants, engineers, construction workers, landscapers and many other people come together to build a new high-rise or mall, usually under the administrative control of a construction supervisor. Motion pictures are now primarily produced by one-time, virtual organizations (rather than by Hollywood studios). This virtual structure is evident in the long list of producers, technical experts and supporting staff that roll out at the end of most contemporary movies. Many consulting firms operate in a similar manner. No “firm” actually exists. Rather, one consultant gets the call or can provide specific knowledge or expertise. This person becomes the “lead” consultant, with other colleagues being brought in on an as-needed basis.

The hollow and virtual organizational structures come in many forms and there are many other innovative organizational structures that build on various forms of collaboration. An organizational coach/consultant becomes an organizational architect, or at least an architectural advisor, who brings informed questions and appropriate expertise to the task of designing and implementing an innovative structure that serves the organizational underground. As an organizational architect, the coach/consultant helps people identify and build new forms of collaboration, thus offering hope and a sense of empowerment for these members of the organizational underground. What about Susan? Could Susan's coach help her form a collaborative enterprise? What about creation of a virtual organization—a collective advertising group? Rather than viewing other out-of-work colleagues as competitors,

couldn't Susan invite them to join her in the formation of a new advertising network? Could this network provide opportunities for employment (enabling professionals like Susan to work on both small and large projects) as well as some health and retirement benefits (members of the network negotiating as a collective for better rates)?

What about other ventures in which Susan is interested? Could she be encouraged by her coach to form or join an existing career support group in which she can enter into dialogue with other members of the organizational underground about her own frustrations and grievances, while also identifying and articulating her own emergent (or re-emergent) interests? This may not be enough. This support group can become a hollow organization in which its members can also assist and gain assistance from one another regarding ways in which to translate these interests into successful entrepreneurial ventures.

One member of the hollow organization (Harold) knows of a theater company's need for a part-time manager. Margaret fills the bill with her background as the past owner of a small business. Another member of the hollow organization (Gwen) has read about the creation of a new undergraduate program in project management at the local community college. Jim (an out-of-work corporate manager) would seem to have all of the knowledge needed to teach in such a program. We believe that these practical and action-oriented hollow organizations may become more common in the future—especially as the organizational underground grows in size.

Community-based engagements

The organizational underground can be considered not only a challenge being faced by alienated members of this underground, but also a challenge for the community in which these men and women live. Professional coaches/consultants can direct their expertise and experience toward special community projects that address these challenges. Just as it may take a village to raise a child, so it may take a community to bring people to a personal sense of purpose and respect. Members of the organizational underground might be asked to assist in expanding an existing big-brothers or big-sisters program in their community, or to design and construct a new eco-friendly playground in their community. Corporate and government leaders can collaborate with members of the organizational underground in providing the resources needed to bring about successful community development. These leaders might not be able to offer a full-time job to someone in the organizational underground because the economy is not stable enough to justify such a commitment. Part-time work, however, on behalf of the community can be justified, and would benefit all concerned. A community-oriented coach/consultant can assist in identifying and bringing together members of the organizational underground with these corporate and government resources, so that the energy and expertise of these unemployed or underemployed men and women is more fully engaged on behalf of their community.

At another level, coaches and consultants can encourage community-based engagements, by bringing people together from different sectors of the organizational underground to share diverse perspectives and solve community-based problems. One of our coaching/consulting colleagues, for instance, has brought together members of the police force in a major US city with members of the organizational underground in her community to address the challenges facing the homeless people in this city. Using coaching and consulting skills, our colleague brought the police officers and undergrounders together with men and women who are living on the street, to solve the problems faced by these street-people. Members of the organizational underground not only gained a comparative perspective on their own “good fortune,” they also were of significant benefit to the homeless (and members of the police force) in helping to solve this pressing problem in their community.

Could either Larry or Susan become engaged in a community project, with the encouragement and guidance of their coach? Even more broadly, could Larry or Susan’s coach have brought them together with other members of the organizational underground to work collaboratively on a major community project? Is it enough that Larry’s coach encourages him to become involved in a community non-profit organization—wouldn’t it have been even better to encourage Larry to join with others like himself who miss organizational life and the joint accomplishment of something important? Isn’t part of the challenge one of restoring the sense of shared purpose that is lost when one loses a job or is forced to piece together short-term, part-time and fragmented work assignments? Can’t community engagements help to fill this vacuum? And isn’t “service-learning” a process that benefits not only the college student but also an alienated member of the organizational underground?

Public policy

The two responses we just described both begin with the assumption that our society will remain untouched by the challenges associated with the growing organizational underground. Both strategies, in that sense, are politically conservative – or some would say “realistic.” Most professional coaches position themselves in a neutral position when it comes to public policy and the “ugly” world of politics. Yet, isn’t there room for “political coaching?” Just as Warner Burke (1987) made a strong case many years ago for abusing organization development practitioners of the notion that they are value-free in their work with clients, so we might argue that organizational coaches need not be neutral in their work with men and women of the organizational underground. They can rightfully envision and help support efforts to change the public policies that contribute to the expansion of this underground or at least do little to ameliorate this condition.

We propose that there are several ways in which organizational coaches might get involved with the reformulation of public policy. For those who are knowledgeable about financial matters or taxation, we would suggest that coaches help advocates make the case for new tax codes. Unemployment and underemployment incur major societal costs.

There are not only the direct costs associated with unemployment benefits and public payment of medical care for the uninsured; there are also many indirect and long-term costs associated with substance abuse and mental illness (especially depression) that ensue from the alienation of those in the organizational underground. What about the profound societal costs produced by anger and learned helplessness (an *external locus of control*, per Seligman, 1991) among those who are alienated? While it seems that a corporation “saves money” when it lays off workers, in fact, the costs are transferred from the corporation to society and tax payers. Should there be corporate penalties for “cavalier” (volatile) employment policies and practices. Should there be tax breaks for corporations that engage in thoughtful and long-term planning with regard to employment—providing a stable workforce and consistent employment practices? How might organizational coaches use their organizational expertise to make a convincing case with regard to these corporate/societal tradeoffs?

We might also turn to organizational coaches who have expertise in the areas of communication and persuasion. They could provide assistance to political and community leaders who are seeking to make a convincing case for addressing challenges associated with the organizational underground. How might long-term perspectives regarding enduring unemployment and underemployment be successfully introduced to a citizenry that is addicted to the 24 hour news cycle and that (as a result) tends to embrace short-term perspectives? Can we also look to the expertise of organizational coaches who specialize in the transformation of mundane managers into visionary leaders? Can't these coaches assist in the production of more compelling portraits of the organizational underground?

A third group of organizational coaches with organization development expertise might also be recruited. These are the practitioners who have extensive experience in working with large groups to arrive at consensus regarding new community visions, priorities and strategies—such as those who conduct “Future Search” conferences. Could not these men and women follow up a large group meeting about the organizational underground with coaching provided to those people who must translate the good ideas generated at this meeting into actionable steps and, ultimately, into new political priorities and policies? While there is a long history of successful large group facilitation, there is growing evidence suggesting that after-event (and even pre-event) coaching serves as a wonderful (perhaps even necessary) compliment to this facilitation.

Ethics

There is yet another perspective to take with regard to the organizational underground. This perspective concerns societal ethics and a vision of the just society. The strategies of alignment coaching (Lazar & Bergquist, 2007) can be effectively engaged on behalf of this perspective. An organizational coach with organization development expertise can help organizational leaders (corporate and government) identify the values associated with the reality of an expanding organizational underground. Each of the other organizational strategies we have just identified ultimately

rests on a set of assumptions concerning what is valued in a society and for which members of a society are responsible. What responsibility does a corporate leader have for the role of their organization in casting out employees or taking advantage of employees who are willing to set aside their own career aspirations for a secure job (thus accept a life of underemployment)? What responsibility does a government leader have for policies that allow (even encourage) businesses to replace workers with machines and to build a disheartening dependence of many citizens on various forms of public assistance?

Alignment coaches can encourage and assist leaders to look beyond their current job and their immediate responsibilities to a bigger arena – what our colleague Laura Whitworth called the “bigger game.” In a previous article by Foley and Bergquist (2009), we presented a case study about Greg, the North American President of a German engineering firm, and the coaching issues he faces while he remains at a firm whose values are misaligned with his, so as to provide for his family. Greg’s family work history is consistent with what we found in our research. As a father, he rationalizes working in a job where he is misaligned or even dislikes, so he can allow his kids to follow their dreams. His father did the same and his father before. We argue that a father must model what he wishes his children to become—playing the bigger game. It would seem that organizational coaches themselves can find a “bigger game” in their work with the ethical dimension of leadership among the leaders with whom they work.

Conclusions

The first key point we wish to make, in closing, is that personal and organizational coaching must be blended when working with the inhabitants of the organizational underground. Some of those reading this article might conclude that these issues of unemployment and underemployment are really matters to be addressed by those doing personal coaching, rather than those doing coaching in an organizational setting. Given that these clients don’t have an organization to call home, why would an organizational coach become interested in or declare that they are competent to help address the challenges faced by these unfortunate men and women? In this article, we have tried to make the case for a vital role to be played by those with expertise in organizational coaching.

The second key point we wish to make is that addressing the issues of the organizational underground requires that professional coaches assume a much broader perspective regarding their opportunities and obligations—they must engage a much bigger game. This second key point returns us once again to the issue of ethics. There is a more fundamental reason for the vital role to be played by organizational coaches (and personal coaches, for that matter): professional coaches of all kinds should make a commitment to the “bigger game” as Whitworth (2004) has framed it. “I want to be engaged in creating a shift in how human beings relate to each other. I firmly believe that much of what does not work on our planet is because a majority of the world’s population does not know how to interrelate in a healthy, positive, and empowering manner. That’s all: *they don’t know how. We can do something about that!* We

can help to put into place a universally aligned system of relating or caring or engaging with one another. (p. 1)”

Professional coaching is not just about economic benefits for the client and coach. It is not just about increasing corporate profitability or non-profit efficiency and effectiveness. It is about making the world a better place in which to live and to ensure that our bio-sphere is sustainable. This is the bigger game of professional coaching.

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