

# **Natalie and John: A Narrative Perspective on the Future Hopes and Fears Facing Organizational Coaching**

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## **RESETTING THE STAGE**

What if Natalie continues to coach John past 2009? This would first of all probably mean that Natalie has been successful working with John - which is good news. There may have to be changes in the coaching strategies being employed, however, because the coaching process has "matured" for Natalie and John. They know each other better--including their strengths and weaknesses. They also will have built mutual trust - in the competencies both exhibit in their intentions regarding the coaching engagement and, hopefully, in their shared perspectives regarding what is ultimately important in the world and how best to find meaning in their individual lives and coaching engagement. There are other reasons for continuing to modify their coaching engagement - and these reasons impact on not only the professional relationship between Natalie and John, but also the field of professional coaching in general. Several of these reasons will be explored in this article.

## **WELCOME TO ECONOMIC HARD TIMES**

The world of economics doesn't look very promising in most of the societies that currently support professional coaching. We are confronted with fundamental challenges - either the flat, hot and crowded world portrayed by Thomas Friedman (2008) or the curved and dangerous world of David Smick (2009). In either of these worlds, professional coaching can no longer be a luxury, benefit or even a primary vehicle for avoiding litigation. John is undoubtedly experiencing the financial challenges facing his own hospital, given the health care crisis that is prevalent in the United States.

If we are experiencing hard times, then professional coaching will have to be justified with hard data that matches the hard times. In terms of the diffusion of an innovation, such as professional coaching, we will clearly be meeting the concerns of the early majority. John is not alone in being skeptical about the faddish claims being made by those who have marketed professional coaching during the past twenty years. We need measurement and accountability. Does this mean that all (or most) coaching programs operating within organizations must demonstrate a Return on Investment (ROI) or at least a Return on Expectations (RO E)? Perhaps they do. At the very least, it means that the benefits of coaching will have to be documented. We know from research on innovation diffusion, that the early majority wants evidence. This doesn't necessarily have to be quantitative evidence—especially if this quantification results in trivialization of coaching outcomes. We certainly don't need an elaborate

strategy of measurement that is based on faulty inferences or very soft data ("garbage in and garbage out"). In many cases, the early majority will be convinced by a thoughtfully prepared series of case studies. This majority will be convinced by an in-depth analysis of not only the outcomes of effective coaching but also some of the reasons why specific coaching strategies seem to be most successful when applied to specific organizational issues or when engaged with specific client constituencies.

## **WELCOME TO A WORLD OF PROBLEMS AND MYSTERIES**

At the heart of the matter is a particularly difficult dilemma in the field of professional coaching. This dilemma concerns the nature of the issues being addressed by coaches and their clients (see for example, Lazar & Bergquist, 2007). In some cases, a coaching client is addressing issues that might be described as organizational puzzles. These issues can be framed in a specific discipline (finances, personnel, marketing, etc.) and they usually operate in a domain over which a coaching client has control (internal locus of control). Accountability can readily be assigned. Success or failure can easily be assessed (metrics) in the resolution of a specific organizational puzzle. Natalie and John could certainly frame some of the challenges being faced by John as puzzles. John could focus on setting up regular meetings with Kurt as a way to improve relationships or could set aside one weekend a month when he would do no work but would instead devote time to his family. Coaching about puzzles is usually a case of encouraging a client to do more or less of something they are already doing or of being more consistent in doing something that is already valued.



In other cases, the issues being addressed are organizational problems. Issues of this type are multi-dimensional and often require multi-disciplinary perspectives. As noted by participants at an international conference (*Evolving the Conversation: the Future of Coaching*) sponsored by the International Coach Federation in 2006, the field of professional coaching will only gain a strong and sustained presence in our world if it tackles problems from many different disciplinary perspectives.

An organizational problem (or personal problem for that matter) may involve finances, interpersonal issues and marketing. John's challenge could be viewed as a matter of getting out of the "can't do" role and as a matter of reducing his need for control, and as a matter of helping his executive team to shift their

dynamics, and as a matter of shifting Kurt's role.

Accountability is much more difficult to assign, for an organizational problem usually is partially under the control of the client and partially under the control of other stakeholders within and outside the system (a mixture of both internal and external locus of control). John can do something about his own role in the committee and about his need for control, but he cannot unilaterally determine the nature of group dynamics in the committee of which he is a member or to change the role played by his president. Metrics are much more difficult to apply in determining the relative success or failure of the solution generated in addressing a problem.

Organizational problems become even more elusive and difficult to assess when they involve dilemmas, polarities and paradoxes—and this often is the case. John, for instance, might wish to work with Natalie on a major dilemma in his life - namely the balance between work and family. He could schedule a work-free weekend each month (a puzzle-based solution) or he could delve more deeply into the issue by

identifying and exploring the pull between work and family life (and perhaps his own personal time away from family). He could also explore a somewhat more subtle pull between wanting predictability and control and wanting to be more of a visionary. One solution to an organizational problem creates a new problem or one approach to the problem necessitates the neglect of an alternative approach which is just as viable. We even find dilemmas and paradoxes that are embedded in or nested in other dilemmas and paradoxes- quite a challenge!

There is a third type of issue which often faces an organizational leader—and which sometimes is brought up during a coaching session: organizational mysteries. Issues of this type typically defy all disciplinary descriptions and are under no one's control (external locus of control). Organizational mysteries often concern economic rollercoaster rides, fickle or shifting customer interests, public policy flip-flops, or the drama of office politics. We don't know why "it" has happened or how to fix "it." We aren't even quite sure what "it" is all about. In a postmodern world of complexity, unpredictability and turbulence, we are likely to find more mysteries in our personal and organizational lives - and fewer puzzles that can be easily understood and resolved.

There is a fundamental mystery that John and his colleagues at the hospital face. In fact, it is a mystery for most men and women working in health care, legislators who are trying to formulate new health care policies in the United States (and in most other countries) and the patients who wish to receive high quality health care services. This mystery concerns the wounded nature of contemporary health care. Why is the health care system so broken? How can health care systems heal if they are themselves deeply wounded and if those working in the health care system are wounded (and are often wounding one another)? What can be done in response to the crisis in health care? At some deep and lingering manner, this mystery underlies at least some of the challenges being faced by John. Is he spending long hours working (even while at home), because somehow he believes (or at least hopes) that he can help heal the health care system? Does Kurt offer a vision in order to reduce the despair of his employees - and is this part of the source of frustration experienced by those in his organization who have grown cynical and pessimistic?

It would seem that the issues being faced by coaching clients are less likely to be puzzles and more likely to be problems or mysteries. For coaches like Natalie, this means that work will become even more challenging. Successful coaching is likely itself to be more of a mystery or at least a problematic enterprise. On the one hand, coaches are more likely to be valued—for we all would like some assistance when addressing a problem or mystery. On the other hand, it may be much harder to determine the success of coaching enterprises—precisely at a point when economic hard times necessitates a careful and convincing evaluation of coaching outcomes. We are also likely to find more "soft" coaching that focuses on decision-making processes, personal values and even one's spiritual core given the prominence of organizational problems and mysteries. The "hard" coaching that focuses on personal performance becomes less relevant, for this type of coaching primarily addresses issues that can be framed (appropriately) as organizational puzzles (for example, how does my client provide her subordinate with constructive feedback or how does my client increase active participation in an upcoming meeting?) This is a perfect example of the kind of nested dilemmas that face many coaching clients--yet in this case it is the field of professional coaching itself that is confronted with a set of nested dilemmas. Soft coaching is more appropriate, because contemporary organizational leaders

are more often faced with difficult problems and mysteries than with puzzles. Soft coaching, however, is harder to measure than hard coaching and accountability is more difficult to assign. All of this exists in a world that is requesting more measurement and accountability.

## **WELCOME TO THE TECHNOLOGICAL WORLD OF VIRTUALITY AND SIMULATION**

As seems to have always been the case, when humankind has met a new and daunting challenge, a new technology has been discovered or invented to successfully address this challenge - and to produce new challenges. We can point to an era in the distant past of widespread glaciations and the resultant use of fire by our Pleistocene forebears as an early example of new-technology-matching-a-major-challenge. In our own era, we can point to the new digital technologies for partial answers to the challenges of complexity, unpredictability and turbulence. Computer-based technologies, often centered on the use of the Internet and other nonhierarchical communication structures, have made the challenges of postmodernism at least seem less daunting and more controllable. Here enters the professional coach and here enters the prospects of new forms of coaching.

More than most other human service endeavors, professional coaching is a product of the new technologies. Many coaches do most of their work over the telephone and through use of their computers. It is almost a prerequisite that an article written about coaching include a picture of a coach sitting on her deck in Wyoming looking over the magnificent Grand Teton mountains, while phone-coaching her client in Pittsburgh or New York City. Natalie could be on vacation in Wyoming or even Peru and still coach John, just as John could call Natalie during his trip to a hospital in Tokyo. These conditions create major boundary issues for both Natalie and John. When is Natalie truly on vacation? Shouldn't John concentrate on the major cross-cultural challenges he is facing in Japan rather than hiding out in his room and calling Natalie?

Technology is likely to continue exerting its influence on professional coaching. It may even profoundly change the character and dynamics of professional coaching. We are likely to see not only telephone-coaching, but also videophone coaching in the near future. Coaches are already making use of Skype and other computer-based communication tools so that they can not only reduce transmission costs but also see their client and be seen by their client via inexpensive video cameras attached to their computer. Will Natalie and John soon subscribe to Skype and purchase webcams to supplement their in-person and telephone meetings? As the speed of transmission increases, we can anticipate even more extensive and skillful use of video-coaching and videoconferencing.

We will also witness the expanded use of various hand-held communication devices, such as the Blackberry, and the concomitant use of brief text-based interactions between coach and client. This already occurs in the context of shadow coaching: real-time questions to provoke in-the-moment reflections and adjusted actions. A twittering coach? We can anticipate a form of just-in-time-coaching that will be valued in particular by younger, computer-savvy leaders who like to address and resolve issues quickly. They want a coach at their side (on their Blackberry) who can move just as quickly in engaging this issue-resolution process. Natalie and John may be "too old" or too much out of touch with the mega-fast world of text-messaging; however, they will certainly have to be conversant with these new technologies if they are to work successfully with younger clients (Natalie) or younger employees (John).

Technologies are also making the world less hierarchical and more accessible—in other words, Friedman's (2005) "flat world." This in turn means that coaching will become even more international

in scope with coaches not only living and working in Wyoming, but also living in Singapore, Cape Town and Bogota. Clients will be working not only in Pittsburgh and New York, but also in London, Helsinki, Istanbul and Jakarta. Coaches may have to become bilingual, trilingual or even quad lingual; at the very least they must become increasingly sensitive to the nuances of culture and the differing ways in which working relationships are established and businesses are conducted in other countries (Rosinski, 2006). With the nonhierarchical nature of the new international networks of communication, there is an even greater need for clients to learn how to influence rather than control. The density of the messages that are flowing through these nonhierarchical channels further suggest that clients must learn how to understand, even if they can't precisely predict, what is about to occur in their personal or work life. Coaches can assist clients engage in their difficult cognitive and affective transitions.

To push even further into the future and into the art of speculation, there is likely to be a new cluster of computer-based tools that significantly increase our capacity to view and analyze complex sets of data (both quantitative and qualitative). We have seen the first versions of these powerful tools in the creation of such software programs as "Dynamo" (and a more recent version: "I-Think") and in a set of accompanying conceptual tools- beginning with Jay Forrester's Industrial Dynamics (1961), Urban Dynamics (1969) and World Dynamics (1971), continuing with the noteworthy Club of Rome study called "Limits to Growth," (Meadows and Others, 1972) and made even more accessible through the writings of Peter Senge (1990).

## **WELCOME TO THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL REVOLUTION(S)**

While coaches like Natalie and clients like John are in the midst of technological revolutions and economic challenges, they are also confronting (or potentially could confront) several major epistemological challenges - revolutions in the fundamental theories, conceptual models and frameworks which undergird the base of knowledge in many Western and Eastern societies. While these challenges are multiple and wide-ranging, several are particularly salient regarding the coaching enterprise.

### **Neuro-Biological revolution**

The first of these is the neurobiological revolution. We are in the midst of learning much more about ways in which our brains operate. The old debate between nature and nurture is now over Who we are and the competencies we exhibit every day in our life are determined by a complex interaction between genetics, life experiences, the environment in which we live, and the environment that existed in our mother's womb during the critical nine months of gestation (Rose, 2005). This means for coaches and leaders that we can learn and change, but that we enter these developmental initiatives with some very strong predispositions, some unique strengths and weaknesses, and a personality and pattern of behavior which is not readily changed.

For instance, we now know that there are two functioning memory systems. One of these (procedural brain) operates when we are performing habitual behavior—such as engaging the gas pedal and brake while driving a car. The other (expository brain) addresses new conditions through reasoning, problem-solving, and learning- such as determining whether the person in the car next to us is going to turn into our lane. When we invite our clients to adopt a new pattern of behavior, we are asking them to perform a very difficult task. Our client must move their cortical work from the procedural part of their brain which works easily and without much thought to the expository part of the brain which requires

attention and exertion. Our personality style, leadership style and interpersonal styles are deeply embedded in the procedural brain. This brain does not appreciate the interference of a coach who wants us to shift everything over to the expository brain, make some major changes, and engage these changes repeatedly for a rather lengthy period of time (until a new behavioral pattern is established which moves over to the procedural brain).

The new biology of the brain also has shattered the old dualistic distinction between mind and body. We now know that our entire body is in some very important ways one large brain. We are making adjustments to our changing environment in all parts of our body and simultaneously engage and interweave our cortical (digital) system and our hormonal (analogic) system. Our mood and perspective each minute of our life is strongly influenced by our physical state - as defined by such bodily factors as nutrition, physical exercise, amounts and quality of sleep, and levels of such chemicals as estrogen, progesterone, testosterone and oxytocin.

We now know that a critical role is played by the amygdala and other areas of the mid-brain in the assessment of new experiences (as to whether or not they pose a threat or an opportunity), as well as in the collection and organization of memories. Our emotions are tightly interwoven with our retention of information, with our structuring and framing of retained information, and with the retrieval (recognition or recall) of this information, and with our decision making based on this information. These components of our brain are even very effective in making many kinds of decisions - even more effective in some instances than the rational (but easily over-whelmed) prefrontal areas of the brain. (Lehrer, 2009) As coaches, we must come to appreciate this close partnership between cognition and affect, as well as the bigger partnership between mind and body. As Michael Polanyi (1969) noted many years ago, we are always attending from our body to something else in our world, and this attentional base has a major impact on what we eventually see, feel and think.

### **Cognitive revolution**

A closely related epistemological revolution which "viii (or at least should) influence future coaching engagements comes from the field of cognitive psychology. We now know quite a bit more than we did twenty years ago about how humans think. We have come to appreciate the remarkable way in which adults process the complex information of our postmodern era. Cognitive researchers such as Robert Kegan (1994) and Carol Gilligan (1982) speak of multiple levels of cognitive competency—noting that adults tend to move from a rather simplistic, dualistic (black and white) frame of reference to frames of reference that embrace relativistic perspectives, interpersonal empathy, nested inferences and the capacity of critical and reflective thinking (metacognition: thinking-about-thinking). We are becoming more fully aware of the cognitive challenge associated with postmodern complexity, unpredictability and turbulence. We are often "in over our heads" (Kegan, 1994) when facing these cognitive challenges and can use the assistance of a coach—especially if the coach is fully appreciative of these challenges and has adopted coaching strategies that not only help a client address these challenges, but also become more skillful themselves in making full use (without a coach being present) of these meta-cognitive functions.

As in the case of the neurobiological revolution, the cognitive revolution has not left the heart behind. The head and heart are constantly being "saturated" (Gergen, 1991) with different images of self (often

manufactured to increase consumption). We have even learned how to "manage" our own feelings (Hochsheild, 1983). Cognitive psychologists point to the remarkable ways in which we convince ourselves that we are happy (or unhappy) and to the equally remarkable ways in which we distort reality in order to come to these conclusions about happiness (as well as competence, empowerment, and meaningfulness; see Gilbert, 2007). Leaders are faced with the task of determining what their "real" and "authentic" self really is, how they are really feeling about what is happening to them and around them, and whether or not they chose to be happy, powerful or competent. We are likely to find that coaches are being asked, with increasing frequency, to assist leaders with these tasks. What will be the coaching tools that are most appropriate to the identification of an authentic sense of self, a non-distorted appraisal of personal happiness, or an accurate assessment of one's emotional state?

### **Revolution of complexity and chaos**

A third revolution that potentially impacts on the future of professional coaching is to be found in the physical sciences. In recent years, we have seen a turn toward an inter-disciplinary perspective on the nature and dynamics of highly complex systems. The worlds of system dynamics, energy consumption and dissipative structures have been permanently realigned—as initiated by Ilya Prigogine (Prigogine & Stengers, 1984) and the "chaos" theorists such as Mandelbrot and Lorenz (Gleick, 1987) and bolstered by the exceptional work being done at the Santa Fe Institute—for example, the work of Stuart Kauffman (1996), and Geoffrey West (Brown & West, 2000). We now know about the intriguing nature of attractor basins, the critical roles to be played by initial conditions and bifurcations, and the irreversibility of many dynamic systems.

With regard to the relevance of these studies for professional coaching, we have only to look first at a proposition that highly complex systems (such as corporations) cannot be effectively managed through the use of hierarchical structures. Most successful systems that are highly complex operate in a nonhierarchical manner. In observing the flocking of birds, for instances, it has been discovered that there is no lead bird, rather leadership shifts quickly based on the bird with the most knowledge about an impending challenge (such as a hawk swooping in) or changing environmental conditions (such as a shift in wind currents). The birds move gracefully and are constantly shifting their position with reference to one another - producing a highly adaptive and responsive system. The flat world described by Thomas Friedman is certainly compatible with this analysis offered by the physical and biological scientists. We have witnessed the emergence of very flat international networks, mediated by the Internet, and the emergence of a global economic market that knows neither start nor end to a day of trading.

While Margaret Wheatley (2006) has written widely about the implications of this finding for contemporary leaders, there are many additional implications to be drawn for a professional coach like Natalie in her work with leaders such as John. How does Natalie help John to lead through strategies other than those that rely on hierarchy - suggesting once again that contemporary leadership is effective not as a vehicle for control but rather as a vehicle for influence. The central question becomes: how should someone coach in and lead in a system that will be successful to the extent that it is self-organizing rather than being hierarchical.

We find the capacity of systems to self-replicate coming out of not only the analysis of complex computer-generated systems but also the observation of natural biological systems. We admire the

graphic beauty of fractals and can observe how an individual pine needle replicates the structure of the pine bough and even the entire pine tree. In the area of organizational theory, we find growing appreciation for a concept first presented by the Tavistock Institute: subsystem mirroring. Widely dismissed or ignored for many years by most organizational theorists, this "wacky" proposition suggests that all parts of a system replicate some central, fundamental dynamic that was established at the moment this system was founded or that is critical to the ongoing essential operations of the system.

Thus, some dynamic that was established when William Hewlett and David Packard began their work in a Palo Alto California garage is still operating in every unit of the Hewlett-Packard family of corporations, just as the nature of the exchange that occurs between a bank teller and a customer is replicated at all levels of the bank, and the treatment plan offered every day to schizophrenic teenagers is replicated at all levels and in every subsystem of the agency that offers these mental health services. Each of these organizations operates like a set of fractals and resembles a pine tree with regard to the replication of specific, fundamental structures and relationships at all levels of the organization. These organizations are amenable, in turn, to nonhierarchical structures and to leadership strategies that emphasize influence rather than control precisely because there is this replication and duplication in the system—the organization is simultaneously very complex and unpredictable, and elegantly simple and redundant.

We can also look at the interplay between energy-use and the life span of organic systems (Brown & West, 2000). Apparently, systems use less energy if designed as self-replicating and branching networks (fractals) that enable both resources and information to be transmitted with minimal effort. Organizations that are structured as fractals rather than as hierarchies typically are more efficient and have a longer life span.

For the professional coach, these recent findings regarding self-replicating systems pose a whole host of new questions and challenges. On the one hand, if organizations are self-replicating, then any change in the style or strategies of a specific leader would be hard to either initiate or maintain—for many other subsystems would have to change in a similar manner given that these systems are all replicating one another. On the other hand, if a small change can be initiated and maintained by one leader in one specific setting, then this could set off a chain of changes that spread throughout the organization.

The role of the professional coach thus becomes one of helping her client identify the key leverage points (Gladwell's tipping point, Buckminster Fuller's trim tab). What about the redesign of organizations as self-replicating, highly efficient fractal networks? How might an organization be redesigned as an elegantly branching system? And what is the role of an organizational coach in advocating for and assisting with this redesign process? The coach must ultimately be in the business of supporting and reassuring her client through these challenging moments of leadership. The leverage points are not easily identified. Change will be resisted at all levels and in many different ways (both obvious and subtle) throughout all of the mirroring subsystems of the organization—just as those who benefit by or at least find security in hierarchy will resist the fractal shift.

There is a third major contribution made by these pioneers of chaos and complexity: this contribution concerns the measurement of complex phenomena. Complex systems are difficult to measure because they are inherently unpredictable and vulnerable to slight shifts in initial conditions (the so-called "butterfly" effect). However, this isn't the whole story. Complex systems have many nooks and crannies

that are not easily measured; furthermore, there are so many different ways in which measures can be taken and some many different ways to interpret the data that have been gathered. We can't measure, let alone predict, the exact amount of "real" money that is lost during a specific stock market downturn, nor can we determine whether or not global warming (or global climate instability) is a reality.

It seems that the tool being used to measure a complex phenomenon may have as great an impact on the outcomes of the measurement process as the nature of the phenomenon being measured. The very act of choosing to measure a phenomenon changes it in a fundamental way - because we have chosen to attend to this phenomenon. For instance, if we measure something up close, we obtain a quite different outcome than if we measure it at a distance: we can predict with considerable accuracy how many people in the United States will choose to eat Cheerios for breakfast today, but we can not predict with any success if a specific person (George Smith, for instance) will choose to eat Cheerios today. If we ask George whether or not he will be eating Cheerios, then this question will itself influence his decision (a trivial variation on the so-called "Heisenberg" effect).

For the organizational coach - confronted with the demand for accountability and hearing the whispers about or overt demands for "return-on-investment" - these findings about the fickle nature of measurement must come as a painful, cosmic joke and paradox: we are being asked to measure what we do precisely at a point in our history when the very foundations of measurement theory and practice are being challenged and torn apart. Furthermore, it is not just the professional coach who is under this paradoxical gun - it is also the manager she is coaching. Leaders such as John must demonstrate their own effectiveness during an era of economic downturn. Yet, how is effectiveness (or efficiency) to be measured? And what is the justification (ROI) for John using corporate money to pay for Natalie's coaching services? New systemically sensitive tools must be developed for the measurement of impact and comparison between expectations and outcomes. These tools will be critical to the success of not only the coaching profession but also the clients being served by these coaches.

### **Cultural anthropological/linguistic revolution**

Natalie and John might consider themselves fortunate, given that they both come from the same social-economic background and from the same (Midwest American) culture. Yet, both of these people will be confronted increasingly with diversity in the workplace - not only because many people are moving to the United States from other countries, but also because they will both be networking with people from throughout the world. With Skype and related computer-based communication tools at their disposal, Natalie can build an international network of clients and co-workers, while John may begin to manage operations in Europe, Asia, Africa or South America. Cross-cultural understanding becomes critical for Natalie and John - and this understanding moves well beyond learning a few words in another tongue or picking up a few of the rituals in another society. It includes: fuller appreciation of the underlying assumptions, values and perspectives in another culture and clearer insight into the various differences and subcultures that exist within the major cultures of a specific country (Rosinski, 2006).

What we are seeing in our 21st Century world is a new appreciation of the interplay between culture, language and cognition. We see the world differently from men and women in other cultures, not only because we have had different past experiences, but also because our language influences the ways in which we see and think (cognition) and, therefore, the ways in which we interpret and engage in our world. A gentleman-scholar, Benjamin Whorf, noted many years ago that language influences cognition

(Strong Whorf Hypothesis) or at the very least reflects differences in cognition (Weak Whorf Hypothesis) within specific cultures.

For instance, we tend to be much more specific in designating (labeling) phenomena that we tend to value. Whorf uses the example of the many words for snow in many Inuit (Eskimo) cultures. We can similarly point to the multiple words for love (e.g., "agape," "eros" and "philia") in Greek cultures, as compared to the use of a single word ("love") in English. Does this mean that English-speaking people tend to place less value on love than members of Greek societies or that the Greeks see something in the dynamics of loving relationships which we in English-speaking societies don't see? Or are these conventions of language merely byproducts of two different linguistic systems that have created words to describe differing social conditions (for example, a greater emphasis in Greece on friendships or reverence for some deities (Cole, 1996)? Put simply, which comes first, the word or the phenomenon being labeled?

This interplay between language, cognition and culture is relevant not only for our understanding of cross-cultural communication problems, but also for our better understanding of the communication challenges being faced within 21st century organizations. There are highly influential sub-cultures operating within our organizations and each of them uses language in a different way. Their use of language reflects and reinforces important differences in the perspectives and values held by those who live and work in these sub-cultures (Bergquist, Guest & Rooney, 2004; Bergquist & Brock, 2008; Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008). Furthermore, as we come to realize (in postmodern fashion) that organizations are really nothing more (and nothing less) than extended conversations and conversational networks reflecting interrelated sets of shared care, commitments and coordination of action, the role to be played by language and its impact on cognition becomes even more important.

Natalie would do well to serve John by focusing on his use of language and on the assumptions, perspectives and values that underlie his use of language. It is very difficult for any of us to reflect critically on our own linguistic and cognitive world, for we can only reflect on this world from within the world (what is often called the "hermeneutic paradox"). A coach like Natalie can be of great value in this regard - though Natalie is in an awkward place because she dwells in a world that is very much like the one in which John dwells. How does she step outside her own assumptive world? Would John be better served by a coach who comes from a different country or for whom English is a second language? Might such a person offer a more critical and detached perspective - and ultimately be of greater benefit to John? Doesn't this challenge the assumption that a trusting relationship between coach and client requires a shared perspective (as well as mutual trust in competency and trust in common intentions)? We are now in a place - with professional coaching becoming a global enterprise - to ask this question about the relative value of local (parochial) versus global (cosmopolitan) coaching services.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Some of the more obvious shifts occurring in early 21<sup>st</sup> societies have been identified and several implications have been drawn in this article regarding how these shifts might impact the professional coaching enterprise. Each of these shifts requires an expanded sense of self, of organization, of society and even of the entire global community. We might even want to reach out beyond our own world to consider the recent findings in astrophysics regarding our universe being much larger and more dynamic than we had previously believed. And what will happen during the next few years when new telescopes

will be able to reach across vast time and space continua to actually witness the creation of the universe (the "big bang"). Rudolph Otto (1923) wrote many years ago about the reactions of human beings when confronting the "numinous" (unstructured experience of the massive reality that confronts us every day). How do we address the "awe-ful-ness" of our expanding universe? As one of my colleagues recently mentioned, our image of God (or some other guiding principle) is going to have to grow much larger, given the immense and expanding size of our universe.

At a personal level, what are the convictions that each of us holds deeply about our own life (which is severely limited in time and space) and the meaning to be found in living this life? If we are assisted by a professional coach, will this person in some manner become a spiritual guide or companion or muse? Is this outside the bounds of professional coaching? At the very least, we might find that professional coaches will become our personal philosophers. They will ask us penetrating questions, not about why we are anxious, but about what the term "anxious" means to us, and to the decisions we make and actions we take in our world. Instead of assisting us in setting the agenda for an upcoming meeting, our coach might invite us to reflect on why the meeting is being held in the first place and about ways in which decisions are made to convene such a meeting.

Our coach may even challenge us to examine underlying assumptions regarding why we choose to define certain other people in our organization as "recalcitrant," "unmotivated" or even "our enemies." While these kinds of questions may initially contribute to the postmodern complexity, unpredictability and turbulence in our lives, and may increase rather than decrease the pain in our lives, they also keep us alive and vitally engaged in the real world around us. They help prepare us for the extraordinary world that will play out in front of us during the coming decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

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