

Six Institutional Cultures and the Coaching Challenges

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Over the past twenty years, the need for cultural analyses of organizations from the perspective of those who lead and work in these organizations has been recognized. Those inside contemporary institutions might welcome an understanding of organizational cultures because many institutions seem to be particularly resistant to influence and change. The dynamics of contemporary institutions are often difficult to understand.

Any framework that can help bring order to the complexity of these institutions will be greatly appreciated. During the past decade, Vikki Brock conducted a series of interviews with leading practitioners in the field of coaching. She discovered widely divergent perspectives on the field and suggested that these differing perspectives relate to differing organizational cultures and, in turn, to differing notions about effective leadership and coaching in each of these cultures.

It has become increasingly fashionable to describe organizations as cultures. Anthropologists, management consultants, organizational psychologists, and other social scientists have become enamored of this concept and have helped to popularize the notion that cultural analyses yield important insights about the life and dynamics of an institution. The definitions of organizational culture and the methods used to study organizational cultures are as diverse as the disciplines involved. I will use Philippe Rosinski's view that "a group's culture is the set of unique characteristics that distinguishes its members from another group." Rosinski's definition encompasses visible and invisible manifestations and sees culture as a group phenomenon as opposed to an individual reality.

While Rosinski is primarily focusing on the "big C" (cultural differences across national and ethnic boundaries), his analysis - as Rosinski himself suggests - also applies to the "small c" (cultural differences within organizations and other social groups). Rosinski states that "once differences can be seen as cultural, there is the possibility of understanding and developing skills to manage, or better yet leverage, those differences. " I am providing an analysis of culture with regard to organizational coaching as one of the most important of these skill sets.

Four different, yet interrelated, cultures of leadership and coaching are often found in contemporary institutions. These cultures have a profound impact on the ways in which leaders and coaches view their current work and the ways in which they perceive the potential for personal benefit and organizational improvement. These four cultures also influence how those outside the institution perceive the purposes and appropriate operations of institutions, and how they believe they themselves should interact with these institutions.

Two of the four leadership and coaching cultures can be traced back several centuries. They are *the professional culture* and *the managerial culture*. The other two have emerged more recently, partially in response to the seeming failure of the two original cultures to adapt effectively to changes in

contemporary institutions. The first of these more contemporary cultures is referred to as *the alternative culture* and the second is referred to as *the advocacy culture*.

There are additional external influences in our global culture that are pressing upon the contemporary institution, forcing it in some ways to alter the way it goes about its business. Two new leadership and coaching cultures are emerging in institutions as a result of these external, global forces, and they interact with the previous four, creating additional dynamics. The first one, *the virtual culture*, was prompted by the technological and social forces that have emerged over the past three decades. The second new one, *the tangible culture*, has existed in various forms for quite some time, yet has only recently been evident as a separate culture partly in response to emergence of the virtual culture and the concern about the loss of continuity and stability in contemporary culture.

The six cultures are now briefly described and graphically portrayed. A more detailed description of each culture and related coaching implications follows this summary analysis.

The Six Cultures: Summary Descriptions

Professional Culture

Vehicle for building the credibility of coaching as a profession

Studying and analyzing the big systematic picture Generation, interpretation and dissemination of knowledge

Develop specific values and character qualities

Head rather than heart

Differentiate between managers and leaders

Untested assumptions about dominance of rationality

Managerial Culture

Vehicle for improved managerial performance

Planning, implementation, and evaluation

Directed toward specified goals and purposes

No important differences between managers and leaders

Value fiscal responsibility and quantifiable measurement of outcomes

Skills developed through a blend of training and coaching

Untested assumptions about capacity to define and measure results

Advocacy Culture

Vehicle for establishing equitable and egalitarian distribution of organization resources and benefits

Value confrontation and equitable, enabling and empowering strategies that bring "all to the table"

Recognize inevitable presence of and need for multiple constituencies with inherently opposite interests
Surface existing social attitudes and structures Not "neutral" about her work
Untested assumptions about ultimate role of power in the organization

Alternative Culture

Vehicle for program and activity creation for personal growth of all
Value personal openness and service to others
Integration of mind, body and spirit
No 'artificial' distinction between personal and organizational coaching
Encourage potential for cognitive, affective, physical and spiritual development
Untested assumptions about inherent desire to attain personal maturation

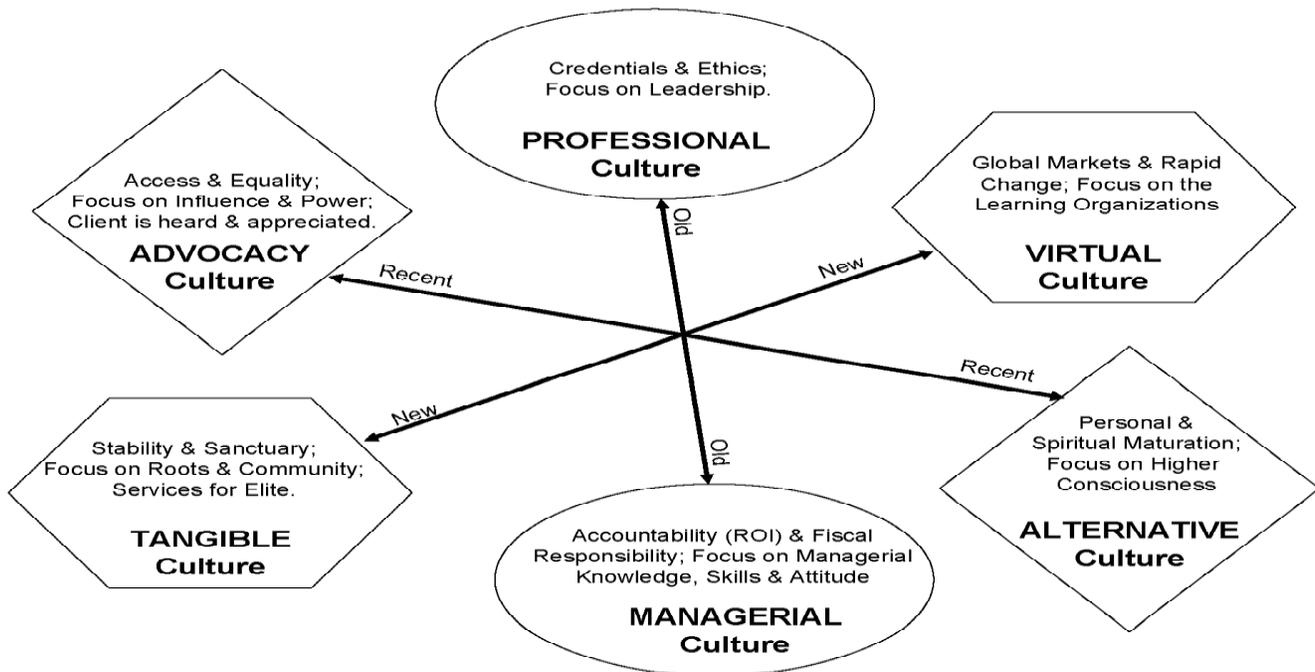
Virtual Culture

Vehicle for engagement and use of knowledge and expertise that is produced and modified at an exponential rate in postmodern world
Linking leader's learning needs to technological resources to access global market and learning network
Wise and skillful in using digital technologies
Actively engaged in setting up own network and accessing global coaching resources
Untested assumptions about ability to make sense of postmodern world fragmentation and ambiguity

Tangible Culture

Vehicle for identification and appreciation of an organization's roots, community and symbolic grounding
Predictability of value-based, face-to-face coaching
Focus on deeply embedded patterns and traditions
Surface existing social attitudes and structures
Emphasis on full appreciation of existing long-standing organization dynamics

Untested assumptions about value of personal relationships and ability of organizations to "weather the storm" of faddish change



The Professional Culture

Leadership Values: Autonomy/Status

Criteria of Leadership Success: Qualitative

Coaching Orientation: Affiliation with specific coaching school and strategy

Nature of Coaching Clientele: Small, select clientship

Criteria of Coaching Status: Certification (input measure)

Nature of Coaching Impact: Unspecifiable, but deep and long-lasting level

Coaches and the users of coaching services who are aligned with the professional culture conceive of coaching as a "profession" and seek to build its credibility through establishing a code of ethics, professional organizations (such as International Coach Federation) and publications (such as the International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring), and research and scholarship regarding coaching. In many cases, the established professions (for example, psychology and business

consulting) have claimed that they alone can certify coaches or, at the very least, that the field of coaching should be closely monitored and controlled. The motives behind this professional concern are laudable: concern for quality of service and for an adequate foundation of theory-based and evidential research to support coaching practices. However, underlying these legitimate motives is often an unacknowledged thirst for control of the field (with its potentially rich source of money and capacity to influence personal and organizational lives).

Professional associations often play a central role in promoting this culture. These institutions address what Houle suggests is “a need for status, a sense of commitment or calling, a desire to share in policy formation and implementation ... a feeling of duty, a wish for fellowship and community.” While those aligned with the professional culture support research on coaching, they are inclined to identify coaching as an “art” rather than a “science” and cringe at any efforts to quantify (and therefore constrain or trivialize) the specific outcomes of coaching.

At this point, I introduce a hypothetical coach whom I will call Susan Stracker. Let us assume for a moment that Susan is strongly associated with the professional culture. She and other coaches who associate with this culture are likely to embrace many untested assumptions about the dominance of rationality in organizations. Susan is likely to find it hard to work with an “irrational” client - someone who seems to dwell only in the heart rather than in the head. Susan is likely to read quite a bit (hoping to keep up in her “field”) and expects her clients, also, to be knowledgeable.

Susan will embrace a perspective on coaching that is systemic in nature - she believes that a “knowledgeable” leader must always look at the “big picture” and she assists her clients in seeing and carefully analyzing this big, systemic picture. At a fundamental level, Susan and her colleagues in the professional culture conceive of the coaching enterprise as the generation, interpretation, and dissemination of knowledge and the development of specific values and qualities of character among leaders in the institution - and they tend to differentiate between managers and leaders.

As “professional” coaches, Susan and her colleagues are inclined to associate their work with leadership, rather than the more “mundane” (in their view) operations of managers in the organization. Managers may need coaching, but the “real” value of coaching concerns engagements with those who operate in a leadership position. Views about management from a professional culture orientation suggest that managers administer. They ask how and when, focus on systems, do things right, maintain, rely on control, and have a short-term perspective.

Furthermore, those aligned with the professional perspective are likely to believe that managers tend to accept the status quo, have an eye on the bottom line, and imitate. They are the classic good soldier and are copies of the stereotypical manager of the 60s and 70s. Given this limiting perspective on management, the role to be played by coaches with a professional culture orientation is quite clear. They are not in the business of assisting managers in performing specific organizational functions. Rather, they are to assist leaders who decide what these managerial functions should be.

The Managerial Culture

Leadership Values: Economic Viability/ Commitment to one's team and organization

Criteria of Leadership Success: Quantitative/Bottom Line Success/Expanding Capacity (Size)

Coaching Orientation: Close alignment with latest management theory and practices related to improved institutional performance

Nature of Coaching Clientele: Mid-level and C-Suite Managers

Criteria of Coaching Status: Yearly Revenues/Size of Client's Organization/Level of Clients in Organization

Nature of Coaching Impact: Client satisfaction (short term) Evidence-based outcomes related to defined organizational goals and objectives (long term)

Coaches and the users of coaching services who are aligned with the managerial culture conceive of coaching as a vehicle for improvement of performance. Coaches and clients with a managerial orientation are much less enamored, compared to those oriented to the professional culture, of "big pictures" and the focus on leadership. Management is where the action is - not so-called "leadership". Management and managerial coaching are often identified with a specific set of organizational functions and responsibilities. Some authors even go so far as to identify coaching as a specific managerial skill. Many definitions of coaching from the late 1970s to the 2000s were similarly oriented towards the management culture.

What if we turn Susan Stracker into a coach who is oriented towards the managerial culture? For Susan and her colleagues in this culture, coaching is seen as a vehicle for improved managerial performance. Coaches aligned with this culture are often engaged in the planning, implementation and evaluation of a manager's work - this work being directed toward specified goals and purposes. Susan would love working with a client who has a specific request to make regarding the way Susan can be of assistance: "Help me prepare for this meeting" or "I'm having a particularly difficult time working with my male subordinates. Can you help me?" As a coach oriented toward the managerial culture, Susan is not likely to perceive any important differences between management and leadership. Managers are leaders, as far as Susan and her managerially oriented colleagues are concerned. In fact, managers are the employees who really make an institution work.

Those who are aligned with this culture—both clients and coaches—tend to value fiscal responsibility and the quantifiable measurement of coaching outcomes (for example, return-on-investment (ROI)). They tend to believe that management (and therefore leadership) skills can be specified and developed through a blend of training and coaching. Coaches who associate with this culture often embrace many untested assumptions about the capacity of an organization's managers (leaders) to clearly define and measure its goals and objectives. They conceive of the coaching enterprise as the inculcation or reinforcement of specific knowledge, skills and attitudes in the men and women they are coaching, so that they might become successful and responsible managers (leaders).

Clients with a managerial orientation want Susan, as their coach, to be able to assist them in a very tangible manner to become more skillful and therefore successful and “promotable” in the organization. One of Susan 's clients actually fits this mold. He wants her to help him find the “keys to success” in his institution. To the extent that Susan is oriented toward the managerial culture, she is likely to feel comfortable with this client's expectations; to the extent that Susan is oriented toward the professional culture, she is likely to feel constrained by these expectations - that's why she would like to work as a professionally oriented coach with leaders who are interested in the big picture rather than the “trivia” of specific performance skills or job promotions.

The Alternative Culture

Leadership Values: Focus on Strengths and Potential (Learning) of Employees and the Overall Level of Innovation in the Organization

Criteria of Leadership Success: Development of an employee’s “breakthrough” Innovations

Coaching Orientation: Eclectic (Whatever is the “latest” thing—often residing outside the traditional boundaries of coaching perspectives and practices)

Nature of Coaching Clientele: Small, select clientship

Criteria of Coaching Status: Certification (input measure)

Nature of Coaching Impact: Unspecifiable, but deep and long-lasting level

Coaches and the users of coaching services who are aligned with the alternative culture conceive of coaching as a vehicle for the creation of programs and activities that further the personal (and often the spiritual) growth of all members of the institution (or even more broadly the entire community).

Flaherty says: “coaching is a way of working with people that leaves them more competent and more fulfilled so that they are more able to contribute to their institutions and find meaning in what they are doing.” Those leaders who are aligned with this culture turn to coaches who value personal openness and service to others, as well as the integration of mind, body and spirit. Neither group accepts what they see as an artificial distinction between personal and organizational coaching.

Leaders who are aligned with this culture turn to coaches who speak about learning organizations. As Peter Senge, one of the early proponents of the learning organization, has noted: “The organizations that will truly excel in the future will be the organizations that discover how to tap people's commitment and capacity to learn at all levels in an organization. Learning organizations are possible because, deep down, we are all learners.” Furthermore, as learners, we should not avoid taking risks and making mistakes, yet we should avoid repeating the same mistakes and taking the same unsuccessful risks. We learn from our mistakes (as well as our successes).

If Susan Stracker were aligned with the alternative culture, she would feel most comfortable working with clients who want to share freely their feelings and their life issues inside and outside the workplace. They are also open to new learning and critically reviewing their own performance. Performance

appraisals are viewed as doors that can be opened on behalf of ongoing learning and improvement (rather than as modes of behavioral control—as is often view of those aligned with the advocacy culture). Susan and her fellow coaches who associate with this culture often embrace many untested assumptions about the inherent desire of all men and women to attain their own personal maturation. Susan does not just want her client to think systemically; she also wants her client to reflect on their own aspirations for the institution - their own vision, their own future in the institution. the alignment between their own values and those of the institution.

Both coaches and leaders who embrace this alternative culture wish to assist in the development of others in the institution (or even the broader community). They conceive of the coaching enterprise as the encouragement of potential for cognitive, affective, physical and spiritual development among all members of the institution - not just the formal leaders. These coaches do not want to just assist a client become more skillful in working with subordinates or in successfully completing a specific task - as would a coach oriented toward the managerial culture. They want their client to ask fundamental questions and find answers to these deeper questions: Why work with subordinates in a specific manner? Why successfully complete this task? Of what ultimate importance is the work I do and what do I sacrifice in my life to complete this work in a successful manner?

The Advocacy Culture

Leadership Values: Serving the Underserved/Expanding Access to the Decision-Making Table

Criteria of Leadership Success: Diversity of Perspectives Entertained and Equity of Treatment for all Members of Organization and Members of Community/Society/

Coaching Orientation: Orientation to quasi-political strategies and advocacy-related perspectives on coaching

Nature of Coaching Clientele: Advocacy oriented leaders (often in nonprofit organizations)

Criteria of Coaching Status: Evidence of diversity and equitable among the clients being served

Nature of Coaching Impact: Successfully fighting against institutional control of personal identity and collective decision-making processes. Influence regarding who is at the table to identify and measure institutional effectiveness?

Coaches and the users of coaching services who are aligned with the advocacy culture conceive of coaching as a vehicle for the establishment of equitable and egalitarian policies and procedures regarding the distribution of resources and benefits in the institution. Rosinski views this as the equality end of the “hierarchy/ equality” continuum and at the universalist end of the “universalist/ participant” continuum. Rosinski defines equality as an organizational arrangement in which people are equals, who often happen to play different roles. The universalist framework is one in which all cases should be treated in the same universal manner, adopting common processes for consistency and economies of scale. Those who embrace this culture often have been associated in their past life with the formulation and/ or enforcement of HR (human resources) policies and procedures (serving as “policy police” in a large corporation or government agency).

Leaders who are aligned with this culture turn to coaches who value confrontation and equitable, enabling and empowering strategies that bring all stakeholders 'to the table'. Susan Stracker has one client who is strongly oriented toward this culture. This client wants to know that Susan 's own value system is aligned with his commitment to broad-based participation in the decision-making processes of his institution. Leaders with an advocacy orientation tum to coaches who recognize the inevitable presence of (and need for) multiple constituencies with vested interests that are inherently in opposition. These leaders and coaches aligned with this culture believe that coaching is essential to this broad-based engagement. Both leader and coach worry about ways in which organizational coaching might be inequitably provided in an organization - producing even greater division between the "haves" and the "have nots".

For a moment, let us assume that Susan Stacker is oriented toward this culture. Susan and other coaches and leaders associated with this culture are likely to embrace many untested assumptions about the ultimate role of power in the institution. Susan would frequently identify the need for outside mediation to deal with these power-based issues. She is likely to conceive of the coaching enterprise as the surfacing of existing (and often repressive) social attitudes and structures. As an advocate for social justice, Susan is likely to recommend, whenever possible and appropriate, the establishment of new and more liberating attitudes and structures in the institutions with which she coaches. As an advocate, Susan is clearly not "neutral" about her work or the men and women she coaches. She would not hide her own beliefs and is likely to be quite selective regarding the institutions and specific clients with whom she contracts.

The Virtual Culture

Leadership Values: Embracing the new technologies that allow for expanded network—resulting in more extensive sources of information and knowledge

Criteria of Leadership Success: Size of "catchment area" (customer base, knowledge base)

Coaching Orientation: Orientation to ways in which technology can be used to make coaching more effective and more relevant for the "new world" of leadership and management.

Nature of Coaching Clientele: Young entrepreneurs and Technologically Savvy Managers and Leaders

Criteria of Coaching Status: At the cutting edge of technology-aided coaching strategies

Nature of Coaching Impact: Helping mid-21st Century Managers and Leaders adapted to a world of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity, turbulence and contradiction.

Coaches and the users of coaching services who are aligned with the virtual culture conceive of coaching as a vehicle for the engagement and use of knowledge and expertise that is being produced and modified at an exponential rate in our postmodern world. This organizational arrangement, labelled "change" by Rosinski, "values a dynamic and flexible environment, promotes effectiveness through adaptability and innovations, and avoids routine, which is perceived as boring." Those aligned with this culture tend to value a global perspective and make extensive use of open, shared and responsive

learning systems. They are participants in what Thomas Friedman describes as a “flat world” which has abandoned organizational and national boundaries.

If Susan Stracker were aligned with the virtual culture, she and her fellow coaches and leaders associated with this culture would embrace many untested assumptions about their ability to make sense of the fragmentation and ambiguity that exists in the postmodern world. Susan would undoubtedly be quite wise and skillful in making use of digital technologies. She might even do some of her coaching via the Internet and is likely to work with clients who are also technologically savvy.

Susan would be frustrated in working with clients who are not readily accessible via some portable digital device and would be inclined to work quickly and decisively with clients via many different media. Coaches and leaders who are oriented toward the virtual culture are likely to conceive of the coaching enterprise as linking the leader’s learning needs to technological resources that enable the leader to access a global market and learning network. As a virtually oriented coach, Susan would be actively engaged in setting up her own network of coaches and in accessing coaching resources from throughout the world.

The Tangible Culture

Leadership Values: Tradition/Heritage/Appreciation

Criteria of Leadership Success: Meaningful, Trusting and Sustained Interpersonal Relationships/ First-hand observations of institutional success: “you have to see it to believe it and to know that it is real”

Coaching Orientation: Focus on relationships in the here-and-now. Coach serving as trusted source of support and inspiration

Nature of Coaching Clientele: Long term coaching relationships (often working with established and family-owned businesses)

Criteria of Coaching Status: Working over a long period of time with high profile and influential clients

Nature of Coaching Impact: The containment of anxiety: helping challenged leaders to set appropriate boundaries and sustain important (often courageous) acts.

Coaches and the users of coaching services who are aligned with the tangible culture conceive of coaching as a vehicle for the identification and appreciation of an institution's roots, community and symbolic grounding. This organizational arrangement is at the opposite end of the continuum from the virtual culture. Labelled “stability” by Rosinski, it “values a static and orderly environment, encourages efficiency through systematic and disciplined work, and minimizes change and ambiguity which is perceived as disruptive.”.

Those aligned with this culture tend to value the predictability of a value-based, face-to-face coaching process. They like to work with people they can see and “touch” (tangible) and work in relationships that are long-term and grounded in reality (tangible). Leaders who are aligned with this culture turn to coaches who focus on deeply embedded patterns (traditions) in the institution. Cultural change is either considered impossible or unwise. A strong emphasis is placed on the full appreciation of the existing and

often long-standing dynamics of the institution - this emphasis being most fully articulated by those embracing an “appreciative approach” to leadership.

Susan is in fact oriented towards the tangible culture (as well as the professional culture). One of her points of frustration concerns the desire of one client to always meet by phone or Zoom. He has “no time” for in-person meetings. Susan does not feel like she really “knows” this client and would much prefer, at least on occasion, to meet in person for at least an hour. Much more could be accomplished—and she would be much more comfortable in picking up his subtle phone or Zoom cues if she at least had an opportunity to work with him in person once in a while. As a coach oriented toward the tangible culture, Susan Stracker would like to see all of her clients face-to-face, but must agree to some phone and digitally-based coaching, given the location and busy schedule of her coaching clients.

Coaches and leaders associated with this culture embrace many untested assumptions, not only about the value of personal relationships, but also about the ability of institutions and their leaders to “weather the storm” and to move beyond the seduction of faddish change. They conceive of the coaching enterprise as the honoring and reintegration of learning from the existing sources of distinctive wisdom located in their specific institution. These coaches and leaders tend to be appreciative, loyal - and sometimes a bit narrow-minded and resistant to new ideas.

Conclusions

I have proposed that each of these six distinct cultures (each with its own history and values) yields a specific perspective regarding organizational coaching and in turn, generates assumptions about ways in which to work most effectively with organizational leaders. Coaches bring their own cultural preference to their work and are often called to adopt other approaches and styles in order to synchronize with the organizational culture of the client, at least temporarily. The question here is how far will coaches stretch themselves, and for how long, such that they do not lose their authenticity.