



COACHING FOR INTERCULTURALITY

Dr Ghada Angawi ACC

info@ghadaangawi.com

Abstract

This paper discusses the issues around Interculturality coaching, its theoretical backbone, competencies and processes. It draws on the literature available and the experience of the author in the field having lived and worked in Middle East, UK and USA. The author challenges the status quo on Interculturality as a term, coaching paradigm and framework. It's considered a beginning in the science of Interculturality coaching.

Coaching for Interculturality

Introduction

The last few decades have witnessed a growing interest in hiring people from diverse backgrounds in organizations. Most of these organizations aimed to widen their customer base by expanding the knowledge gained across the organization due to diverse backgrounds and cultures of its employees. Some organizations also focus on diversity as a way to say they value fair opportunity and equality. They hire people from diverse backgrounds and prepare them through training and development programs. While diversity may be seen as an addition that can enhance organizational effectiveness, it may also cause many problems due to the one-way communication from the majority of the employees towards the diverse group or multicultural group (Ely 1996).

There is certainly lessons to be learned from the literature and research on the subject of cross cultural management and leadership in organization for coaches, but the field of cultural coaching is still under-researched and in need for theoretical underpinning to facilitate practical models for coaches to use and explore in their own context. Moreover the field of coaching and its competencies is in its infancy and new emerging applications in different cultures are being explored by coaches around the world. What we know now is there are differences in coaching approaches that require a learning attitude from the coaches themselves towards their diverse clients. This discussion paper is one attempt to raise the issues around Interculturality coaching.

The word *culture* in itself is over-used and somewhat limited in how it explains the complexity of interculturalism. Martine Abdallah-Pretceille (2006), prefers *culturality* as a term indicating a flexible and adaptable business environment that encompasses all the emerging patterns of thinking, expressions and behaviors (Abdallah-Pretceille 2006). In this discussion paper I will follow after them in using the term *culturality* as indicative of the fluid nature of culture.

Over the years of training & coaching people from different cultures from the Middle East and West, I came to identify patterns of thinking and expressions that exhibit itself in a coaching session let alone the workplace. But before I get to the part where I express my own observation in the field, I like to bring to the reader a simple and brief background on what has been developing in the literature around cross-culture dimensions, coaching models and coach competencies. Second, I will focus on the three steps' model of *Complexity Intelligence* as a simple method for *culturality* coaching (Jan Inglis and Margaret Steel 2005). Finally, I will conclude this paper with proposing a *culturality* framework for coaching individuals: organization and society.

Terms and definitions

K. Gilbert and P. Rosinski (2007) define culture as “the characteristics of one group that distinguish it from another” (Kate Gilbert and Philippe Rosinski 2008). Culture therefore is an internal process that exhibits itself in the form of the obvious: artefacts, language, body gestures, social habits and literature (Hofstede 1994). The concept of a group regardless of their geographical location, nationality, religion, gender, generational, organizational or social stratification, indicates inclusion of different elements from the above, specific to this group. This means that previous

research dependant on the taxonomies above is inadequate in explaining cultural differences on an individual level (Gibson 2014). The definition does not determine if individuals represent the culture they belong to or not on an individual behavioural basis.

As I indicated earlier, *culturality* is my preferred term here in this paper indicating culture in motion. *Intercultural* on the other hand is defined as “pertaining to or taking place between two or more cultures”¹. Coaching for *Interculturality*, therefore when used in this context would mean **“Coaching taking place between two or more *cultures in motion*”**. When we combine the definition of coaching to this, the resulting outcome implies a spiral of growth, development and creative solutions.

The importance of Interculturality coaching

Nowadays there is a focus on two concerns in the world of business: (1) human resources' employability of individuals who are able to deal with (2) organizational competitive edge. This clearly addresses the organizational culturality. Leadership, in response to these issues on a global level, is becoming more aware of the need for an organizational culture that promotes both simultaneously; the alignment with vision and mission on one hand and the flexibility and adaptability of inclusion of other cultures on the other. This demand a balance between structure and fluidity. In essence leaders who have this awareness provide the resources necessary for entrepreneurship that initiate divergent changes and implement them accordingly. The self-awareness/self-questioning of the coaching profession seem be lacking in all the training and academic preparation of leadership and its

¹ www.Dicotionary.com

becoming a necessary intervention by new leaders to support their self-development and continuous (re)adaptation to new realities (Barosa-Pereira 2014). The 11 coaching competencies published in March 1999 by the ICF were formed through the work of the Portfolio Exam Committee and based on the common successful practices of experienced coaches in western cultures (Barosa-Pereira 2014). The challenge arises when moving to a different culture, where there is an additional competency related to cultural awareness to be identified. Also pertaining to each competency, to what extent can it be implemented or not implemented cross-culturally. Finally, does the competency model, in the light of the Interculturality of organizations and society in general need to be reviewed and updated?

Assumptions around Interculturality coaching

To emphasize the importance of Interculturality coaching I am listing some of the common assumptions around coaching. Assumptions are either true or false but it's important to understand them before we explain any Interculturality coaching model to eliminate misconception.

Assumption 1: I can deal with any culture, I have the coaching competencies framework which allows me to understand the client's cultural perspective.

In many ways we contract with a client assuming that we as coaches are able to deal with any arising cultural challenge. This is because we are coaching from our cultural comfort zone. Many of us, when faced with the cultural realities of our clients then realize the challenge. The challenge is to rise above those realities and dive into the opportunities they present to our clients.

Assumption 2: clients coming from a culture, represent that culture.

The scholarly work on culture was mostly formed to inform cross cultural management, expatriate assignments, and the management of diversity in the workplace. Little or no research emerged concerning Interculturality coaching because coaching focused on individuals rather than organizations dealing with Interculturality issues (Kate Gilbert and Philippe Rosinski 2008). Not only that culture is a collective identity and we deal with individual clients that exist in this collective identity, but these clients may not be representative of it and they certainly may not agree with it. The challenge is to know the culture but be curious about the individual.

Assumption 3: Not necessarily because of our nationality, educational background or belonging to similar interest groups we come from the same culture.

You will be amazed that the person sitting next to you may have inherited some cultural aspect of another ethnic group or just simply they like a particular culture and resonate with it.

Assumption 4: The right or wrong around culture.

This is where a coach assumes that this culture is unjust due to its customs, traditions, and political system and race or gender issues.

Assumption 5: which culture dominates? The company or the country?

In companies with a strong identity base, its employees around the world behave in a certain cultural way even when they are in a country where the norm is

different. When the company's identity is weak, employees may be assimilated to that country's culture.

Assumption 6: the role of communities of practice in enforcing a culture

This assumption addresses the acculturation process between individuals when they are qualified in fulfilling a certain role in their field across the globe. CEOs can have common culture, accountants, and coaches.

Assumption 7: I don't do cultural coaching, I am only coaching here in my home town!

Guess what, your neighbour next door is from India and she needs your services as she is starting a restaurant business! Your friend whom you grow up together in one school, is married to someone from the Middle East and she too needs coaching for a career transition. What assumptions do we have around Interculturality coaching?

Cultural theories and the literature on Interculturality coaching

Among the famous and most recognised theories in the field of management and culture is Hofstede's cultural dimensions models of work-related values (Hofstede 1994). The model consists of five dimensions:

1. Power Distance – the degree of equality/inequality due to different individual positions in a society.
2. Individualism/Collectivism – the degree to which a society values individual or collective achievement (which governs interpersonal relationships).

3. Masculinity/Femininity – the degree to which a society reinforces the traditional masculine work role model.
4. Uncertainty Avoidance – the level of tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity.
5. Long-term Orientation – the degree to which a society embraces, or does not embrace, long-term devotion to traditional, forward-thinking values.

There are several more dimensions added by other researchers in the field. Hall (1976) simply divides culture into high-context and low-context. He argues that the concepts relate to the way in which information is communicated and hence links to language. The assumption is that within the low-context, the listener would know very little about the context and meaning of the communication, while in high-context, the listener already knows a lot about the context (Hall 1976).

Rosinski (1999), came up with 18 dimensions grouped in seven categories corresponding to critical challenges faced by people everywhere, regardless of their role or position. The dimensions have emerged from a synthetic analysis of a range of theoretical frameworks developed by eminent anthropologists, communication experts, and cross-cultural researchers, including Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961), Hall (1983), Hofstede (1997, 2001), Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998), among others. Rosinski elaborates: “The purpose of the COF assessment tool is to bring to light the individual’s cultural orientations, the cultural filters to perception mentioned above” (Kate Gilbert and Philippe Rosinski 2008). Having worked through the complete assessment tool, the participant receives a graphic representation of their scores demonstrating the consistencies or gaps between their espoused cultural orientation and their ability to straddle

different orientations.....the process can give rise to quite profound introspection and reflection, particularly on values (see appendix 1)².

Rosinski (1999) proposed the following steps to deal with cultural differences:

1. Recognize and accept differences – acknowledge, appreciate and understand that acceptance does not mean agreement or surrender.
2. Adapt to differences – move outside one’s comfort zone, empathize (temporary shift in perspective) and understand that adaptation does not mean adoption or assimilation.
3. Integrate differences – hold different frames of reference in mind, analyse and evaluate situations from various cultural perspectives, and remain grounded in reality; it is essential to avoid becoming dazzled by too many possibilities.
4. Leverage differences – make the most of differences, strive for synergy, proactively look for gems in different cultures, and achieve unity through diversity.

The Universal Integrated Framework (UIF) was developed by Law, Ireland and Hussain (2007). The framework emerged from their coaching practice in Health and Social Care in the United Kingdom and multinational programmes involving African, Asian, Chinese and European businesses. It embeds the following aspects:

1. Continuous professional development (CPD) including learning and supervision.
2. Appreciation of a cultural environment.
3. Coach/coachee fluidity/integrative continuum.

² <http://www.philrosinski.com/cof/>

4. Cross-cultural Emotional Intelligence.
5. Communication methods and feedback mechanisms (Dr Jonathan Passmore and Ho Law 2009).

I do not wish to spend so much time critically analysing the cultural dimensions in the previous frameworks and theories as the reader can expand on that themselves. What I have to say here, is that the studies and research on Interculturality coaching is scarce as Alexandra Barosa-Pereira (2014), in her latest literature review elaborates. Alexandra is a credential holder coach from the International Coaching Federation (ICF), who has reviewed the literature on the subject of cross-cultural coaching and was unable to locate any research or study comparing the ICF core competencies with the dimensions of intercultural competence as an example of a coaching identity consolidation. She also explained that there is a good amount of studies on coaching expats in different cultures and using coaching as a medium for coping and performance enhancement. Most of the studies, she states, are qualitative and there is a need for quantitative studies in the field of Interculturality coaching. In her words, Alexandra thinks that: “Every coach should develop cultural awareness, since this should be the starting point to respect clients in their uniqueness” (Barosa-Pereira 2014).

Coaching complexity, coaching Interculturality

In their words, Inglis & Steele (2005), describes “What happens when there is a gap between our operating beliefs of how the world works and the contradictory evidence presented by what we observe in the world around us? What happens to societies when this manifests as large gaps between existing capacities and the capacities needed to respond to societal challenges?” In many of the scholarly

work on learning and development, there is a common belief that human development stops or slows down once we reach adulthood and that adults are individuals equipped for dealing with all life situations no matter what. This belief has limited our abilities to realize the gap that adults encounter when they deal with transition and change. Thus making it easier to label them as quitters, failures, disabled, incapable, low IQ, or even lacking integrity. Integrity as Inglis & Steele (2005), explain is a gap between how the individual conceptualizes life and their ability to implement what they conceptualize. It's defined as "the integration of the reasoning ability, emotional capacity and social cognition required to function at the level of complexity demanded by current life challenges" (Jan Inglis and Margaret Steel 2005). They call this ability Complexity Intelligence (CI). This understanding is vital for a coach to deal with individuals in transitions, let alone Interculturality contexts.

In other studies this is also recognized as Cultural Intelligence or CQ. CQ is defined as "the ability to make sense of other cultural behaviours and gestures and adjust ones response to them accordingly", with the two most important skills being *confusion acceptance* and *suspending judgement* (R Brislin, R worthley and B Macnab 2006). This does include aspects of social and emotional intelligence. It overlaps with the transitions gap described by Inglis & Steele. If we could develop enough adults to acquire CI or CQ the Interculturality happens as a result, vs stagnant and rigid culture that deters any external influence attempting to reconcile or integrate. The latter results in a lack of integrity, misalignment or even abandonment/avoidance form of Response to Failure (RTF) as described by Gibson (Gibson 2014).

Inglis & Steele (2005), have identified three characteristics pertaining to the process of change or transition in adults which can be a model for Interculturality coaches: (1) first the client develops a recognition that a gap exists between their operating beliefs and the current conditions facing them; (2) then the coach encourages the client's perseverance to stay engaged in the resulting confusion, contradiction and frustration as they detach themselves from familiar operating beliefs and navigate the gap. At this point the coach has to remain patient and not push the client to any conclusion; and (3) third the exposure and openness to a new conceptual framework which validates their recognition of the gap. At this point the coach can guide the client to how this finding can be helpful in their specific context. In order for society to move forward and have CI to handle the global issues it is facing, we need more than just individual coaching, we need a full social Interculturality coaching to navigate society through the gap. This demands institutionalizing Interculturality coaching as a profession. It requires programs addressed by Interculturality coaches in the community and in other forms of organizations (Jan Inglis and Margaret Steel 2005).

Interculturality coaching competencies

At this point it becomes important to discuss Interculturality coaching competencies beyond "raising awareness" of existing culture which is one of the coaching core competencies at the ICF. This raises the issue of coaching identity and the need to update the coaching competencies within a wider global context. Would CI become a competency? Or the elements of CQ of "confusion acceptance" and "suspending judgement"? Or is there more to that?

Gibson (2014), researched CEO cultural competencies and has identified five Interculturality competencies including: Adaptability, Cultural Self-Awareness, Cultural Sensory Perception, Global Perspective and Open-mindedness. The findings indicated two primary means by which the CEOs in the study developed competencies: living/working abroad and through mentoring/coaching. Personal relationships with people of different cultures, international travel, and working in diverse teams were also found to be significant sources of development. The findings also suggest that even at earlier career stages, intercultural coaching and mentoring programmes could be more valuable to companies than training for the development of future global executives (Gibson 2014). If these were the most profound competencies for global CEOs, I would like to suggest them as competencies for coaches who work at that level. Therefore I have integrated them in the Interculturality coaching model I suggest below. Nevertheless, this field is wide open for research and exploration. Peterson (2007), gives an account of how coaches can coach across culture by adapting themselves to that specific culture, learning about how people learn and orchestrating change in the way that suits that culture (Peterson 2007). In his view it's about being culturally aware.

[A Model for Interculturality coaching](#)

The ability to coach Interculturality, then becomes a prerequisite for any coach. Not only for CEOs operating in global context, but also for the clients that come from different backgrounds and cultures who reside in the same country and work in local organizations.

Coaching through the cultural dimensions may work, but it does not tap into the deep values and traditions inherited in different cultures. Coaching with the CI

model is a good start to venturing into the complexity of Interculturality transition where the coach realises the process and supports the client through it. Coaching with CQ in mind is also useful in raising the coach and the client's cultural awareness level. Coaching Interculturality requires competencies that use a deeper framework than the dimensions that we know in COF or UIF. The dimensions may be relevant or irrelevant; they are only behavioural and demonstrative preferences just like the personality types, temperaments and the professional or technical backgrounds that a person acquires through education and training.

We need a framework that enables a coach to slice the culture skilfully to navigate with the client their deepest concerns and coach them to their own purpose and workable beliefs. I therefore recommend a more direct and deep approach involving elements of the social identity of the group or groups where they belong to in relation to their work's organizational culture, subcultures, purpose, processes, structure and governance. Social identity plays a big role in defining an individual belief system, personal values, social behaviours and communication, and their own identity. The Intersection between the organization and the society is where the conflict of values, beliefs, and identity arise or even worse, the conflict of cultures and subcultures. I have attempted to draw this model for the reader as three wheels connected together in a way that allows them to influence each other's motion. Each wheel contains the major elements of the player identity. Concerning the coach, for example, it would be the Interculturality coaching competencies suggested earlier. Concerning the client, it would be all the elements pertaining to the constructed identity over their lives. In the organizational wheel,

it would be the elements that constitute the organizational culture and subcultures. The coach is the main Initiator of the client and organizational wheels. In other words they propose the interactive thoughts by the combination of two or more meetings points between the two wheels. Their wheel as a coach will guide them in implementing a certain competency for adaptability so they can observe and change their coaching method or tools or the communication accordingly. (See appendix 2).

Conclusion

This paper focused on culturality coaching and its positioning in the newly developed profession of coaching originating in North America and Europe. The profession in itself demands theoretical underpinning with empirical research. Interculturality coaching was identified in this paper as an important part of the profession due to the growing interaction between the world economies and the immigration of labour, business and people across the globe. We don't need to travel far to coach Interculturality; it's very much part of the local lives of individuals and organizations. Coaching competencies may have the potential to include elements of Interculturality competencies. The five competencies of Gibson maybe a good start: Adaptability, Cultural Self-Awareness, Cultural Sensory Perception, Global Perspective and Open-mindedness. The ability to coach complexity Intelligence is a sixth, and the ability to interact with complex and intertwining social and organizational elements can be the seventh. Nevertheless, they themselves are not thoroughly researched in a scholarly manner and this presents an obvious gap in the field.

Interculturality coaching frameworks are borrowed from the field of cross-cultural management and may lack the perspective of coach/client relations in the wider context of the organization and the wider context of the client social background. A preliminary framework is suggested here based on the researcher's experience which requires trial in different settings to be refined and claimed applicable.

This brings us to the end of this discussion paper which ultimately aims to engage the coach practitioner and researcher alike in the hope that further action or initiative will take place, especially at the origin of this profession: The International Coaching Federation ICF.

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Appendix 1

The Categories and dimensions of COF

Sense of power and responsibility

This category relates to one's attitudes towards the place of human life within nature. Do we seek to control nature, taking a dominant and driving stance towards controlling our own lives; or do we 'go with the flow', accepting whatever fate casts our way? Clearly, the very activity of coaching is predicated on the idea that people have and need at least some level of control over their lives, but it is also important to note that individuals will be located somewhere along a continuum between 'control' and 'humility', with a certain degree of 'harmony' along the way.

Managing time

There are three dimensions here:

1. Do we see it as **scarce** on the one hand, with our seconds ticking away, or **plentiful**, where we can 'take our time'?
2. Do we see activity as **monochronic**, i.e. with a sense that it is somehow best to do things or concentrate on relationships one at a time; or **polychronic**, allowing us to multitask our way through a more chaotic life?
3. Do we place more of our attention on **the past** (learning from past occurrences); **the present** (focus on the here and now and short-term gains); or **the future** (focus on long-term benefits and a far-reaching vision)?

Definitions of identity and purpose

This resonates with two key dimensions in culture theory; the individualist/collectivist and the being/doing dimensions.

Organisational arrangements

The key dimensions here are:

1. Hierarchy versus equality, linked to the concept of 'power distance'.
2. Universalistic versus particularistic, which maps whether we believe that all cases should be treated in the same manner no matter what the circumstances, or that the circumstances will dictate how a case should be treated.
3. Stability versus change, relating to how comfortable people feel with change.
4. Competitive versus collaborative, a dimension relating to how success is promoted and pursued within the organisation.

Notions of territory and boundaries

This has one dimension that defines whether the individual tends to form clear and strong boundaries between different areas of his or her life (such as the boundaries between work and home life) or allows boundaries between spheres and roles to be permeable, and how the individual manages their physical space.

Communication patterns

This is another four dimension category:

1. **High versus low context cultures.** High context cultures rely greatly on implicit forms of communication such as gesture, body language and inflexion. Low context cultures favour a 'what you see is what you get' direct style of communication.
2. The **direct versus indirect** dimension is closely linked to levels of context, and indicates how we will prefer to communicate in a conflict situation.

3. The **affective versus neutral** dimension indicates how we will manage our feelings in a communicative context. An affective culture will place a high value on display of feelings and emotions as a way of building and maintaining social connections. A neutral culture will tend to view such displays as inappropriate in certain contexts, and a person with a preference for neutrality will tend to display a level of precision and detachment in communication.
4. **Formality versus informality**, which relates to the relative value placed on strict protocols or conversely on spontaneity.

Preferred modes of thinking

1. **The inductive versus deductive** thinking, charting the dominant direction of thinking from practical experience to **Coaching** theoretical generalisation, or vice versa.
2. The **analytic versus systemic** dimension denotes a style of thinking, either analytically separating a whole into its constituent parts in order to examine their precise characteristics in isolation, or assembling separate parts into a cohesive whole, looking for connections.

Appendix 2

The framework of Interculturality coaching

