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Gibb, S.J. and Hill, P. (2006) *From Trail-Blazing Individualism to a Social Construction Community; Modelling Knowledge Construction in Coaching*. International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education, 4 (2). pp. 58-77.

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The International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching

**Volume IV Issue 2
September 2006**

From Trail-Blazing Individualism to a Social Construction Community; Modelling Knowledge Construction in Coaching

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Abstract

This paper describes a model for analysing why and how knowledge construction issues arise around understanding coaching and mentoring. This analysis concerns the literature and empirical context one kind of coaching, executive coaching. Data from a survey of coaches who completed a preferences instrument derived from the model was collected. Analysis of this data indicates patterns in the academic identity and knowledge construction preferences of coaches. In discussion the initial model is revised for further stimulating thinking around integrative knowledge construction in the field of coaching.

A History of Trail Blazing?

The period of trail-blazing and path-finding in coaching and mentoring by pioneers is over. The 'wild west days' (Sherman & Freas 2004) are history. Original thinkers and contributors have been producing their 2nd editions (Downey 2003, Whitmore 2000, Clutterbuck 2004). The momentum to establish an institutional infrastructure for coaching and mentoring has built up considerably in recent times. In the present the growth of occasional articles into integrative literature reviews (Feldman & Lankau 2005, Joo 2005) networks into more formal bodies, of short courses into qualifications, of a few published textbooks into many texts in catalogues, give a real sense of coaching becoming an integral feature of the learning and development landscape. Sustaining and building on that momentum now brings into starker relief an issue that faces any successful knowledge construction initiative which grows as much as this. That is the issue of the academic identity of coaching and mentoring.

The issue now is that knowledge about coaching and mentoring are currently being socially constructed during the course of interaction between two big forces. Social construction here simply means that knowledge is made and sustained as a community is made and sustained. The process of knowledge construction is

mutually reciprocal with community construction. One big force in this is the continuing strong presence of pragmatists. Accepting, embracing and advocating a 'pragmatist' view of people and performance in coaching and mentoring, means accepting a 'whatever works is good', loose process and technique-laden approach to knowledge construction around coaching and mentoring practices. The pragmatist belief that what is important is what works, not the coherence and consistency of a body of knowledge or theory, allows for multiple eclectic accounts of process and practice. Pragmatists are, and often wish to remain, free to locate and blend techniques in this individual, personal and eclectic fashion. They have blazed the trails, and want to be free to continue wandering where they wish at will. People who positively value this kind of environment and freedom continue to be attracted into the area of practice, people who consider that any other kind of environment would be stifling.

The other big force is the influence of those who have followed along the trails, representing the great knowledge communities of already socially constructed established subjects, disciplines and professions, the well established domains of academic identity allied with established areas of institutional practice. These include, but are not only, practicing academics from the divided kingdoms of business and the study of adult learning, of schools of psychology and counselling. Their social construction influence is to question the sustainability of the trailblazers individualistic way of going about things, and to propose that now development be done in a more structured and evidence-based way (Pawson et al 2004, Pawson 2004).

Where the free spirits of individualism and eclecticism, of the pragmatic approach to coaching and the advocates of a tighter governance requiring evidence-bases, conceptual coherence and clarity about curricula for development meet there are elements of both common interest and confrontation. There have been meetings in the burgeoning literature about coaching and mentoring (Chapman et al 2003, Crane 2002, Zeus & Skiffington 2003). Texts written by practitioners and experienced coaches, the wisdom literature, typically ventures into and deal with aspects of academic territories, often at a deep philosophical level though, not at the bread-and-butter level of methods, evidence and structured analysis. They may go beyond reviewing standard themes and techniques; like basic skills in the area such as listening, questioning and consider heuristics and techniques to help with doing work, such as using 'clean language' and 'exploring metaphors' (for example Leonard 1998, Hill 2004).

Competency mapping provided another meeting point. A map of the coaching and mentoring (and other development role) territory needs to be staked out for common interests such as curriculum design and course accreditation purposes. The question that arises is who ought to occupy that staked out territory? There is competition, a plurality of groups that may/should be encouraged to prevail. These could be thought of as academic subjects; psychology, consulting, organisational analysis, HRD, leadership. Or they could be thought of as associated 'professions' and methods (and

movements); such as counseling, adult learning, mentoring, positive psychology. The potential threat is of being pulled to a centre of gravity in one form of professional practice (for example Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT), Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP), or typologies of kinds of coaching and mentoring).

The Momentum of Social Construction

This situation is not peculiar to coaching. When a new area of professional development is emerging and approaching institutional status, being more than a loose collection of practices which a few individuals are trail-blazing as they go along, the usual option is to reach for and gather together the ‘right’ set of subject-matter based disciplines. This process of constructing an academic identity is a social process, one that involves creating and sustaining a community. In the case of coaching and mentoring the community is one that has been open to incorporating a set of members from, for example, psychology, social psychology, career studies, management development and organisational analysis.

Another source of possible members of the community that may coalesce around coaching and mentoring is people in associate professional areas. They bring with them experiences of how competence is developed, incorporating methods and areas of expertise. This may bring validation by connection with the scientific and cultural capital created in these areas of established expertise. Alternatively they may bring with them confusion and problems as they overshadow other members.

This is a period of social construction and searching for a basis for community to connect evidence-based, coherent and education-grounded development without over-shadowing or even sacrificing what has gone before.

This as a big picture of the situation might be of little concern, if it did not turn on a crucial dilemma that

“The human mind serves two masters; the stress of practice and the craving for a larger wisdom ... adventures in thinking are vital quests for guidance in action and for insight into order and destiny” (Jastrow 1962)

One risk is that social construction phase draws attention into the consideration of larger wisdoms. But to be helpful in supporting effective coach development studies need to be addressing the stress of practice, providing for guidance in action. The complex social construction phase currently being experienced needs to serve both the stress of practice as well as the cravings for ‘larger wisdoms’. The other risk is that the community withholds from opening up and advancing analysis of larger wisdoms. But to support effective coach development also means recognising an interest with and concern about insights into order, these are an equal part of effective coach development.

Why Model ?

Exploring academic identities can help transcend coaching being either too pragmatic and ‘techniques’ driven or becoming too enmeshed in the mazes of larger wisdoms, esoteric philosophy and sense-making systems. One option is to adopt and adapt the work of Becher and Trowler (2001) and model and analyse academic tribes and territories. This model can be adapted to conceive of an integrated framework for knowledge in coaching and mentoring. For Becher and Trowler 4 kinds of knowledge construction or academic identity, can be identified and explored. Each of these has distinctive features that contain effective sense-making, with characteristic patterns of communication for the construction of what is deemed to be useful knowledge. Each type of academic identity requires a kind of ‘savoir faire’, making them distinctive. While there is evidently scope for conflict and confrontation between these different groupings, ultimately each of them may have a role and can be useful to inform understanding coaching and mentoring.

In advancing such a framework the denotation of ‘academic’ places emphasis on matters relating to education and scholarship, on reading and study rather than technical or practical work. The connotations lead in many directions. They can end up with meanings that define the academic as dry, boring, tedious and remote from operational significance; or end up with meanings that value the academic as of high status, representing the informed challenge of conventional wisdom which drives dynamic cultures and societies. Here we mean only to acknowledge that it is to be taken seriously that the ‘academic’ has to articulate its value, to avoid being misperceived as irrelevant.

There will be wariness and sensitivities around advancing any such framework. Those in and around the occupation still favouring pragmatism, to be more independent and action-oriented, will be wary of being drawn away from the personal certainties they have attained and into what they may fear are stagnant backwaters and swamps.

The Model

Becher & Trowler (op cit) propose that any area of knowledge production and consumption can be considered as a kind of ‘territory’; an environment with conditions that may range from the ‘hard’ to the ‘soft’. At the ‘hard’ end of possible environments are the territories inhabited by those who have been successful by adopting a ‘realist’ strategy for knowledge construction; these are groups who form to seek to identify the facts of a discernable and stable reality. In the environments deemed ‘soft’ are the groups who have been successful by adopting phenomenological strategies, to articulate and give voice to diverse accounts of reality. In between the extremes of environments warranting either of these in their pure and contrasting forms are those environments that afford success to a mix of the hard and the soft. These are inhabited by groups that accept that ‘realist’ and objective knowledge is possible, and even desirable, but that such knowledge

construction is always embedded in processes of testimony and communication (Goldman 1999). That mean knowledge construction is also subject to the mediation of social and the subjective factors.

This dimension alone would produce two kinds of knowledge construction. But there is also a second dimension to modelling the possible realms of knowledge construction, and this is a cultural dimension. There are, in addition to strategies appropriate for inhabiting a certain kind of territory, equivalent preferences and adaptations for belonging to a certain kind of 'tribe'. Similar lifestyles may evolve, for instance, in hot and cold places, but the communities inhabiting them may not share the same language, customs and beliefs. The key differentiating element in the founding and sustenance of academic tribes is whether they are a tribe that adheres to a clear, single paradigm or a tribe that adheres to not have a clear, single paradigm. Those knowledge construction communities evolved around adhering to a clear, single paradigms have, as it were, only one face on their totem pole, in essence being monotheistic. Those tribes evolved around adhering to no clear, single paradigm have many faces on their totem pole, being polytheistic.

The former tribes are, in Becher and Trowler's terms, in a culture of convergence. The latter are in a culture of divergence. The fundamental nature, coherence and permanence of knowledge construction communities, of academic identity , divides along these lines. With the former a stable and continuing consensus on the core paradigm is necessary for their everyday work to be sustained; the need is to work from, reinforce and extend the clear, single paradigm. For the latter variation, disagreement and dissent is the norm; to be sustained they value and the contest of not just competing arguments, theories and schools but of paradigms.

This dimension introduces contrasting patterns of taken-for-granted values, attitudes and ways of behaving which characterise different groups markedly. Their preferred cultures are articulated through and reinforced by recurrent practices among the group. This is manifest in the behaviour, language, values and rituals to be found in the faculties, departments, conferences, publications and every other place that tribe members gather. Socialisation and initiation into a kind of culture, a culture of convergence or divergence, will entail encountering quite distinct challenges to values, beliefs and behaviours if these do not occur naturally in the person, or on changing from kind of environment to another. The culture shock of crossing discipline boundaries can be as severe as anything encountered elsewhere.

The central point is that the way that members of a tribe come habitually to define situations and use the appropriate discourse of either convergence or divergence becomes central to their knowledge construction, and accepting that becomes an essential feature of continuing tribe membership. Using the discourses and modes of argument, demonstrating the savoir faire of the convergent or divergent tribe, is not an option, it is a fundamental part of membership.

Taken together these two dimensions of environment and culture produce a matrix of four potential kinds of knowledge construction and academic identity (see Figure 1).

By extension this model can be used to examine knowledge construction and academic identity in any existing, or new and emerging, area. Some subjects come to evolve around one mix of environment and culture, for example, favouring those who prefer hard and convergent forms of research and learning while others will attract and favour those preferring, in contrast, soft and divergent forms of research and learning.

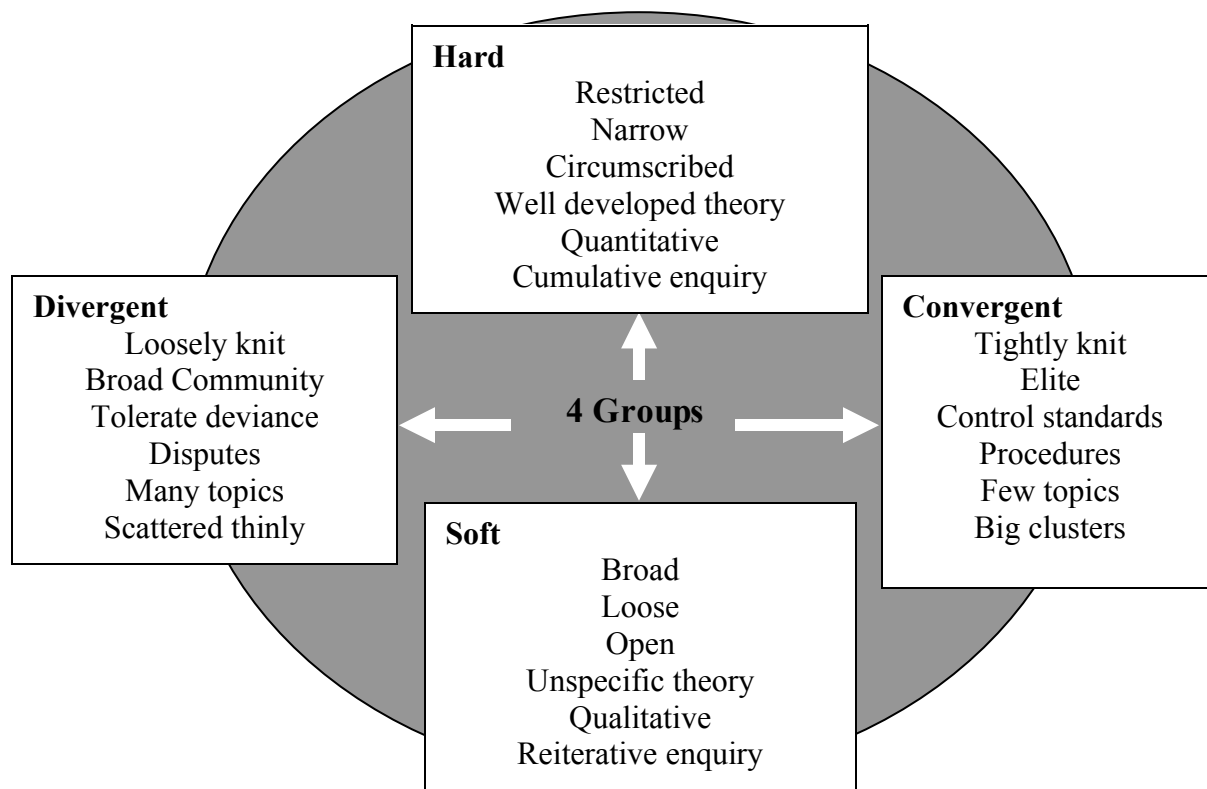


Figure 1; Mapping Academic Identities; Source Becher and Trowler 2001

Method

An instrument was developed to translate the Becher & Trowler model of knowledge construction into a series of statements which could be given to respondents. Their forced choice on agreement or disagreement with these would profile them as members of one kind of the 4 possible academic tribes. This involved identifying 6 soft and 6 paired hard indicators and 5 divergent and 5 paired convergent indicators derived from the descriptions Becher and Trowler (2001) give of the territorial and tribal differentiators. There were then in total 22 statements (see Figure 1) with which a respondent could agree or disagree, with agreement indicating support for that indicator of academic identity.

A survey was completed by circulating this tool (see Table 2) to 20 people who attended a presentation on the model at a conference, The European Mentoring and

Coaching Council conference, in Zurich in November 2005. None of the respondents were made aware of the underlying model prior to completing the survey instrument. The executive coaching domain is a good one to explore, as the literature around the theory and practice of executive coaching shows a breadth and diversity in academic terms is evident (Sperry 1993, Witherspoon & White 1996, Clutterbuck & Megginson 2000, Kilburg 2000, Crane 2002, Ludman & Erlandson 2004, Shuit 2005, Khan 2005, Kaufman 2006). The literature found ranges from the ambitious attempt to generally summarise ‘all there is to know’ about Executive Coaching (Zeus & Skiffington 2003) to the more reflective and questioning approaches that raise concerns about challenging the myths that the occupation may be in danger of getting stuck with (Chapman, Best & Van Casteren 2003) or even the potential dangers of unprofessional executive coaching (Berglas 2002). It is a domain where it is claimed (Orenstein 2002) the literature on executive coaching is dominated by descriptions of methodologies by practitioners, defining and designating practices, types and roles for coaching, but there is more on the agenda than this. It is a domain of coaching that is not an exclusively individual intervention, but also overlaps with team and group issues; and coaches need to develop self awareness and reflection about that..

Those who completed the survey indicated the following about themselves as background;

A Coach	6
Teachers of coaching	3
Researchers in coaching	0
Purchaser of coaching services	2
A combination of the above	
coach & teacher	1
coach, teacher and researcher	4
teacher & researcher	2
Coach & researcher	1
Researcher & purchase	1
Teacher & purchaser	1

Table 1; Survey respondents

The sample is then one which includes both academics and practitioners concerned with the identity of executive coaching. Most respondents had British institutional connections, with some representing German, Swedish and other European institutional contexts.

Figure 1; Questions derived from Becher and Trowler

I think that most effective teaching and research around executive coaching will be found where...

Soft-Hard Dimension

1	It is appreciated that there are many possible approaches to understanding executive coaching
2	Clear boundaries are established to map out what executive coaching is and isn't
3	A particular focus on the core of the executive coaching role is well defined for learners
4	An eclectic, inclusive, pluralism of possible executive coaching roles is accepted
5	It is recognised that there are no well established and understood boundaries around the subject
6	Differentiation between executive coaching and apparently similar roles is absolutely clear
7	The specific theory that is present in the literatures about executive coaching is made more explicit and critiqued
8	There is freedom from having to be rigorously grounded in particular theoretical traditions
9	There is evidence available from many quantitative and causal studies about the practice of executive coaching and its impact on careers
10	There is evidence from many qualitative case studies about the organisational contexts of the practice of executive coaching
11	There is a conscious collection of and building upon existing studies in executive coaching extending study into 'gap' areas and new concerns
12	Only recent studies are used, as there is a continual re-visiting in studies of a familiar set of core concerns, problems and issues but in current conditions

Convergent-Divergent Dimension

13	The networks of teachers and researchers concerned with exploring executive coaching need to be in close touch and tightly knit as a community
14	The networks of teachers and researchers concerned with exploring executive coaching are only loosely connected as a community
15	In teaching and research there is a high level of tolerance of diverse and even unusual and idiosyncratic approaches to executive coaching
16	In teaching and research there should be a low level of tolerance of multiple and unusual views about executive coaching
17	It is accepted that disputes in understanding executive coaching may persist over prolonged periods, and even become institutionalised in separate theories
18	Procedures for resolving disputes effectively are an integral part of exploring the subject, so as to keep theory development coherent and integrated
19	It is acknowledged that there are a great many topics that are connected with understanding executive coaching in research and teaching
20	There are only really few essential topics at the heart of executive coaching which in research and teaching need to be prioritised and focussed upon
21	Teachers and researchers in executive coaching being scattered thinly across several institutions is a good thing
22	Teachers and researchers in executive coaching being concentrated in a few big, permanent clusters would be a good thing

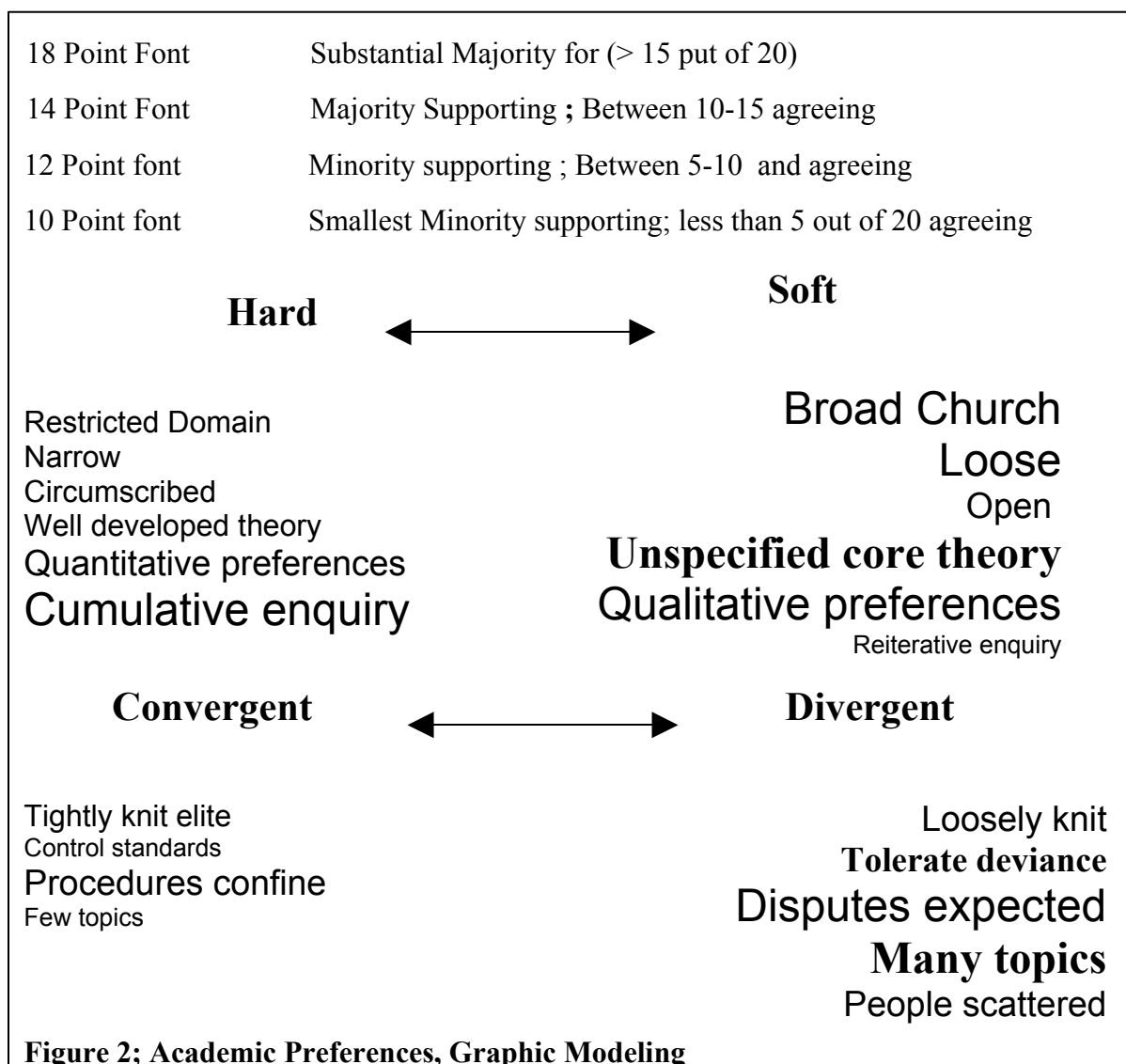
<i>I think that most effective teaching and research around executive coaching will be found where...</i>		Disagree	Agree
Soft-Hard Dimension			
1	many possible approaches	2	18
2	Clear boundaries	13	7
3	focus on the core	9	11
4	pluralism	3	17
5	no well established boundaries	5	14
6	Differentiation clear	15	9
7	specific theory	9	9
8	Not grounded in theoretical tradition	2	17
9	quantitative and causal studies	4	16
10	qualitative case studies	4	16
11	collection of and building upon existing studies	3	17
12	continual re-visiting in studies	15	4
Convergent-Divergent Dimension			
13	tightly knit as a community	13	6
14	loosely connected as a community	8	11
15	tolerance of diverse approaches	7	12
16	low level of tolerance of multiple views	15	5
17	disputes may persist	4	15
18	keep theory development coherent and integrated	6	12
19	great many topics	2	18
20	few essential topics	19	0
21	researchers scattered thinly across several institutions is a good thing	5	12
22	researchers being concentrated in a few big, permanent clusters	12	6

Table 2; Tribe and territory preference based on survey returns

The extent to which the survey responses were consistent could be judged. This was possible as pairs of statements in each dimension matched; with one positive statement and the other a negative statement on the same factor. Perfectly matched characteristics would indicate a clear preference for one kind of the 4 kinds of academic identity. Most of the survey responses were matched, suggesting that there was a consistent view of academic tribe core identity views being expressed; but in some indicators there was a mismatch.

The evidence here (see Table 2) is that there is a discernible preference, for what in Becher & Trowler's terms would be the 'soft-divergent' academic identity, but that is not entirely consistent on either of the primary dimensions. On the soft-hard dimension there are potential tensions around the qualitative-quantitative inquiry

factor, and around the open-circumscribed subject factor. The former may indicate differences among the respondents, while the latter may indicate uncertainty about taking a position on the definition of boundaries around the subject. Figure 2 gives a graphic representation of preferences, using font size to indicate the dominant preferences, with indicators in the largest font being preferred by the majority and those in the smaller fonts preferred by fewer.



Knowledge Construction ‘Tribes’ in Executive Coaching

Tribe 1; Skills- Sports and Performance

An identity preference based on an affinity with domains of behaviour and performance such as sports represent the affinities behind this preference (See for example McLean et al 2005). The styles of coaches and coaching in this domain

offer potential insights, and studies have been and can be done around that. For some this identity for knowledge construction is attractive because it is more 'fun' than the others. For others there is also a potential gender bias that has to be taken into account. Typically the key sports, and sports coaches, and their coachees, are male. There is also a division on the perceived isomorphism between sports and business and teams in these areas. For some various factors in coaching success are common across these different domains, including using both directive and non-directive techniques and strategies. There is an immediacy of results and outcomes in much sports coaching which can make it a useful model for illustrating otherwise abstract ideas or processes that may take time to emerge in other contexts. There is also a shared historical connection with long standing support and involvement in outdoors-based development. This interface may be expected to continue to produce new initiatives and insights from studies, though the 'martial' and adventure aspects can sit uncomfortably with some.

The typical themes that tend to arise are trans-sport, broader than the specific activity that is of concern, raising a combination of behavioural change and positive psychology issues. These are, for example;

- Performance requires drive, discipline and determination; performers are being focus and 'dream' driven
- Teaching the fundamentals closely and carefully is critical; mastering the rudiments and practicing them is a continual challenge
- Performers are laying against themselves as the ever-present challenge; bettering your own best performance not just winning matters
- Visualization matters; mental rehearsal is as important and valuable as physical practice
- Performers learn from 'defeat'; people lose as much as they win, many even losing more than they win, and performers need to be able to learn from that
- The coaching relationship is mediated by values; honesty, trust, and communication

There are few pure approaches to executive coaching rooted in this tradition, and the kind of knowledge construction it represents. Galleway (1986) represents one version and variation of this approach. The narrative and empathy with games and sports is warranted because;

“The value of a game lies in its ability to create an illusion-that is to provide a separate reality in which you can experiment and take risks without great penalties for failure...for the purpose of learning better how to meet real challenges and overcome real obstacles in the presence of real pressures.”

Galleway 1986, P 228

Coaches need to understand the key equation of;

Performance - Interference = Potential

Interference is run by ‘Self 1’, impeding the role of the capable ‘Self 2’. Bad performance is attributable to this interference. Perversely most education and training is based on passively acquiring what Galleway terms ‘do-instructions’, and this is to be seen as a source of interference. Performers expect to be advised by coaches to ‘do’ this, and ‘do’ that. They are dependent on experts, they mistrust themselves and their natural learning process.

The historical and continuing popularity of this approach to knowledge construction can be attributed to the audience demographics for much Executive Coaching, being male (Ludeman & Erlandson, 2004). Executive Coaching was a safe way of slipping in ‘soft issues’ in the guise of behavioural psychology wrapped up in sports talk. This got under the radar of ‘sceptical men’, who, it is often explicitly or implicitly believed, are happier to review and reflect upon their performance and leadership or team role problems if they are contained in narratives founded on sports and sporting dilemmas, teams and activities.

Criticisms of this kind of academic identity for Executive Coaching centre superficially on the extent to which the parallel between sports and management can be either made or sustained (Peterson & Little 2005). In sports the boundaries and rules of the game are clearly delineated. Games are brief and self-contained, with the outcomes of choices and actions clear. Feedback is relatively immediate, and much coaching occurs during practice sessions. Coaches may know the rules better than the players, and design a strategy that players implement; the coach is an expert guiding the game and calling the shots. In management all these factors can be contrasted (see Figure 12).

	Sports context	Management context
Boundaries and rules	Clearly delineated	Difficult to define; people may enter, leave or change
Conditions	Brief and self contained	Lengthy and inter-connected
Outcomes	Effect of actions and decisions evident	Effect of actions and decisions hard to gauge
Feedback	During practice	During performance
Coach Role	Expert designing strategy, providing answers	Partner helping review, facilitating review

Figure ; Sports and Management Contexts for Coaching Compared

At a deeper level the objection is to assuming that the ‘realities’ of a stable, discernable relationship can be fixed and observed in order to produce a science of coaching. The alternative view is that complexity, uncertainty and contextual factors interact to render such ambitions not just misleading but positively distorting; framing phenomena such as coaching in ways that make them mechanistic exercises in controlled ‘doing’ of specific things rather than human exercises in mutual ‘being’ and healthy growth.

Tribe 2; Cognitive Theory and HRD

An interest in and affinity with psychology, especially cognitive psychology, is a rationale that represents this second kind of tribe in Executive coaching. Rather than behaviour and the performance of a game the structure of knowledge construction here is about individuals' learning. The challenge for them is that understanding the brain and research about its functions is rooted in the hard and convergent but there are softer and more convergent aspects. To be informed about and involved in knowledge construction here entails engaging with movements such as the evolution of positive psychology (Seligman 2002) to challenge conventional accounts of psychology in coaching (Peltier 2001). Challenges arise around the encounter with highly specialised knowledge, and the scope for pseudo-science and misunderstanding. That leaves knowledge construction vulnerable to hype in linking techniques and applications based in this area to practice.

This tribe is also more divergent, belonging as it overlaps with the domain of Human Resource Development (HRD), the interface of learning, careers and organisation development rather than sports, games grounded in description and analysis of the body. This gives it 'social construction appeal' among the community of HR managers and other managers whose sense of savoir faire overlaps with studies in that area. These are groups who are familiar with the language and research formats typically adopted in this area. These usually attempt to capture the 'whole' series of issues around a topic through exploring cases which link organisational, group and individual levels of analysis together; for example in 'talent management' or development interactions (D'abate et al 2003). This crossing of levels is a major strength, grounded in evidence directly from workplaces.

It is also possible to see this in some ways the least 'negative' kind of tribe to belong to, rather than a positive choice; for those who are not comfortable with the constraints around the hard and convergent identity. An ambivalence around a positive embrace of a tribal identity that is hard-convergent may be best hidden, or contained, in accepting a more 'divergent' identity. It is not going all the way into being a 'bit of everything is relevant and may be seen from multiple angles' culture; but communication norms around inquiry and data standards are loose. The demands of working within an agree paradigm, or explicitly and constantly challenging paradigms, is less strong.

There are those who outline and use theories from associated domains explicitly (Fitzgerald & Garvey Berger 2002). They represent an attempt to combine several strands, to explore the diversity of approaches that exist, reflecting different theories about development and learning. They themselves prefer psychology, and the Jungian school within that, along with the adult learning work of Kegan. They also include reference to the established concepts of 'double loop' learning at an individual level and to 'triple loop' learning, which they associate with asking 'why' questions to promote insight into paradigms. They review coaching practices in contexts such as midlife change, psychotherapy and transformational learning. And

they seek to identify and apply coaching to a range of special situations; including isolated executives, entrepreneurs, and those working across countries.

Tribe 3; Human Relations and Helping Professions

The tribe here is softer and more convergent, accepting of multiple possible interpretations and various authorities co-existing. It is in executive coaching represented by those embedded in the human relations and ‘talking cure’ modalities traditions (Anderson 2002, Arnaud 2003). There is ambiguity here, as the taint of ‘negativity’ that comes with knowledge and techniques developed for helping those suffering problems is ever-present; both in the way that coaches may be perceived and in the ways that coaching might be construed. Nonetheless there is a substantial body of knowledge, and an esteem as well, that means a popular concern with the unconscious and the area of ‘talking cures’ may indeed illuminate significant things about coaching. It has potential to supply an authentic and respectable expertise on people. Its proponents have intellectual and emotional expertise in dealing with ‘helper-client’ relations, and appreciate that this involves more than surface competence and behaviour, and involves accessing the ‘hidden’. They have a rich understanding of the course and content of such relationships, and have elaborated ways to work systematically in those.

They may help coaches to widen their own repertoires, though no single representative from this stream alone could review all understanding in it. It is also getting more divergent; what is deemed to be epistemic, the core to a paradigm, and what is open to debate among various authority figures complicates the understanding of process and ideas about helping relations practice that follow from that. At the extreme end of divergence is a demand to engage in more less permanent paradigm contests. In such conditions it may be that an expertise in being multi-paradigm savoir faire is considered the ideal. Becoming transtheoretical, as Proschaska (1992) presents, is taken into the literature or it may mean learning to live with having commitments to one of the competing paradigms and always being open to challenge by the others. The way I read it currently there is a core commitment in coaching to helping, and to personal growth as a paradigm, with aspects of the unconscious recognised as significant. Thus the current concern of connecting with knowledge construction in this area but continuing to differentiate coaching from counselling and therapy will continue, and will also extend into the supervision roles and relationships. Whether this represents a welcome extension of a valid frame of reference or a complication too far in the circumstances of actual coaching practice is a real concern.

Tribe 4; Totalities, Beliefs and Values

At the most soft and divergent level is the tribe represented by those concerned with totalities, complex and integrated wholes seeking to articulate how beliefs, ‘tacit’ knowledge and values are influences on people and performance in areas like

coaching. Smith provides a representative modern definition of complex totalities of belief as;

“configurations of linked perceptual/behavioral tendencies of various degree of strength, continuously formed, transformed, and reconfigured through our ongoing interactions with our environments.” (Smith op cit, p 44).

The divergence here proliferates around the high level abstractions central to discourses here; beliefs, values and knowledge itself. Belief is not then just, or perhaps in any sense even, something ‘in the mind’; rather it is integral to an entire organism’s complex and linked tendencies to perceive and act; in action some belief is strengthened and other elements weakened. The differences among the ways that such totalities can be conceived of give rise to the wealth of philosophical, social, economic, political and ethical discourses with which man seeks to take the measure of man. For instance they are discernible in assumptions and debates around values which are present in much of the literature on Executive Coaching (see for example Flaherty 1999). These areas of value contest are:

- **Phenomenological:** in coaching ‘empathy’ is the best means of accessing and knowing the coachee’s reality
- even if coaches learn and commit to use all kinds of formal and structured diagnostic tools
- **Post-Modernist:** in coaching several domains (‘life’, spiritual, etc) are important for individuals and organisations
- motivation for upward career development (talent management ?) is still ‘the’ lever for full potential realisation
- **Idealism:** in coaching nurture the ‘will to change’ for good; self development and consciousness change/raising
- even if individuals and organisations really want to change behaviour and performance
- **Voluntarism:** personal, local, action and agency is the foundation of successful change
- Even though we realise people are always members of groups and are embedded in more general (even ‘global’) systems

Discussion on the Modelling of Knowledge Construction

The development and application of a model produces a profile of the academic tribes and identities of coaching. It is possible to explore representatives of these, and their influence on explicit or tacitly in structuring and inform knowledge construction in coaching and mentoring. For example, how coaching and mentoring is a domain where a proliferation of many ‘universal and integrated’ theories and models appear as individuals compete to gain prominence for their ‘totality’ level model. To counter this, a greater concern with evidence-based argument around lower levels is needed around relations, cognition and behaviour concerns in coaching instead of further

‘universal and integrated’ pioneering accounts. Remaining stuck in a field containing many prescriptive models, and choosing among them or seeing to integrate them, displaces concentrating on learning about significant and sustained core areas worthy of study and reflection.

For Executive Coaching to be perceived as a domain where aspects of all the four different kinds of tribe are represented has potential. The preferences instrument has been derived from the work of Bech & Trowler, provides a way of locating existing underlying preferences for a kind of tribe. Some results here show that there is a preference for viewing executive coaching through a lens that is divergent and soft. Outside the primary preference of soft-convergent there is a tension in the pull of other kinds of identity. On the one hand, territorially, the perception is that the interface with the hard domain of ‘Sports’ offers most; yet in terms of ‘tribal’ preferences the ‘Helping professions’ domain is preferred. These secondary preferences are the harder to reconcile, in terms of academic identity, out of the possible secondary combinations. There were interesting findings around the soft-convergent domain, where survey returns show greatest disagreement and/or splits around preferences.

Understanding academic identity issues is part of developing professionalism, beyond initial and personal perspective starting points is an important part of development, alongside techniques and methods. This may advance professionalisation in Executive Coaching, helping to avoid the criticism that the stress of practice is met only with a semi-skilled mastery of technique rather than a higher status foundation of knowledge and understanding.

It is though possible and desirable to re-model the academic identities, to map identities on a continuum rather than in quadrants (see Figure 3). This can help integrate rather than divide the domains, and stimulate inter-domain questions for research, and accommodate different traditions in methods as well.

It fits with professional development requiring a dynamic and reflective understanding of Executive Coaching. People's theories and identities as coaches can be secured by engaging with conflicts and debates around the types of groups which exist, to get at the deep and real issues rather than the superficial manifestations of merely inter-tribal difference.

Exploring the tribes and identities of Executive Coaching opens up fresh lines of thinking and questioning, which can advance the credibility and effectiveness of the occupation. Learners can gain both greater knowledge of people and performance, human interaction and enhanced professionalism. Professional practice is not exactly like that in associate fields, whether therapeutic or sporting, educational or scientific. Living with the tensions of this pluralism is perhaps exactly what the real challenge of Executive Coaching is about, and that is not something to deny or avoid or wish away.

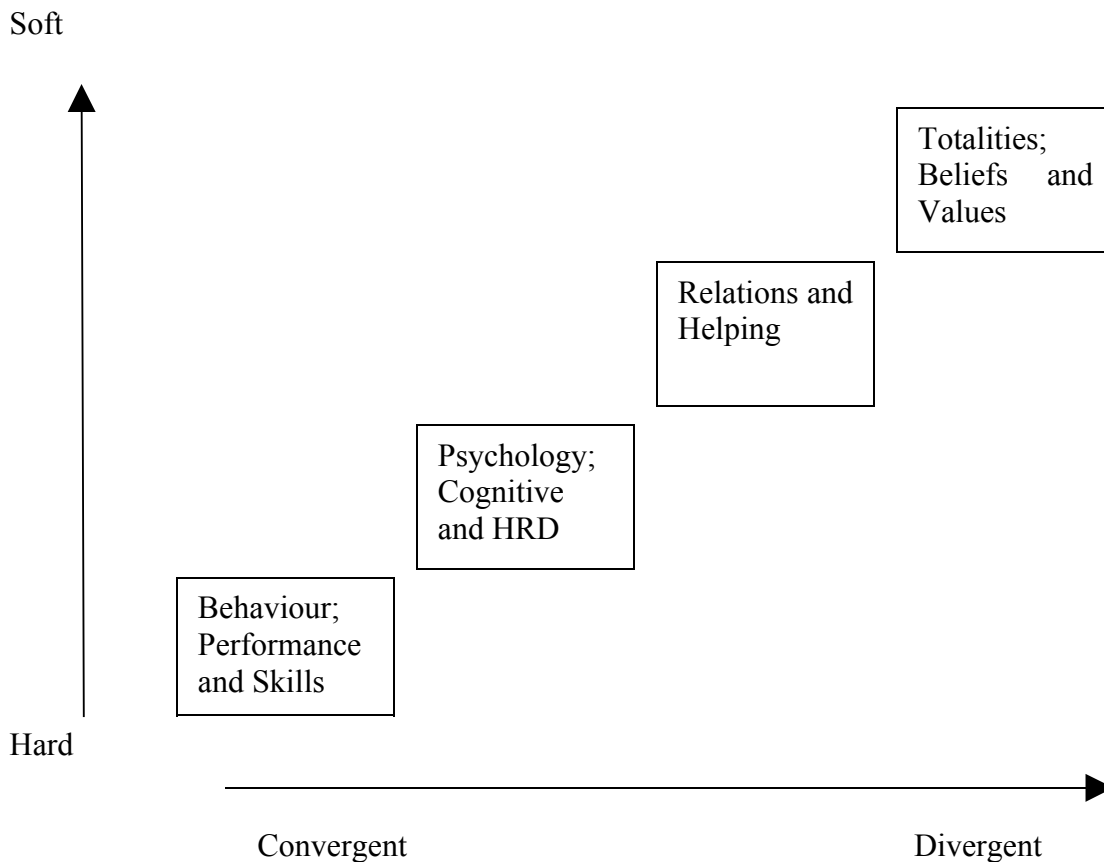


Figure 3; Re-modelling Identities for Knowledge Construction as a Continuum for Coaching & Mentoring

In advancing such an analysis of identities around knowledge construction in Executive coaching new options emerge.

One implication of an identity for knowledge construction is that people will have a natural home, and be comfortable with one kind of analysis and identity and uncomfortable with the others. Recognising that and then working within that comfort zone, but also being able to work across groups, switching as appropriate, are both important. Teaching, researching and being professional as a coach means more than picking and mixing insights from each identity for knowledge construction.

Understanding the nature of knowledge construction can help move us beyond a contest among favoured prescriptive models to situating theory and action in an integrative and inclusive framework for reflective practice. And it may also help guide both teachers and learners, writers and commentators, away from the traps of exchanging or mistakenly criticising unexamined preferences, and into debates where issues and matters, both critical and empirical, can be engaged with to the benefit of a broad and growing community.

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