

What is Wrong With Business Coaching?

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Coaching is the latest craze in organizational development. Thousands are calling themselves coaches and making a living at it.

There are dangers in this practice. What are they and why are they dangerous?

My first year, freshman year, at Hebrew University Jerusalem. The class: International Relations Theory.

The professor enters the class and the first sentence out of his mouth is about what is ethical between people is not necessarily the ethics that govern international relations. (Inter-people relations are ruled by what we might call fairness. International relations are ruled by interests and not by fairness).

I have been reminded many times of this class in my work as a consultant to companies and to governments.

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What I have learned is that systems have different levels and each level has their own rules of what works and does not work.

For instance, what works in personal, individual therapy does not work in family therapy. The therapeutic tools have to be different. You are not treating the components that make up the family, or the individuals, but the dynamics between them.

And then I learned, in my own skin, that what works in family therapy does not work in organizational therapy, also called organizational transformation.

I once hired a very famous family therapist to help me with a certain client. He agreed to coach one of the vice presidents. The direction his consultation took was structured around helping the VP. But the repercussions for the company were dysfunctional.

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The VP complained to him that in the company people had their own armies. What he meant to say is that the organization was in fact organized around silos. So my famous family therapist asked him why didn't he mobilize his own silo?

Maybe it would have made the VP happier and solved his personal problem, but it sure undermined my efforts to integrate the company.

And what works in company level therapy, or integration, I found to my regret, does not work in doing countrywide, large-scale social transformation.

I thought I could use my experience leading corporate organizational change in my consulting with leaders of countries who professed a desire to introduce social change. Not a chance. It required starting from zero to develop different tools and concepts that work.

So, now, what is wrong with coaching?

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It is the assumption that if you make an individual more effective, especially if it is the CEO, you can make the organization more effective.

Good luck.

You might make the individual more effective, more at peace with himself, less stressed, etc., but the organizations won't change much.

It might, I repeat, might work somewhat with a company in the growing stages of their lifecycle because in those stages, the style of the leader impacts heavily on the style of the company at large. But in the aging stages of the lifecycle, organizational dynamics and culture are stronger than the style of the leader, particularly when it comes to impacting organizational behavior. So changing the style or behavior of the leader does not change the behavior of the organization. Not at all.

What is wrong with coaching is the expectation that if managers are coached well, the organization will be more effective and/or more efficient, i.e. better managed. Not true.

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The danger lies in the assumption that something is happening when in reality it is not happening. It is analogous to having insufficient strength antibiotics.

The patient believes he or she is doing the right thing when in fact nothing or very little is happening at all.

Source: Huffingtonpost by Dr. Ichak Kalderon Adizes