

Creative Coaching

Maja Dorothea Schellhorn, D – Freiburg

Bente Hoejer, DK – Koebenhavn

We live in post-modern times with fundamental changes and uncertainties on many levels. All of us know it, and all of us have to handle it. When you face a new challenge, a new situation, or are burned out, are stuck in your routines or have to make difficult decisions, you cannot solve anything by the habitual means and in the familiar ways. This causes confusion and lack of orientation how to act adequately. In such situations we are not able to see all the possibilities and options we have.

Here the coach can help. New problems ask for new solutions. Creativity is an essential, fundamental means and obligatory competence, when one has to cope with new situations. The coach has the expertise to arrange situations creatively, and in this creative process to ask guiding questions to investigate and enlighten the field of possibilities. By bringing the potentials of creativity into the coaching process the coach opens up surprising new perspectives and insights for the coachee.

Traditional ways of solving problems rely almost exclusively on logical thinking, the ratio, and are much focused on the past, seeking reasons and explanations, why things evolved as they did. The method based on creativity, however, always sets a focus on the present situation, the here and now in the creative shaping. In doing so the potentialities and resources of the working person are challenged, invigorated and developed.

In Switzerland, the creative access in processes of change is taught at the European Graduate School EGS in Leuk by an internationally prominent staff of teachers, who have developed and applied the creative methods in therapy for about 20 years. Linked to this international university – which is about to gain international accreditation – a new field of research has been set up in the last few years: In institutes in Freiburg (Germany), the United States and other countries the insights about creative methods in dealing with the challenge of change are transferred to the fields of coaching and business consulting.

Thus in various and manifold ways art making (künstlerisches Gestalten) may be employed in the consulting/coaching processes: painting, movement, writing, scenic actions, doing music or other artistic activities become an essential medium to differentiate a problematic situation and to explore new ways of handling and designing the situation. The results are often very surprising, and lead to very concrete, sustainable, high quality results. The high effectiveness of these artistic methods is experienced and proved with single persons, managers, men and women in leadership function, same as with teams, groups, and small and big organisations and companies.

Two objections that are often raised are these:

- 1) "Doesn't the artistic activity use up much too much time? We do not have the time to play around! We need fast results!" and
- 2) "We are/ I am not an artist! I can not do arts!" Or the opposite: "I am an artist and do not want to deal with dilettantism!"

To the first point, it is to be emphasized: Not although, but exactly **because** there is no time to waste, the creative access is very often the method to choose! Rational exploring and structuring is certainly necessary in some phases of the process of cognition. But the rational thinking alone takes up too much time! And more than that: When we have to cope with complex situations and problems, the ratio falls short in comparison with creative methods that employ thinking as well as the huge capacities of more unconscious knowledge, like feelings, intuition and imagination.

To the second objection there is to be said: The artistic level is set by the capacities of the coachee. The level of artistic background of the coachee is not essential to the result of the consultation. What is essential is his or her artistic attitude: the "seriousness in playing", the serious and playful effort in shaping and arranging a work of beauty or meaning apart from or parallel to rational logic.

Coaching with arts is a new emerging and integrative practice, based on solid scientific insights about the human condition and the human capacities and competences for problem solution. Up to now the disciplines of psychology, pedagogic and cognition theory have for the most part been dominated by the objectivist, materialistic worldview of western societies. The insights of these sciences have too long been neglected by the mainstream. Coaching with arts acknowledges the arguments of scientists and practitioners alike for the necessity of a shift to a more holistic and suitable approach to cognition in an increasingly complex world. It values inner experience and subjectivity, the unity of body, mind and spirit, and the huge influence and capacities of mainly unconscious knowledge such as intuition and imagination.

Contributions from system theory to the field of consulting with expressive arts also include a high awareness of the importance of context and a profound understanding of the individual as part of complex, interacting and "living" systems. In that respect this learning process is rather similar to the learning process that is described in system theories. It takes into account that systemic understanding is essential, when the working person has to cope with highly complex situations. To adequately respond to new challenges, he or she has to first un-learn old patterns. He has to cross a border, cross "a river", where he enters on uncertain ground. And he has to move on uncertain ground before the "added learning" or re-learning can happen.

Given a specific coaching session we start with a dialogue between the coach and the coachee in order to define a concrete subject of concern that is to be looked upon and can be managed in the given time frame. In a second phase of the coaching process we then step aside for a while and do a small creative work of music, dance, theatre, painting, writing, storytelling or other. Thus we avoid using up too much time for collecting an infinite amount of details in a problem that cannot be handled. If we might not do artistic work in the literal meaning, we still certainly incite the powers of

intuition and nourish the imaginations – which are essential competences for any problem solution.

In this so-called decentering phase, the coachee will experience that his or her senses are stimulated and opened up, the feelings are acknowledged and taken into consideration and the mind is highly stimulated. The coachee achieves a distance to his or her problem that essentially widens the perspective and enriches his associations and ideas. In the decentering he or she is engaged in present shaping and forming, getting in and out of structuring and destructuring, chaos and order, moments of clearness and moments of being without any clue or orientation, moments of desperation perhaps and moments of confidence – a process that parallels and resembles what he experiences in the ordinary life.

The creative phase is followed by an analysis. First, the “work of art” is appreciated in its various aspects. Then the coach guides a profound reflection, in which the emphasis is put on the coachee’s capacities for problem solving. The competences and capacities that have come apparent in the artistic process are transferred to the initial concern that had been raised and defined by the coachee. Powerful adequate and most effective strategies will in this stage be found and be developed. The coaching or consulting always ends by formulating very concrete next steps and measures that are to be taken by the coachee in his subject of concern.

Creative coaching connects the creativity, imagination, intuition, feeling and thinking, and when it is integrated into human experience, you become an innovator.

So be creative and an innovator! We need it in these post-modern times – in business life as well as in our private lives!

Maja Dorothea Schellhorn, D - Freiburg

(Tel. +49/ 761/ 70 43 86 06, Email info@die-kunst-der-loesung.de)
and Bente Hoejer, DK - Koebenhavn

May 2006

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