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COMMENTARIES

More Hidden but More Useful Than We Realize

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We would like to extend McKenna and Davis' (2009) observations on two points: (a) the significant professional divide between psychotherapists and industrial–organizational (I–O) psychologists and (b) insights derived from teaching executive coaching that parallel findings from psychotherapy metaresearch.

The Significant Professional Divide Between Psychotherapists and I–O Psychologists

McKenna and Davis' focal article about coaching promotes a viewpoint considered an anathema by many I–O psychologists: that we have a lot to learn from psychotherapists. We've had our noses in the air too long, especially when it comes to one-on-one developmental interventions such as executive coaching. This is especially noteworthy considering that clinical and counseling psychologists invented precursors to executive coaching. Several notable clinical psychologists (Harry Levinson, Lester Tobias, and others) developed organizational interests early in their careers and became prolific in applying clinical thinking and approaches to organizational work. Executive coaching figured prominently in their professional activities and writing. These advances did not get much attention from the I–O community until the 1980s. Henry Morgan's (1983) useful chapter in *Occupational Clinical Psychology* highlights what were the new counseling and clinical activities within I–O psychology, clearly describing executive coaching (referring to it as developmental counseling). In that same book, Yeager's (1983) chapter, *A Model for Executive Performance Coaching,* offers many suggestions about that emerging practice and directly draws upon psychotherapy research and methods.

It is no surprise that APA Division 13, Consulting Psychology, became the forum in which clinical, counseling, and psychotherapy practices were applied to organizational challenges, especially executive coaching. Starting in 1996, Division 13's *Consulting Psychology Journal* has highlighted coaching in its published articles, recently resulting in a collection, *The Wisdom of Coaching* (Kilburg & Diedrich, 2007). Unfortunately, most I–O psychologists affiliated with Division 14 without partaking of Division 13's offerings. This served to segregate them from clinical and counseling psychologists who were applying their methods in organizational settings. It was therefore gratifying to see Division 14 focusing on coaching practice for last fall's Leading Edge Consortium, where McKenna and Davis' keynote address previewed their focal article. This long-standing separation between clinical and counseling psychologists practicing in organizations and I–O

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psychologists has served neither group of professionals.

A major factor contributing to this separation, especially for I–O psychologists educated in the 1970s–1980s, and possibly later, is that I–O psychology graduate programs generally did not include clinical or counseling coursework or training. As a graduate student in the late 1970s, the first author had no requirement or suggestion to take courses in clinical psychology, counseling, or psychotherapy. The second author's graduate training began with an MS in general psychology that did include a course in clinical psychology. The challenges and growth of the individual, even within organizational settings, were not available as a focus for academic study in I–O psychology.

By way of example, approximately 5 years after the first author finished his PhD, he had occasion to work one-on-one with managers using feedback tools and development planning templates. The dynamics of those relationships and the broader challenges of individual growth intrigued him, but he also felt unprepared for that work. After several years of wrestling with how to remedy that gap, as well as overcoming residual biases and lack of awareness about therapeutic training, the first author matriculated into a post-doctoral psychotherapist training program. That training, completed in 1989, yielded many insights about helping relationships and professional growth at a time when they could be directly applied to coaching.

Our experiences in hiring psychologists who will be expected to coach also support the essential usefulness of therapy training and experience. For those of us who have worked for consulting firms and been responsible for adding to the roster of available coaches, an organization-savvy clinical or counseling psychologist is more likely to engage quickly as a coach than an I–O psychologist trained in the traditional topics. Psychotherapy clients may be different in important ways from coaching clients (this requires more study), but prior training in the one-on-one helping relationship, instilling a respect for its power and its limitations, has tangible advantages in bringing coaches up to speed.

In summary, the lack of application by I–O psychologists of psychotherapy principles, research, and practices to executive coaching has a long history and is unlikely to change quickly. McKenna and Davis are challenging I–O psychologists to explore that sister field for new insights, but educational and professional boundaries remain. There are many suggestions that could be made to cross-fertilize graduate psychology: joint appointments in both I–O and clinical or counseling psychology, visiting lecturer appointments, clinical and counseling coursework and experience requirements for I–O students interested in individual change and growth, design of new multidisciplinary courses, and so forth. Similar ideas are evident in newly emerging MS and even PhD programs focusing on coaching and leadership. Other multifaceted solutions to these divisions are certainly possible, and executive coaching may be a stimulus toward bridging them.

Insights Derived From Teaching Executive Coaching That Parallel Findings From Psychotherapy Metaresearch

The psychotherapy metaresearch findings cited by McKenna and Davis established that the quality of the relationship between therapist and client is the second most important factor in psychotherapy usefulness, accounting for approximately 30% of outcome variance. The largest impact on therapy outcomes, estimated at 40%, comes from factors internal to the client or from aspects of the client's situational context. Two other factors, estimated to be approximately equal, round out the percentages: client hope/expectancy and specific theory/technique. The relative importance of these four factors is directly aligned with our experience of what students tell

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us they take away from our courses on coaching.

For the past 8 years, we have been teaching executive coaching in graduate-level courses, executive education certificates, and in organizational settings with internal coaching teams. We have amassed a large collection of final papers in which students describe their journeys to become coaches and their future approaches to coaching. The second author recently content analyzed these papers in preparation for a keynote presentation about learning to coach leaders, which was delivered at SIOP's Leading Edge Consortium in October 2008 (available as a monograph: Lee, 2008). A striking finding was that new coaches discover that their strongest leverage with clients comes from the coaching relationship rather than any particular method or technique. Lee has extracted four aspects of coaching relationships that students most frequently report they learn to apply: (a) seeing the client's reality, (b) listening without an agenda, (c) helping to evolve development goals, and (d) varying their own action orientations. These four coaching skills or competencies all support the helping relationship in the context of coaching. We might not have set out to teach our students these competencies, but after a process of challenging them to actually do coaching and asking them to reflect on the experience, they identified their essential learning as the key ingredients in building productive relationships, mirrored in psychotherapy outcome research.

A further finding came from analyzing the personal models of only the I–O psychologists in our advanced courses. We have had eight I–O psychologists as participants, working both internally and externally to organizations. Their final papers yield an insight specifically about I–O psychologists in helping relationships. For those of us trained to analyze data and be as objective as possible in interpreting it, we tend to overlook one of the most powerful tools in a helper's repertoire: the helper's use of his or her own subjective reactions and insights about the client. In our courses, we label this tool as *use of self* (Frisch, 2008), and for I–O psychologists, it opens up a whole new way of thinking about how to support individual change.

Use of self can only be applied in the context of a helping relationship. It requires both self-reflective insight and a relationship that invites its use. It cannot be *done to* or *delivered* independent of an established partnership. I–O psychologists may be able to masterfully interpret the results of a 360° feedback tool, but their coaching will be lacking until they can reflect on and sensitively report out their own reactions to the client's behavior while maintaining their connection to the client. Our I–O psychology-trained participants have told us repeatedly that this is both a freeing insight and a major challenge. Use of self in the context of a helping relationship was not included in their graduate studies nor was it called for in their internal and external consulting roles. It is only when they sought to add coaching to their offerings that they discovered they could bring more of themselves to this practice, a skill they look forward to expanding.

Another parallel that our coach training experience has with psychotherapy outcome research is the humility that comes from the fact that most of the variance is controlled by variables outside the helper's control. The usual descriptions of executive coaching highlight the coach's contributions to positive outcomes and major turnarounds for clients. It is rare to hear about coaching that does not yield desired results. This tends to inflate expectations and inject unreality into a new coach's experience with a complex and conflicted client. Not to worry; for those of us who have significant flight time as coaches, surprises and setbacks are part of the experience. During our training of coaches, we emphasize the many variables that can undermine or compromise coaching results. McKenna and Davis mention several of them and suggest ways coaches may be able to capitalize on or avoid problematic intra client and client-context factors.

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This idea is both practical and psychologically productive for coaches, and we have developed it into a list of 10 risk factors or *caveats*: five characteristics of the client and five characteristics of his or her organizational context that, if active, may undermine coaching (Frisch, 2005a, 2005b). As McKenna and Davis point out and as psychotherapists know, a coach should ''never believe it is all about you'' (p. 12).

Executive coaching, just as psychotherapy, is full of paradoxes and fine distinctions. We are there to help, but clients are not always ready to use our help. We are optimists about human potential but we also need to understand obstacles to success. We need to nurture a positive and supportive relationship with clients without making it an end in itself. We work toward positive change in clients even when the gestation period for such change is beyond our time horizon. Given these paradoxes, coaches and therapists must make moment-to-moment choices. The McKenna and Davis article aligns with our experience in what should be in the foreground of those choices: (a) Is the case viable? (b) How do I build a working alliance and a trustworthy relationship with a client in need? (c) How do I use myself in that alliance so that *both* the relationship and the client's growth are fostered?

The challenge for coaches in answering these questions is to draw upon the widest possible sources of inspiration and guidance. The research base and meta findings coming from the psychotherapy literature are obvious and rich sources, of which McKenna and Davis have highlighted broad implications. Psychotherapists, in general, do a much better job of nurturing and leveraging the therapeutic relationship than I–O psychology-trained coaches do, and there is much more we can learn from that literature, such as understanding and using transference and countertransference, being reflective in the moment, assessing *readiness* issues and client motivation, and dealing with challenging and difficult client personalities. I–O psychology is only at the beginning of transferring ideas and practices from therapy to coaching.

On the other hand, there are skills and abilities that are core to I–O psychology and essential to coaching. Generally speaking, we readily understand organizational contexts and can support our clients in leveraging those contexts. We are trained to assess clients' strengths and development areas with clarity and objectivity. We are schooled in the topics of management, leadership, teamwork, and other core organizational disciplines that our clients often need help in mastering. Finally, we bring a behavioral rigor to both plans and outcomes going beyond self-insight toward alignment with the organization's focus on the bottom-line. We bring these skills and others to the science and art of executive coaching, but McKenna and Davis' findings and the authors' own experiences strongly suggest there are other important skills most I–O psychologists are underutilizing.

To continue this dialogue and further investigate the case for applying lessons from psychotherapy outcomes into executive coaching, two research questions occur to us as needing exploration: (a) How does the population of typical coaching clients compare with the population of typical psychotherapy clients on characteristics important for individual change? In other words, does the comparability of these populations support the generalization of research findings? (b) What are best practice guidelines for teaching I–O psychologists to deliver one-on-one interventions, including both academic and practice methodologies? For example, our experience in training coaches attests to the value of case supervision, just as in therapist training, but how much supervision and for how long really makes the difference in coaching? Although I–O psychologists can benefit now by attending to the findings highlighted by McKenna and Davis and supported by our experience, research on these questions and others would be useful to refine and specify the transferability of the lessons from psychotherapy meta-analyses to executive coaching.

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