

**Coaching Across Divides to Create
Alliances for Shared Objectives - An
Integral Coaching Model**

Research

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Summary

Research Project Title:

Coaching Across Divides to Create Alliances For Shared Objectives – an Integral coaching model

Project objectives

1. To coach *managerial leaders* (Jaques and Clement 1994:3-33) in teams and organisations to develop alliances across divides towards shared objectives.
2. To frame an Integral multi-dimensional metamodel and develop an Integral coaching process. (See Section 2.3.4 for the definition and use of the term “Integral”.)
3. To test a core hypothesis on a critical coaching focus in working with clients to build alliances across divides.

Project research sample and approach used

The project research site is a financial services company of 80 employees in four sections, each headed by a senior manager, who report to the managing director.

The project took place in three phases of coaching over a period of 20 months. Case study material has been selected from nine clients who were coached over this period, at senior and middle management level. In keeping with an Integral approach, the process included both individual coaching at fortnightly intervals and group facilitation at appropriate points.

The company objective for coaching has been to assist in the need to move from low trust to high trust, from poor overall performance to performance excellence.

A core hypothesis in developing and testing this Integral coaching approach is that team performance is affected by negative perceptions of ‘otherness’ that lie unnamed beneath the surface, often buried in deeply wounded spaces beneath zero-tolerance policies. Factors that influence the sense of corporate well-being include the validity or illegitimacy of individual perceptions, such validity or illegitimacy being reinforced by

the dominant organisational culture. I identify the emergence of individual perceptions as ‘discursive themes’, and attribute the presence of each of these themes to competing discourses currently broadly present in the wider world of South Africa.

The interpretation of discursive themes in this work is informed principally (but not exclusively) by the prolific published work of Melissa Steyn; I am particularly indebted to two sources – her Master’s thesis, now an award-winning book, and her (as-yet unpublished) doctoral thesis and its methodology in tracing ideologically-charged discourse strategies in the current South Africa. The research methodology that appears to be most appropriate in tracing discursive themes and competing discourses in the clients who constitute the body of the research undertaken in this dissertation is case study research methodology. Beyond the South African context, the particular experiences that this research taps in respect of competing discursive terrains may have value in a broader debate on the importance of recognising discursive terrains in the interests of positive inclusive outcomes.

The Integral coaching approach described herein is intended to provide a coherent model to help managerial leaders develop the skills to recognise the many possible circumstances that can affect optimum performance (about which there is much existing literature – like emotional intelligence, appropriate performance management structures and practices), and particularly to be able to recognise limiting assumptions of ‘otherness’ where these might exist. By so doing, the coaching aims to help managerial leaders appreciate the impact of negative or limiting assumptions, which may well be conflated with conventional, well-documented leadership and performance management concerns. The intended outcome of this Integral coaching process is to help managerial leaders to work consciously with the layers and inter-locking patterns of Integral awareness, in building positive alliances in their teams and relationships in the interests of successful shared outcomes.

Conclusions

As coaching method, the Integral coaching approach proved effective in navigating multi-dimensional complexity, and received positive feedback on its contribution to building alliances at individual, team and organisational levels. The Integral Model proved highly efficient at mapping congruence and ‘disconnects’ at individual, team and organisational level – particularly the performance impact of congruence between espoused values and values in use.

The research methodology - single case study approach as described by Robert K Yin – is used to explore the research questions and the hypothesis that, in the context of South Africa at the time of this research, discursive themes and competing discourses will be

evident and identifying these will be relevant to coaching to create alliances across differences to meet common objectives.

While I am not suggesting that my work provides clear evidence of this, it suggests potential for linkage and further research in developing coaching practice to include interpreting discursive terrains as a valuable analytical tool for surfacing subliminal tensions, as distinct from the many existing ways of working with the standard leadership and performance management issues that affect team work.

The limitations of this coaching framework and model are that the theoretical underpinning is complex and layered, requiring that the coach be competent at managing this complexity, both theoretically and practically. Unless the coach is committed to absorbing and feeling at ease with the elements of the Integral approach, the danger is reductionism to a systems approach. This impacts on the viability of this model for training in-house coaches.

Note 1: Terminology with reference to South Africans

- White – South Africans deemed ‘white’ in apartheid South Africa.
- Black – all those deemed ‘non-white’ in apartheid South Africa, including African, Asian (Indian and Chinese), Coloured.

This project uses the word ‘black’ to refer to all groups racially discriminated against under apartheid.