

Transforming leaders for sustainability through coaching

Sustainability initiatives in leading organisations are increasingly focusing on transformational and systemic change, rather than incremental improvements. It is this link between transformation as it occurs through individuals and their leadership that highlights coaching's critical role in driving innovation and integration of sustainability within organisations. Our research highlighted the link between 'inner' (personal development, organisational values and culture development) and 'outer' (organisational, business, market, sustainable) development. We explored the leverage points for integrating sustainability that exist in the 'interior' of individual's mindsets and values.

We inquired into how coaching as an inter-subjective process can be a powerful and effective way to accelerate leadership development and adoption of new values and culture. Here we are sharing some of our findings as they relate to leaders wanting to take it to the next level.

For individuals in key positions (e.g. CEO) their capacity to navigate the complexity of sustainability is a critical aspect of the organisation's potential to develop. Coaching methods, including dialogue, inquiry, 360 feedback, use of recordings (video, audio) and other objective perspectives of measures of real-world performance are exactly the methods that can facilitate questioning of assumptions and increased self-awareness.

Developing an increased awareness of your own and other's assumptions and values, and taking responsibility for engaging in a way that resonates with them is something that the coaching process often focuses on. The greater awareness a leader has, the more choices and options are available in terms of strategies and tactics to maximise the opportunities for innovation and competitive advantage through integrating sustainability.

We reviewed developmental models and conducted interviews that highlighted the need for "... leadership that is more expansive, more inclusive, and more complex. The next-level leader's strategy takes more perspectives into account; therefore, it is inherently more intelligent, more potent, and better suited to solve the challenges of complex marketplaces."¹ In addition, next level leaders sense of identity, their values and purpose become more aligned with sustainability: "What integral coaches know is that attuning the close-in relationships within the self and between the self and others are the primary node from which one scales outward to the broadest integral connections, including stewardship for nature. Put another way, naked self-interest matures beautifully and powerfully into enlightened self-interest when one awakens to the fullness of circles we live and work within."²

One of the primary functions of a coach is to support alignment and inquire into dissonance they see between the coachee's values, aspirations and behaviour (e.g. espoused values that are different from values in action). There are other means by which individuals can facilitate this sort of reflection themselves (e.g. meditation, setting and reviewing of goals), but coaching is one of the most powerful and relevant in an organisational context because it is easy for someone else to take a fresh perspective on your own behaviours than it is on your own.

Sustainability Inside-Out

Our research highlighted over a dozen distinct approaches to coaching, and identified which are appropriate for different contexts and purposes. Some forms of coaching that are relevant and recommended to support transformational leadership development include one-on-one executive coaching by external coaches, peer-to-peer coaching within organisations, inter-organisational support groups for sustainability champions, and integration of coaching and sustainability into performance management.

Creating sustainable organisations requires significant change, and therefore leaders that are operating at a level beyond that at which we created the problems. We found significant evidence, and abundant means by which coaching can be the leading means of accelerating leadership development, organisational evolution, and rapid moves towards sustainability.

¹ Stagen, R. and Thomas, B. (2006), '*Next-Level Leadership*' [Online]. Available: <http://www.stagen.com/perspectives/next-level/> [2008, 16.06.08].

² Raines, L.(2007) "Integral Leadership Coaching: A Holistic Meta-Framework and Process" in *Integral Leadership Review*, Volume VII, No. 2 March 2007. [Online] Available: <http://www.integralleadershipreview.com> [2008, 19.08.08].