Values-based coaching and the value of coaching - *Building Synergy in a Complex World*

- . . . those values upon which our success depends honesty and hard work, courage

- inaugural address By President Barack Hussein Obama, January 21, 2009

The to be more affirmative, more direct and more of a risk-taker. During the triad meeting between my coaching client, the corporate sponsor and myself, the subdued nature of my client was overwhelming. Immediately our third out of ten coaching sessions contracted by the U.S.-based headquarters of a global company.

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there was to know about developing key leadership competencies which include influencing, inspiring and empowering others. Little had he realized what he would encounter when integrating a virtual team found not only across different time zones, but across cultural and linguistic divides.

**What are values?**

Politicians exalt them, companies engrave them, parents transmit them, and our environment beliefs, assumptions, attitudes, and behaviors? And above all, how can we develop synergy by understanding the values that drive our behaviors?

Max Weber in argued that values drive the wealth of nations. He states that some values are associated with economic development and others are not. David McClelland, the personality psychologist who popularized the concept of need for achievement, agrees with Weber. Experts agree that values serve as our internal drive as motivators for certain behaviors. In , by Robert Hogan, the importance of values to decision making is taken one step further. He defines values, motives, and interests as the same concepts, differing only in terms of specificity - e.g., one might value family ties, be motivate , and be interested in outdoor sports. All these experts would concur, however, that values are used to make decisions and choose between alternative behaviors and actions.

Personal values are influenced by gender, social class, religion, rituals, and traditions. National values are influenced by politics, regionalism, and local customs. Research has shown that
corporate culture-shaping values are influenced by the national culture of where the company is headquartered. More and more companies going through the globalization process are seeking to adopt core values that they perceive to be universal and generic, but often betray an Anglo-Saxon bias, expecting the foreign entities to abide by them. Needless to say, confusion, tension, and business disruptions are often the result.

**Universal Values and Cultural Values**

Studies show that there seem to exist universal values, and then there are specific values that are born of cultural environments.

**Respect, Recognition, Reward, and Relationships.** Every human being seeks out and values these concepts, under different names. Then, over the years, our caretakers, and our educational, social, and professional environments, shape and mold these universal values into more specific beliefs (right and wrong attitudes) — our cultural values. These cultural values lead us to assumptions and teach us the acceptable behaviors that are deemed to demonstrate the integrity or congruence of our universal values.

**Reflection Exercise**

From the following list, choose 3–5 values which you consider a personal priority and eliminate 2–3 values which are not a priority. Then read the following dialog and determine which values are in play.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tradition</th>
<th>Innovation</th>
<th>Recognition</th>
<th>Patience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Passion</td>
<td>Generosity</td>
<td>Accountability</td>
<td>Loyalty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiative</td>
<td>Cooperation</td>
<td>Competition</td>
<td>Privacy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Openness/directness</td>
<td>Efficiency</td>
<td>Material Possessions</td>
<td>Consensus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun &amp; Enjoyment</td>
<td>Honesty</td>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>Family ties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formality</td>
<td>Informality</td>
<td>Reputation</td>
<td>Power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modesty</td>
<td>Security</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Risk-taking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Back to my first meeting with the U.S.-based sponsors of my European coaching contracts where I heard them say:

risks, make those hard decisions. They are just not committed to taking the initiatives needed those muscles? The company you acquired has been run as a tip top ship with a strong vertical hierarchy, based on ascribed status (who knows who, not who does what), long term relationships,
Where is the probable disconnect between HQ and those working on the other side of the Atlantic? How might a shift in attitude enable this person to see the complexity in the situation? With a systemic approach, what might a coach focus on when listening to this discourse?

Back to Emmanuel, and his conflict of values. During that third coaching session, Emmanuel did the above exercise with cue cards, choosing 4 values which were important to him, and eliminating two. His choice of relationships, modesty, cooperation and reputation enabled us to shed a different light on how he was feeling, especially when he conjectured that his stakeholders would most likely have chosen values similar to what they identified in their responses on the 360° feedback: initiative, openness/directness, and risk-taking. Emmanuel then defined the behaviors he would associate with the values he had chosen and compared them to his

certainly as to how he was planning to put the feedback into action.

The Science Behind Values

We are creatures of comfort and habit. To be more specific, our brains seek out stability and familiar situations to provide this. And, science is proving it through the emerging field of neuroscience, demonstrating the hard-wiring (neural pathways) with diagnostic tools like the MRI.

During our formative years, our parents, caretakers, school teachers, heroes and, later on, our corporate mentors, influence our criteria for distinguishing between the right way to do things versus the wrong way. Over time, through proverbs, lessons learned by our elders, and sound advice, our brains become hard wired and learn to react a certain way when faced with certain situations. The feeling of “that’s just how it’s done around here” describes that gut reaction—the heartfelt, hard-wired sense of right from wrong. But can one culture be right and another wrong? I think the Reflection Exercise above answers this question with a resounding “No.”

Based on western values of achievement and efficiency, we sense that the hierarchal managerial approach of command and control is not rewarding. We promote a leadership style based on empowerment and ownership with employees being driven from within. As we say in the Anglo Saxon world, they need to develop accountability. This presents a problem, however, because in many cultures, there aren’t words for these concepts such as individual achievement, or they take a back seat to more relationship and status-driven values. Influencing and inspiring others across cultural and linguistic barriers requires us to be able to step out of our own cultural frameworks, re-evaluate our expectations, and reframe our thought processes in order to not only see, but feel, our colleagues’ worldviews from their (rightfully owned) perspectives.

As coaches, we also need to be able to dig deep into our mindsets, to analyze where our cultural without expectations. Easier said than done.

Back in the United Sta
consensus-based reactivity (perhaps based on his/ her values of security, tradition, formality, and reputation).

We have learned cognitively that we must not be judgmental. Still, we do not always understand, especially in a crisis, what makes us revert back to experiencing such strong feelings of right vs. wrong. The good news is that this reaction is physiologically normal. Recent research in the field of neuroscience has proven that our cohesion; the physiological meaning of resonance. They become hard-wired through our life experiences and develop a sense of expectation as a means of survival. When what we encounter is not how it is done, another word for culture could very well be expectations.

Getting Past the Hard-wiring

"The heart is the chief feature of a functioning mind."
- Frank Lloyd Wright

My fourth session with Emmanuel found him once again stretching his comfort zone, but not in that he had been tracking specific actions he had taken and would even be able to include these new behaviors in his upcoming IDP (Individual Development Plan, an annual behavioral review).

s and issues arising from contextual situations, we now needed to look at how they expressed in linguistic divides.

ulture that tends to value rapport, relationships, and modesty, with protocol and formality. Through our coaching sessions, Emmanuel discovered a deeper meaning to what being an authentic leader is all about. He learned to be affirmative enough to align with his corporate bosses, while preserving a relationship climate in his team. He is now a calculated risk-taker by understanding the importance of the lessons learned process. His communication style is direct, while also integrating the need for formality and protocol. By behaviors, the successful project launch and an improved bottom-line proved he could create coherence out of apparent conflict. Emmanuel learned that coaching is a function of leadership.

On the Road to Synergy, Start in the Valley of Values

In our role as coaches in organizations, we are challenged to help our clients reach out to their colleagues from around the world in a quest for complementarities and synergy. The goal is to go beyond the cultural differences that initially seem to jump out at us obvious differences or traditional behaviors that strike us as insurmountable. We can all learn how to hand over a business card with two can we get to understand and admire the respect that comes with the meaning of earned, culturally-enforced values of formality and hierarchy? By at least questioning our hard-wired expectations, and climbing out of our comfort zones, we enable ourselves and our coaching clients to grow into truly global citizens of the world, equipped with both cultural and emotional intelligence, which together lead to Cultural Synergistic Intelligence.