



***Organizing Reflexivity: The Case of Coaching in Management  
Education Workshop  
11 & 12 September 2019  
at University of St. Gallen, Switzerland.***

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***Final Paper (as on 14 June 19)***

**The Basic Premise**

This initiative in “Leadership” coaching was designed to impact practice, and has been attempted at Indian Institute of Management Udaipur (IIMU) in India from 2013, for students in the 5th Semester, spread over 33 class-hours of 90-minute duration spread over four months, plus three / four hours per student in 01-on-01 sessions. Founded in 2011, IIMU is AACSB-accredited and ranks 5th. amongst top b-schools in India.

The idea is to create young women and men in India who are aware of their own influences and assumptions, and to develop their ability to connect the internal psycho-dynamic worlds with societal and global processes that influence their transferences and counter-transferences for decision-making.

India has been labeled a *jugaroo* nation by partisan academics in the West, and we are at best a reliable vendor for application of products owned by Western conglomerates. We have very little to show by way of OEM. The Global Innovation Index 2018 report has ranked India 57<sup>th</sup> out of 126 countries. Added to the above, we have a huge “demographic dividend” playing catch-up with the West. If education is to become the vehicle of transformation, then we need leaders who are in touch with their inner worlds and that of others, so that they can bring about organizational transformation, through practice of a paradigm of leadership behaviors built on curriculum and pedagogy that is not only “Western”.

**The Dual Concepts**

The main objective of the program is to provide exposure and training about “leadership” paradigms and practices, through team-assignments implemented in real-time. Every member of the participating Class explores her / his “personality”

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characteristics that impact her / his “leadership” behaviors. Inputs are designed to be intense and interactive, and unfold over four (4) distinct segments.

This paradigm shift in **Leadership Coaching** draws on practices of select Indian business leaders, while also drawing from the “lived” experiences of leaders at a few Fortune 500 companies. The pedagogical shift in the education and training of b-school students are applications from psychosocial and psychodynamic theories as they apply to practices in “leadership” and “organization” development. Insead’s Manfred Kets de Vries describes this vividly by closing the schism between a psychotherapist and an executive coach:

“It’s fair, perhaps, to say that psychotherapists have more intensive training in personality dynamics, while executive coaches focus more on the general work environment in which executives operate. But it’s my conviction that therapists can benefit from knowing more about the organizational world, and coaches without training in psychology would do well to acquire its basics. In my own work, I often move from past to present and from conscious to unconscious material. Both as a therapist and as a coach, I’ve had some assignments that were short and highly focused and others that lasted for years.” (HBR April 2014)

**Reflections on the Self** This inaugural part is designed to bring **reflective** focus on personal “leadership” challenges. The focus of innovation in this pedagogy is the “person” as experienced by her / him in three domains: personal motivation, personal feelings / attitudes, and personal attributes (Cropley & Cropley 2015). This knowledge about the self, collated with the help of a few instrumented interventions and individual psychosocial analysis, facilitates the crafting of a personal SWOT and an “Action Plan”.

Post this initial “Action Plan” crafted by each individual, begins a unique feature of the program ie. confidential 01-on-01 “psycho-therapy” sessions between the participant and the Leadership Coach, building up to the Group Relations Conference and thereafter. These sessions extend to about four / five hours per person, and facilitates the identification of “toxic” material that has been lying “below the surface” in each person, and needs to be resolved so that experimentation and exploration of new, proactive behaviors can begin. The Class becomes familiar with the phrase “below the surface”, as opposed to use of the psychoanalytic phrase “the unconscious” which does raise eyebrows at b-schools and industry in India.

**Learning from a Leader** It is recognized globally that to bring about transformation in organizations, exercise of leadership with sustained efforts is necessary. In this context, the second part of the program is dedicated towards

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understanding leaders in India who have influenced and acted to bring about transformation in organizations. Engagement with real-life **Leaders** helps conceptualize the challenges of “leadership” behaviors such as risk-taking, thinking out-of-the-box, innovating, listening & inspiring, influencing other team-members, meeting tight time-schedules as well as factors that are relevant in the context of India.. These intimate dialogues help build key takeaways for personal reflection. The small team of students embark on the study of the individual leader assigned, and prepare first, a “psycho-social history” from available data – both in the public domain as well as thru 360 feedback and ESat processes. They then design two questionnaires, of increasing intensity, with the objective of unravelling deeper “truths” faced by the leader. The first questionnaire is based on a set of Life Qs, and the second one draws on research about Indian business leaders that highlight the following specific differences with Western leaders:

1. Leadership is not about cleverness at strategy or even because of the efforts of a top team.
2. No mention of skill in financial markets, mergers and acquisitions, or deal-making talents that Western CEOs often claim underpin their companies’ performance.
3. Almost without exception, the leaders said their source of competitive advantage lay deep inside their companies, in their people.
4. Far more than their Western counterparts, the leaders and their organizations emphasized a long-term, internally focused view.
5. They spoke about creating a sense of social mission that is served when the business succeeds. Shareholder value is # 4, compared to # 1 for Western leaders.
6. They highlighted the need for aggressive investments in employee development, despite tight labor markets and widespread job-hopping. And they strive for a high level of employee engagement and openness.

**Leaders of the most successful Indian companies engage with the country, culture, and employees, and this is an important factor in their performance.**

Through this process the students begin to understand how the Indian business leader performs both charismatic and instrumental roles, and unravel the mechanisms by which leadership exerts influence in organizations.

### **The Groups Relations Conference**

Group Relations Conferences, in the Tavistock tradition, offer a unique arena for live investigation of the processes that occur in organizational life, and the opportunity for examination in the “here and now” of what can *promote and what can obstruct proactive action, change and*

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*development.* The purpose of this part is to offer a platform to each student to test and practice in real-time new “behaviors” based on the “Action Plan” and the 01-on-01 “therapy” sessions, and develop insights and perspectives about “the unconscious” aspects of leadership and organization, and its impact on the performance of groups and organizations. The structure of this part is activated in a 04-day residential setting. The Class is facilitated to explore and test hypotheses about what actually happens within and between groups, in multiple exercises bounded by the time, the task, and the territory in which work takes place. This sensitizes the participant to experience for oneself the powerful and conflicting human desires between being part of a group and wanting to fit in, and the need to demonstrate one’s uniqueness and individuality. A key thrust of the GRC is to develop awareness of the “toxicity” within oneself that generates **reactivity** at its interface within the group, and the need to resolve and release **proactive** action required to address the challenge faced by the group.

Following the GRC, a mid-program interface is held between each team and the leader assigned, giving the team an opportunity to probe further and understand deeper aspects of **leadership in-practice**, and help integrate the learning.

### **Theoretical Underpinning of ALC**

According to Kolb's experiential learning model (Kolb, 1971), learning occurs through a four-phase cycle that includes:

1. experiencing (concrete experience),
2. reflecting (reflective observation),
3. conceptualising (abstract conceptualisation),
- and
4. applying (active experimentation).

The model suggests that learning is incomplete or less effective without all four phases.

ALC is designed on FOUR legs of Kolb’s conceptual stool, not necessarily in the above-mentioned order:

1. Reflections on the SELF through Personal History writing and instrumented feedback (the Psycho-Social) so as to identify a personal SWOT (Reflexivity # 1),
2. Learnings from Leaders, in real-time (Reflexivity # 2),
3. Classroom discussion of Psychodynamic Theory, using case-analysis and film-excerpts (Reflexivity # 3), and finally
4. 01-on-01s to identify TOXICITY in self, followed by immersion in a Group Relations Conference, the “incubator” to test new LEADERSHIP behaviors (Reflexivity # 4).



**Stitching together** As the course comes to a close each student is required to pull together all the learning from the various inputs, including the takeaways from the interface with leaders, so as to build and present a doable personal “Action Plan” for the next two (2) years. This plan includes their understanding of material that lies “below the surface” in organizations.

A final presentation to the “leader” by each team is mandatory, highlighting a SWOT as well as recommending an Action Plan for the leader. This has become a key take-away for the leaders, all of whom commit their valuable time to this exercise, absolutely free.

The following excerpts from alumni of the course addresses the four recurring themes essential to management learning of reflexivity as a means to:

- 1) understand the (unconscious) dynamics underlying events and problems,
- 2) make sense of ambiguous personal experiences,
- 3) better relate to others by integrating multiple, contextualised perspectives, and to some extent
- 4) develop and maintain ethical and responsive management.

There is evidence that the course has been of great benefit to individuals. To quote:

*“ALC helped me a lot to change my outlook and behavioural aspects. I understood that there is a huge difference between a Manager and a Leader. Leadership is a skill which you have to develop and practice in day to day life. Moreover, somehow I feel it also gave me the strength to manage my emotions and provided mental peace. I still remember the lectures where we were nudged to figure out the unknown territories and out of box ideas, and right now in my corporate life I am finding the huge necessity for everyone whether it’s an employee or the organization, to work on the same lines. On personal front, the course has really helped me to set priorities in life. Overall course structure helped create a preface for corporate life as a leader and social life as a peaceful soul.” - Prakhar (2013).*

*“In an MBA curriculum, where there are many courses to help one understand the business, understanding oneself personally during that tenure is inevitably critical. During MBA or even before that, we were so running to meet deadlines, grasp concepts and acquire all kinds of “necessary” skills to be better managers, that we forget to spend time on ourselves, which is of utmost importance. It is a prerequisite that a manager needs to know himself/herself exhaustively. This course helped me in exploring myself as an individual. Post MBA, we are overwhelmed with major decision-making both professionally and personally. ALC not only helped me in my thought process by showing the broader picture and not missing the long term scenario while taking decisions, but it also enabled me to plan my career considering*



*all the different angles in the process. It's an art to take everyone along to reach to a conclusion and I started learning that art with ALC. The art has helped me with the skill of conflict management both at my workplace and home. A leader needs to be balanced as a person, and I am thankful to ALC for instilling this important ingredient in me." - Nupur (2017).*

Thu, Dec 6, 2018 at 5:09 PM

To: Manab Bose <manab.bose@iimu.ac.in>, anna sperling <anna.sperling.2018@iimu.ac.in>

*Dear Professor Bose, please find my presentation on the PLJ in the attachment to this email and let me know if any other document needs to be submitted! Regarding my experience in the course, I would like to say that it was surprising journey for me in the sense that I was not expecting to discover so much about myself in such a short time. During my studies and work life I was constantly encouraged to look outside and evaluate everything around me but myself: customers, competition, revenues, macroeconomic situation etc. And it seems that there was neither place nor time for looking inside and asking such simple yet important questions as „Who am I?“, „Why do I act as I act?“ and “What are my fears of being a leader?“. During the workshop I finally had time and courage to ask these questions and think about possible answers. It was not an easy path to walk: I was constantly challenged by you, your colleagues and the whole members' group, and from time to time I felt exhausted. Despite (and maybe because of) that, I gained a lot of new thoughts and inspirations in our GRC sessions, 1-on-1s and interview with my assigned leader at the beginning of the course and would definitely recommend it to the future students!*

*I will be happy if we could stay in touch. This is my German email, please feel free to drop me a line if you come to Germany or need any assistance from my side in any matter. Again, I would like to thank you for this course, your patience and support. I am very happy that I took this course and will also inform my university about this new experience. Who knows, maybe it could benefit future students in Germany as well!*

**In Conclusion** There are several examples of a new leadership paradigm emerging out of this *reflexive* intervention in a b-school curriculum.

Management education, especially “leadership” education in b-schools, can first bring about a paradigm shift in the intellectual development of future executives by making them aware of the reality of “below the surface” processes that exist in all collective human endeavor, such as an organization, and as it exists in an individual. They can then get training in “reflective” courses such as this to learn the skill of decoding the feedback from employees and customers so as to decipher the “toxic” elements that accumulate, and need to be addressed by leaders. Needless to add, case-discussions and film-reviews under a psychodynamic lense help in such education and training.

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The Class signs up for this course after familiarity with the concepts of “leadership”. A list of textbooks and articles are given as pre-program preparation, indicative of the “advanced” and “psychodynamic” nature of the program. It is important for students to reference-read and view films that help bridge the gap between a cognitive appreciation of “leadership” concepts and the “real” but “toxic” impact of accumulated feelings that impact decision-making, both at the level of “self” as well as in its interface with the “organization”.

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## The Author

**Manab Bose** has been Adjunct Professor at IIM Udaipur, since 2013. Trained in psychoanalytic psychotherapy in India, he is also a practicing therapist at a psychotherapy center in Bangalore, India. He was with industry for 20+ years, the last 2+ years in the Group Executive Office of Tata in Bombay House, reporting to the then Chairman. Prior to this, he was on the top-management team of GE India and Colgate Palmolive India, thru the 80s and 90s. Starting work-life in academia as an English teacher, he taught at Delhi, Nainital, Kolkata and Bhutan. His last assignment in academia was with National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad as Academic Administrator.

Manab pioneered and is Director of The India Conference, now in its 3<sup>rd</sup>. version, a 10-day Group Relations Conference which is informed by the traditions of the Leicester Conference. He has been Staff at several GRCs in India and overseas since 2005, after attending the Leicester Conference in 2003 and 2004. He has published clinical and research papers, and presented his work both nationally and internationally.

