

Coaching for Renewal

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Post-modern-leadership, well adapted to today's complex shifting organisations, demands that leaders bring themselves to work with skill to foster organisational renewal. To do so leaders must practice renewal themselves, and the work of the coach becomes to foster renewal and practices of personal renewal in their clients. What is post-modern leadership, and what does it demand of the leader? What is renewal, and how can a coach work to foster it as a practice? And what are the implications for coaches themselves? This article explores the concepts and shows how an appreciative approach underpins coaching for renewal.

The world that our clients lead in is complex and often ambiguous. To be successful they must foster success in intricate organisations, with competing values systems and narratives and alliances with multiple stakeholders. We, and others, describe this characteristic state of complexity and ambiguity as “post-modern”.

As our understanding of organisations in this post-modern world has shifted so has the leadership narrative. From expecting leaders to “know” or “find out” the right way to direct an understandable and “engineerable” organisation, we have moved to exploring a leader’s role in shaping meaning for a fluid, organic organisation. From investigation of the traits that good leaders show, the competences they need and the behaviours they should adopt we have developed a more integral consideration of how leaders “are” – how they successfully bring their whole and unique selves to others to create insight, inspiration, vision and ultimately change.

This places a greater demand on the leader’s development. No longer is it enough to grow expertise, knowledge, skills and behaviours. Now we are demanding that they constantly review and revise how they “are” as well as what they do. We call this process of growing how you “are” *renewal*. In this article I hope to share what we at Jericho Partners have learnt from our experience of working to foster renewal in our clients and how we believe the philosophy and approaches of Appreciative Inquiry inform and support coaching for renewal.

Developing how you “are”

There are many models and vocabularies of growth and development. One that we find particularly useful for talking about renewal is Spiral Dynamics.¹ Spiral Dynamics assumes that both individuals and organisations develop their narratives of the world and their mind-sets over time in response to changing conditions. An individual or system is “healthy” when it is capable of growing as the conditions it faces change, and “well adapted” when its mind-sets and narratives meet the challenges it faces.

In the Spiral Dynamics model there are stages of development, broken into two “tiers”. A leader showing a first tier mind-set is driven by his individual need to be “right”, or to be the “best”, or to belong. By contrast leaders showing mind-sets from the second tier are free from those individual needs but driven by their impact in the system, by a need to foster healthy systems and effective solutions for their organisations,ⁱⁱ to be of service to the wider community or address issues of global concern. The inset below describes leaders with mind-sets from the two developmental levels that are defined as “second tier” by Beck and Cowan.ⁱⁱⁱ

Post-modern organisations need leaders who are healthy and well adapted to post-modern conditions of complexity and ambiguity and who can foster the health and adaptation of the organisation to post-modern conditions. Post-modern organisations need leaders who are capable of renewal, and at least some leaders who have second-tier mind-sets.^{iv}

Developmental Phase	Characteristics	Leadership Assumptions
YELLOW driven by creating meaning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concerned with flexible, effective adaptation to change Openly shares information Drives for effective use of people and resources Seriously enforces ethical codes Seeks to create peer-mentor networks to challenge and enrich their world-view 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People are diverse, and work best when they are in a role that stimulates them, where they have fun Managing resources well allows us to do more People are motivated by learning – information should be freely available to those that need it Conflict is inevitable, can be constructive and creative Change is constant, all organisations are transitory
TURQUOISE driven by service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates concern for and impact on global issues, and a capability to read and seize historically important moments Shows a desire to contribute to the well-being of humanity, of the world and increasing interest in the spiritual aspects of life and work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a meaning, a greater truth that we are part of and exists within Emotion and information enhance the understanding each of the other

Table: Post-modern developmental stages from Spiral Dynamics

We have found that Spiral Dynamics informs our coaching in a number of ways. It helps us to frame questions that investigate where a leader currently is, where their assumptions and drives are coming from, and whether they are in the process of consolidating within a particular level or experiencing transition between levels.^v Coaching is particularly powerful

for clients experiencing transition, when they are rejecting previous assumptions and finding new ways of being. We have also found that the client's coaching need, and therefore the coaching that is most effective with a client, is shaped by their developmental stage, skills or performance coaching being most appropriate for earlier stages, developmental and transformational coaching becoming more appropriate in the later first-tier and second-tier stages.

Developing through renewal

What is actually happening in renewal? The model in the diagram below illustrates our narrative of "renewal". Like any model this oversimplifies and makes it seem like a linear progression whereas it is a far richer, more complex process.

For renewal there must be insight – clarity about the world, and my or our impact in it. To be responsive to change we must see "what is" and "what is emerging". To respond to change we must understand how we contribute to what is and be able to identify how that might be different.

Insight leads to awareness, but that in itself is not enough to create change. In order for there to be change there must be "readiness" – an ability to identify and free ourselves from the limiting assumptions, habits of mind or practice which hold us in our old patterns of "being". Only then can we truly commit to making change and begin to develop an "authentic vision" of what that new way of being will bring.

This "authentic vision" is compelling, but rooted – a new way of being that we are ready and able to move to. The motivation that gives that vision energises us to take action to make change. As we complete the change we are in a new place, we "are" different; we understand the world differently. This is an important moment for rest and reflection, to allow the satisfaction which change creates to be enjoyed even as we begin to develop insight into the world anew.

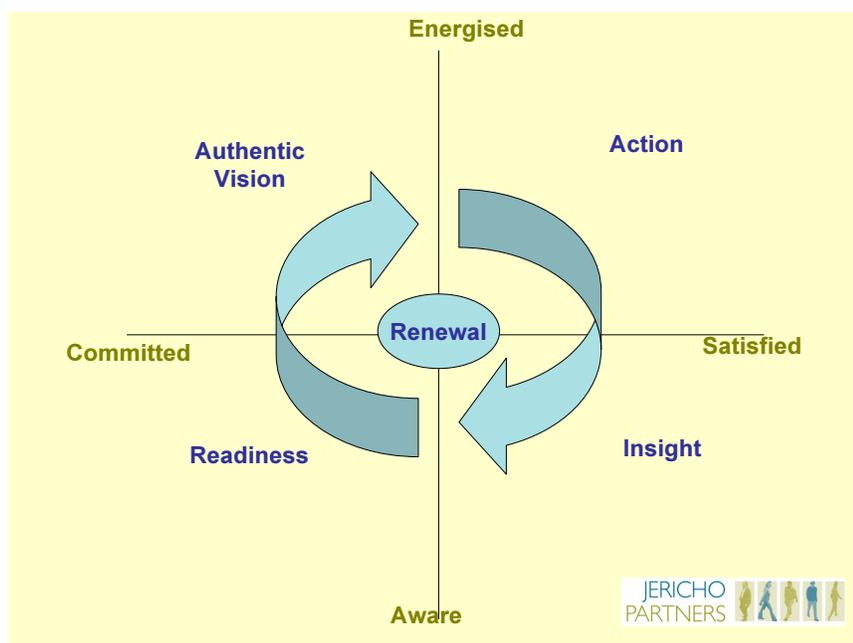


Figure 1 – Model of renewal

Appreciative Inquiry in Renewal

What makes the difference between a healthy individual or system and one that is stuck or “arrested” in its development? Why do some organisations and leaders renew themselves and others fail to adapt? The process of renewal can be slowed or stopped by many things but it is most often, in our experience, broken or slowed by lack of commitment or lack of energy. Appreciative Inquiry, adopted as a coaching approach for renewal, is powerful in avoiding those brakes because it leads to the right choice of inquiry, provides positive energy to overcome blocks, a vivid and compelling dream of the future and positive support for action.

Insight – The right choice of inquiry:

The appreciative coach guides the choice of inquiry in a positive way. By asking “When are things great?”, “When are you being the leader (or the team) that you want to be for the future?”, the coach structures an inquiry which has two features that will foster renewal:

- a. Inquiry into a change which is already experienced, at least sometimes, to some extent
- b. Inquiry into a change that the client is motivated to pursue.

So, some part of developing commitment and energy is already there in the choice of inquiry subject, what Jane Watkins and Bernard Mohr call “a fateful choice”.^{vi} The appreciative coach continues to build awareness by asking questions that help the client to recall vividly, to tell the stories of those occasions, to examine what was happening and feel again how they were being in that situation.

Readiness – A positive look at blocks:

The need to develop readiness and overcome blocks to change is a tricky subject for appreciative practitioners and is sometimes avoided for fear of giving weight to the negative energy that blocks can create. However if there are blocks, such as the client’s limiting assumptions or fears, and they are left un-named and un-addressed, it will be difficult for the client to sustain commitment and energy for change in the longer term.

We address this by asking questions that are freeing. Rather than ask negative questions, “What stops you...?”, which emphasizes the bonds that hold us to old ways of being, we ask positive questions about the client’s experiences of being the leader they want to be such as “What was there about the times when you were like this that made it possible?” and “How were you feeling at that time?” The coach is able then to ask “How could you be/feel like that more often?” For example one client recognised that they were able to be courageous when they felt adequate, confident, recognised. They recognised that they were not hampered by feelings of inadequacy, lack of confidence or need for recognition when dealing with a particular group of peers, but were with others. So how could they get the feelings of adequacy and self-confidence with more of their peers? What could be different? How could they be different? As clients pose and answer these questions they begin to change – by seeing how they could be, they free themselves, become more open, more able to change.^{vii} Habits of mind can be hard to break, and the coach may need to help the client to stay with this freeing process, recognising where they use the “new” ways of being, and what the positive outcomes are as the process of renewal continues.

Authentic Vision – Dreaming the future:

David Cooperrider says “Compelling visions of the future create action”; and Peter Senge talks about the power of “mental rehearsal” in overcoming our inbuilt brakes on change.^{viii} The energy released by creating dreams or visions of the future is familiar to all Appreciative Inquiry practitioners, and is based on asking “what would it be like if it was like that all the time?” In coaching for renewal the appreciative practitioner is able to build on the questions that have been developed in inquiring into readiness. Following the example above we asked “What would it be like if you were a confident and courageous leader all the time?”, “What would it mean for you? For your team? For your organisation?” The energy and power of that positive vision fuels the client in acting to make and sustain the changes needed to bring it into being. The work that has been done in creating awareness and commitment means that the vision is authentic. By “authentic” we mean that the client is free to make the change envisioned and that making it will have value for the individual client or team, for the organisation or its stakeholders.

Action – Supporting action:

The coach’s work doesn’t end with commitment and energy. Sustaining change goes deeper than envisaging it and many things can impinge on clients’ efforts to be different. The appreciative coach works with their client to recognise what works, why it works and how they can get more of it, as well as addressing new challenges and obstacles that might come up through the process. It is vital that clients get to experience the positive satisfaction that comes from making change, rather than constantly seeing what hasn’t been done, or moving on to the next challenge, otherwise they may not be able to sustain the energy needed to complete the change. Our often highly action-oriented clients can see this as unnecessary or self-indulgent. We see making space for this reflection on what has worked, and helping clients see the power of satisfaction in sustaining energy, as a key part of our role as appreciative coaches.

Coaching to sustain renewal

Not every leader we work with shows, or needs to show, second-tier mind-sets. In many circumstances, in many organisations, leaders driven by competition, but capable of adaptation within that mind-set, are very successful. However, as organisations face more post-modern conditions we believe operating from second-tier mind-sets will be demanded from more leaders. This means that an ongoing process of renewal, of freeing themselves from bonds that hold them and of addressing their individual needs until they are free to attend to the needs of the system, will be key to the success of leaders and their organisations.

As well as coaching clients through a process of renewal as described above, the appreciative coach can assist clients to develop a practice of renewal that will sustain their development into the future. In every part of the renewal process there is the opportunity to inquire positively into the source of the renewal energy that is released, to help the client to see what practices they have, or could adopt, to get more of that energy and to give more of it to others. For example in Insight we are able to enquire into the sources of awareness with

questions like: “How did you know you were making that positive impact?”, “How did you see that opportunity?”, “What other areas might you get insight into from that source?”, “When do you give similar feedback to your team?”, “What was the impact?”, “How might you make that part of your leadership practice?”, “What would it be like if you did?”, “What will you do differently?”

As a result we develop commitment to change in practice that keeps the leader renewing.

Coaches need renewal too

The practices of renewal are as important for us as they are for our clients. Not just because we should “walk the talk” to be role models for our clients, but because we too need renewal to foster renewal in others. We need insight into our impact on the world, to free ourselves from bonds that hold us to old ways of being and to develop powerful and authentic visions of how we will be different. And we need to pay attention to implementing change in ourselves and in our practice. Coaches give a lot of energy out into the world and it is too easy to become part of a whirl of client-focused activity – loving it, learning from it, feeling vibrant – and then suddenly to discover that you are exhausted, “flat” and stressed. What’s happening? Why is everything OK for a while and then not?

We believe that the same thing happens to us as happens to leaders and organisations when they don’t pay attention to their renewal. Over time, as the world changes, what was well adapted becomes less so, but we don’t notice, or we deny it, or we avoid doing anything about it until suddenly we find ourselves out of sync, badly attuned and in need of urgent change. This “urgent change” requires much more energy, and often at much more cost than an ongoing process of renewal would have taken. In the extreme this creates a barrier to renewal that can lead us to give up, to “throw the baby out with the bathwater” as we abandon what is positive in order to get away from what holds us back.

At Jericho Partners we are learning about renewal and learning about renewal practices for ourselves and for our clients every day. We hope that this article gives you some insight into your own renewal practices, and how you bring renewal to your world. We look forward to continuing the conversation.

Footnotes

- i. Spiral Dynamics is based on the work of Prof. Claire W. Graves, and was developed by Don Beck and Chris Gowan. *Spiral Dynamics – Mastering Values, Leadership and Change* is a complete reference for those interested in pursuing this further.
- ii. Spiral Dynamics stresses that each stage of development flows from all previous stages. We do not leave our previous selves behind and we cannot speak of people, or organisations, as being “in” a particular phase. We can only speak of mind-sets as coming from a level of development. I might show a post-modern mind-set in my work as a leader, but a modern “expert” one in my role as a parent.
- iii. Spiral Dynamics names different developmental levels as colours, such as Yellow and Turquoise, in an effort to reflect that each is equally valid and appropriate to particular life stages and circumstances. The assumption to be avoided is that later levels are “better” than earlier levels, or that everyone “ought” to aspire to turquoise. What matters is healthiness, ability to adapt and grow, and being well adapted to life conditions.
- iv. I recommend reading the description of Spiral Wizardry in the Beck and Cowan’s book.
- v. We also use a web-based questionnaire with some clients that gives greater detail about their developmental stage and driving values.
- vi. *Appreciative Inquiry – Change at the Speed of Imagination* by Jane Magruder Watkins & Bernard J. Mohr, published by Jossey-Bass Pfeiffer.
- vii. David Cooperrider describes this as the principle of Simultaneity – Change happens the minute you ask the question.
- viii. *The Fifth Discipline – The Art and Practice of the Learning Organisation*, by Peter M. Senge, published by Century Business.