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The Sphinx and the New Era: The Clinical Coaching Role
of the HR Leader in Today's Organizations

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Thesis

**THE SPHINX AND THE NEW ERA: THE CLINICAL COACHING ROLE OF
THE HUMAN RESOURCES LEADER IN TODAY'S ORGANIZATIONS**

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To Flávia

I'm a keeper of sheep.
The sheep are my thoughts
And my thoughts are all sensations.
I think with my eyes and ears
And with my hands and feet
And with my nose and mouth.

To think is to see it and smell it
And to eat a fruit is to taste its meaning.

Alberto Caeiro

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Abstract

HR leaders can achieve a powerful organizational transformational role when they incorporate a clinical coaching lens into the role of strategic partnering. The role of HR Leaders in tandem with the HR Department has evolved substantially in the direction of further contributing to organizational performance. Currently under constant controversy regarding how to position at the strategic decisions table, the leader of HR has the opportunity to step up and design the future steps towards transforming organizations into spaces that encourage learning and growth, where the pursuit of profit does not come at the expense of the planet and its inhabitants. Analysis of narratives of HR Leaders indicates that those who stepped up their use of a clinical lens have done so after a critical moment in their careers and their lives - a tipping point that make them take a broader systemic look to organizations and that open them up to clinical coaching methods. When it happens, the HR Leader becomes a critical agent in supporting people within organizations in their discovering and searching for meaning, in their deciphering of the riddle of the Sphinx, and in building new organizations that can thrive in a new era.

Key Words

Organization, strategic partnering, clinical coaching, HR Leader, critical moments, transformation

The Sphinx and the New Era: The Clinical Coaching Role of the Human Resources Leader in Today's Organizations**Introduction**

Before being political animals, we are social animals. As a condition to survive, any social formation has to get organized to produce and make survival possible; it establishes forms of organization. Any form of organization is simply a group of people executing their activities in a defined space, according to a determined plan, performing different tasks that will later be integrated. Any form of organization demands division and then, the integration of tasks. Once an organization is formed, a direction is necessary, where hierarchy flourishes and the work is subdivided. Organizational configurations have been modified throughout history and implied increased fragmentation and diversification of activities, a multiplicity of jobs and services, the hierarchy of functions, differentiation of wages and salaries, division of competencies, concentration of the decision-making process, concentration of power, and concentration of authority in the spheres where decisions are taken.

The economic development and configuration of social and interpersonal relations in our contemporary world have increased the complexity for people to understand each of their roles inside organizations, at the same time that the exaggerated belief in the technology process as a panacea for everything had not yet corresponded to happiness at work. The current configuration of organizations has generated, to a large extent, the absence of critical content, submitting substantive reason to instrumental reason. Substantive reason implies intelligent perceptions on how events are integrated into determined situations, and therefore, it is important for people to be able to understand their roles within organizations. If they do not understand their roles, they do not have motives. Without motivation, productivity is limited. As a condition for an organization to survive and grow, generating value in a solid and consistent manner, the continuous search for incremental productivity is crucial. Productivity comes from motivated and engaged people in organizations. What moves us is what makes sense to us, what we consider to be meaningful. The

meaningful work engages to go beyond basic job duties. Meaningful work makes us deliberately choose a discretionary effort towards achieving better results at what we do. It drives the desire to take ownership and responsibility for our acts. It makes us choose the will to create and to empower ourselves.

Meaning, motives, engagement, and empowerment - it is all about existence as the essence. *Who are you? What do you do here? From where do you come? To where will you go?* It approaches the riddle of existence: *decipher me or I devour you*. This is everyone's quest. HR leaders can be crucial to the process of creating space in organizations that support their people to find personal meaning and purpose, and decipher their own riddles.

An interpretation about the myth of the riddle of the Sphinx lights the importance of creating a space within organizations where people can search for meaning and are offered a chance to grow towards understanding their selves, their relationships, and the society they live in. In addition to the idea that the riddle of the Sphinx is about Oedipus and the unconscious incestuous relationship between son and mother, mother and son, the riddle is the story of a damned man sentenced to death, doomed to die, where given his courage to be true, reaches the highest level a man can reach. It is about the natural right to live and to do so with dignity and love, against the fear of rejection from others, be it sexual, social, or psychological. The Sphinx that smothers and suffocates us is as a matter of fact the inquiry of our misunderstood past and uncertain future. When we understand them, a relief comes and the tightening of the throat seems to disappear... until they return and force a new inquiry. The key to decipher the riddle is to understand yourself, others, and the whole to then become capable of flying high, inwards and outwards (Salis ,1994).

There is a role for the HR Leader in today's scenario, within the environment of organizations. This role is related to exercising the mandate of partnering strategically with a clinical coaching approach and, simultaneously, fostering it in all leaders.

The roles for the HR Leader have been encapsulated by many buzz words and from wave to wave, a new fashion term arises: strategic advisor, strategic partner, business partner, change agent, change catalyst, service provider, board advisor, culture shaper, talents champion, you name it.

For the purpose of this thesis, a dichotomy between the roles of strategic partner and clinical coach is enough to make a point surrounding the adequate or ideal role for the HR Leader to efficiently support the people and organizations of modern times and be capable of adapting to continuous changes and transformations. The strategic partner role is related to performing as an executive board member, discussing strategies, discussing HR and organization related strategies, and directing implementation of organizational plans and actions. The clinical coaching role is related to appreciating, validating, and fostering a culture of creating sustainable organizations by putting people first.

The expectations of the role of the HR Leader vary from organization to organization, from time to time, from strategic moment to strategic moment, and from crisis to crisis. Very often, HR Leaders are expected to take on the role of a strategic partner, leaning in and asserting their perspectives at the decision table. In other instances, they are expected to take on the role of a coach. Regardless of either expectation, an HR Leader can perform both by integrating a clinical coaching approach to the role of a strategic partner. The role of the clinical coaching partnering strategically has high transformational potential. This combined role is the one that creates the possibility for the HR Leader to focus on influencing the choice of strategies into the direction of, through people, building organizations and cultures where performance is maximized in the eyes of all stakeholders.

Within the context of this thesis, an HR Leader refers to the number one HR executive, the person who occupies the top HR job within an organization, either a C-level, a member of the C-suite reporting to the CEO, or the HR head of a standalone subsidiary of a larger company. The mandate of an HR Leader

may span from a purely bureaucratic one to a strategic partner role, from a paternalistic attitude to a builder of an empowering environment. To a large extent, the space an HR Leader occupies within an organization is related to his/her capability to influence this organization.

The clinical coaching approach, as discussed in this thesis, is also known as a psychodynamic approach. This approach takes into account “the undercurrents of organizational life through issues such as interpersonal communication, group processes, social defenses and organization-wide neurosis. A clinically informed approach aims to instill in organization’s leaders an interest in and understanding of their own behavior – why they do what they do – as well as the behavior of others to best influence and leverage the potential of their followers” (Kets de Vries & Cheak 2014, p. 8 and 9). Clinical coaching may be described as a series of techniques of a practitioner to support individuals, teams, and organizations to change and be able to continuously adapt and survive (Kets de Vries, 2008).

According to Kets De Vries and Chaka (2014), the four basic premises of the clinical paradigm are as follows:

- First, there is a rationale behind every human act – a logical explanation – even for actions that seem irrational. This point of view stipulates that all behavior has an explanation; however, one needs to do “detective work” to tease out the underlying hints and clues of perplexing behavior.
- The second premise is that a great deal of mental life – feelings, fears, motives – lies outside of conscious awareness, but still affects conscious reality and even physical well-being. It concerns the blind spots and shadier sides that everyone has.
- The third premise states that nothing is more central to whom a person is than the way he or she regulates and expresses emotions.
- The fourth premise underlying the clinical paradigm is that the human development is an inter- and intra-personal process; we are a result of past experiences.

Therefore, there is a space for the HR Leader to occupy and it is more than simply shifting from attracting and developing talent to driving high-performance culture. It goes beyond that. The HR Leader's role should be expanded towards setting a context where people in organizations are encouraged to open up and expand their awareness of a possible meaningful content. The HR Leader's role should be one of creating a sustainable organization in which people understand the meaning and see a purpose in what they do, and then team up with others towards achieving a common goal. To make a difference for the individuals and organizations, an ideal HR Leader should adopt and foster a clinical coaching approach in the development of people and organizations. By creating an environment that provides people with improved self-knowledge, promotes better team alignment where people freely speak up and listen actively, with a shared mindset of ownership and empowerment, an ideal HR Leader will foster endeavors that will lead to a greater good. In such an environment, it does not matter much which HR tools they use and practice. What matters much more is the experience and qualification of the HR Leader in instilling and instituting a culture that takes into account the substantive reason, the human functioning, and the non-rational dimension of the organization's life, appreciating interdependences, mutual support and trust. A culture that values this authority is exercised not through control, but through the interaction among individuals, who are not mere subordinates and technical experts.

There is a challenge for HR Leaders to occupy this space and perform such role, and it is related to the application of clinical coaching interventions in organizations. The application of clinical coaching or psychodynamic approaches within organizations and their acceptance have been undermined by the difficulties in defining the concept of organizational health (Driver, 2003). As a consequence, it has also been challenging to determine what such approaches can achieve. One reason for debating and questioning the potential positive impact of using a clinical coaching approach is related to the unclear definition of organizational health and, therefore, the unclear definition of its impact on an organization and business performance (Driver 2003). However,

the application of clinical coaching skills towards the creation of healthier organizations has been suggested, tested, applied, and proven to be successful and cited by many studies, especially by Manfred Kets De Vries and his associates (e.g., Kets De Vries 1991). The link between organizational health and performance is also demonstrated in many studies (Collins, 2001, Hamel, 2012), and is widely accepted as having a strong positive correlation.

These discussions and issues are similarly aligned with the same challenges HR Leaders have faced to justify their value or contribution to organizations, in other words, the challenge they have had to justify the return on people investments they propose. Therefore, for an HR Leader to adhere to the use of a clinical coaching lens, a deeper will to transform and overcome a common resistance within organizations is required to apply them. This deeper will comes very often from critical incidents experienced by the HR Leader. The critical incident works for the HR Leaders as an awakening of a belief in the use of the clinical lens for improving organizational performance that can potentially transform organizations. Moreover, the inclination to use this approach is in line with the tendencies observed in new organizational models. New models aim at leveraging overall business results, profitability, and workforce development, while also taking into consideration the possible impact of their operations on the planet. The driving force for moving this organization's predisposition forward can in fact be its HR Leaders.

Research Aims and Objectives

The research aims and objectives are to identify a pattern or patterns in the development of an HR Leader that make him/her believe in the importance of the clinical coaching approach and validate that this approach has been impactful on transforming people and organizations. An HR Leader who combines strategic partnering skills with the use of a clinical coaching lens inside organizations is critical to allow the potential of each person within the organization to find meaning and decipher his/her life's riddles. An HR Leader is the one best positioned to help organizations improve its health, mainly when they articulate the collaborative creation of a both humanized and productive

culture. The role for the HR Leader that makes a difference is the role that pushes and leads people to decipher the riddle of their own Sphinxes. This role makes a positive difference for the individual, the organization's health, and consequently, the organization's performance. This role is performed once the HR Leader has the clinical coaching knowledge and skills and once organizational resistance to this approach is put away. It is not that the HR Leader has to perform fully as a clinical coach or therapist. It is that the HR Leader with the clinical coaching knowledge uses a different perspective that helps organizations improve. What triggers the will in HR Leaders to accept, endorse, and foster the use of the clinical coaching approach seems to be beyond the cognitive level. It is not only that they find a reason; they have a belief. And from where and how does this belief arise? The answer to this question may help other HR Leaders and other executive leaders live better with the apparent ambiguity of sitting on the strategic board and using the clinical coaching approach and to exert a positive impact on their organizations and the development of employees.

This thesis seeks to explore common themes and patterns that were present in the life stories of HR Leaders. Themes that have something in common and that are their motivations to embark on this journey of incorporating a clinical coaching lens in the way they perform their roles within organizations; themes that have generated or worked out at a critical moment. A sequence of life events may make an HR Leader perform a combination of strategic partner and clinical coaching roles, and, moreover, a critical moment may work as a tipping point for him/her to envision the possibility and robustness of aggregating the use of a clinical lens to the strategic partner role. Through the methodology of narrative analysis, this thesis seeks to understand if critical moments exist in the career and life of HR Leaders, if there are similarities and patterns among the narratives of interviewed HR Leaders, and if this theme or incident was related to their choice for adopting a posture towards validating the clinical coaching approach.

This thesis searches for potential answers as to what triggered in some HR Leaders the belief of the importance of the clinical approach; if this belief in clinical coaching came from a critical moment in their lives and if there was a moment that worked as the tipping point when it seemed a new horizon would be revealed.

Literature Review

The role of the HR department has always been subject for debate. Literature discussing the role of HR departments and HR Leaders within organizations does exist. Many of them discuss the importance and role of HR Leaders to improve an organization's performance and business results. Some discuss the difficulties regarding the acceptance of clinical coaching concepts and approach for business leaders. I have not yet discovered any specific literature that considers the reasons or willingness to apply a clinical lens approach combined with the concept of strategic partnering from an HR Leader's perspective. To exemplify what is being discussed and published on the role of HR Leaders, I consolidated several excerpts from literature under the sections "Gurus' Approaches", "HR Community-Focused Approaches", and "Clinical Coaching Approaches".

Gurus' Approaches

The most read literature on HR professional roles (e.g., Ulrich 2014) has enlightened the importance for a business to consider the multiplicity of contributions of the HR Leader in changing, coaching, and advising. However, they have not entered deeper into the implications and value of clinical coaching. Despite the many studies and publications on HR evolution and despite that the recent debate, described in detail below, between Charan (2014) and Ulrich (2014), both very renowned HR influencers, had gained broad and ample attention, the "gurus' approaches" do not address in-depth a key differentiating characteristic of HR Leaders; specifically, their clinical coaching capabilities.

This recent debate about the need of an HR Department and HR roles came to attention and became a trendy topic after an article by Ram Charan was published in the Harvard Business Review (Charan 2014). In the article "It's time to split HR", Charan begins with a provocative statement – "It's time to say good bye to the Department of Human Resources", arguing that it is rare to find HR Leaders serving as sounding boards and trusted partners and who are capable of diagnosing organizations, matching employees and jobs, as well as providing advice on the talent implications of the company's strategy. More specifically, Charan (2014) attributed their deficits to the fact that most HR Leaders are only process oriented, internal focused, technical experts. Furthermore, Charan (2014) pointed out that the few HR Leaders who perform at a higher level often come from other departments prior to leading the HR position. Thus, Charan proposed the replacement of the singular HR Leader position with two positions: HR-A (Administration) and HR-LO (Leadership and Organization). While the HR-A basically manages compensation and benefits and reports to the CFO, the HR-LO would focus on improving employees' capabilities and report to the CEO.

Building upon this solution, Charan, Barton, and Carey (2015) came up with the new role for the position of Chief Human Resources Officer (CHRO) in their article, "People Before Strategy: A New Role for the CHRO". According to Charan et al. (2015), CHROs should focus on finding ways to use human capital to create value and the CEO should form a core steering team with the CHRO together with the CFO. They conclude the CEO, who believes people are the ultimate source of sustainable competitive differentiation, must embrace the strengthening of the HR function very seriously.

Following this discussion, Ulrich refutes to Charan's proposition of splitting HR in the article, "Do Not Split HR – At Least Not Ram Charan's Way" (Ulrich 2014). Ulrich expressly advocates in favor of HR Leaders who engage with business leaders to deliver value and who focus on delivering talent management, leadership pipeline, and organization capability. According to Ulrich (Ulrich 2014), to be excellent on those deliverables, HR Leaders are

required to possess an outside-in perspective and not simply an inside-out one. In essence, the outside-in perspective is about using the point of view of the customers of the business when making decisions.

David Ulrich and the RBL Group, declaring themselves as HR professionals advocates, have increased the tone of their claims on the importance of a strong HR function. In the recent publication, *In the Rise of HR, Wisdom from 73 Thought Leaders*, editors (Ulrich, Schiemann, and Sartain 2015) presented multiple perspectives regarding how HR departments can add value, laid out a positive and aspirational view of the HR department's future, and discussed HR Leaders' roles for impacting business through managing talent, creating cultures, and providing sound advice. They advocate the HR profession and propose that being effective is more than just knowing the body of knowledge that defines the profession, but also by being able to apply that knowledge to business challenges. HR professionals should become advisors and architects on the importance of individual abilities (talents), organization capabilities (culture), and leadership; keys to the success of all organizations. They define six domains where HR people should develop their competencies: strategic positioner, credible activist, capability builder, change champion, human resource innovator and integrator, and technology proponent. They conclude that those competencies are what HR professionals need to know and do to become better and more effectively deliver values to employees, organizations, customers, investor, and communities.

In an article for the Korn Ferry Institute, Ulrich and Filler (2014) highlighted the crucial alliance of CEOs and CHROs for the business' success and pointed out what I believe to be vital. They got closer, but not hit the target, to the idea of combining strategic partner capabilities with clinical coaching approach. They stated that the ability of an organization to change and adapt becomes the key differentiator and advocated that if a CHRO has mastered the capability of managing talent and culture to deal with change and adaptation, he/she may succeed and become the CEO.

HR Community-Focused Approaches

Bringing in additional dimensions for the role of the HR Leaders, in a guide to HR professionals on how to earn and keep a place in the C-suite, Wright advises: "Like it or not, the CEO and the executive team members will often expect the HR professional to help keep executive team meetings from becoming a 'killing ground'" (Wright 2015, p. 50), meaning, HR Leaders have to perform a role in containing the environment and in transforming it in a reflective and safe space. Listing areas in which an HR professional can add real value, the author mentions:

- Executive team effectiveness
- Business strategy formulation and implementation
- Organization change management
- Senior leadership development and succession planning
- Board interaction effectiveness

Moreover, he brings a very important position: an HR Leader should assess from early on the effectiveness of the executive team and where opportunities to improve it may exist. "Not immediately assessing the effectiveness of the executive team and helping to improve it once you have a seat at the table is similar to what can happen when someone is unwilling to inspect a house and perform basic maintenance on it... the HR professional needs to work in concert with the CEO to make an accurate assessment of the team's effectiveness and the maintenance that needs to be done. If these flaws are not addressed, it could result in failures in the team's effectiveness later during critical business periods." (Wright 2015, p. 56) Wright also comments that business changes that impact organizational changes are great moments for HR Leaders to bring and implement knowledge of the works and theories about organizational change. Additionally, in terms of culture management, Wright says, "the role of the senior HR professional in the C-suite is to help the CEO and other members of the executive team have a realistic assessment and understanding of the culture(s) imbedded in the organization. As most specialists who study company culture advise, it is important to not only understand the 'what', and the 'where' of a company, but also the 'how and why'." (Wright 2015, p. 89 and 90) On coaching, Wright says, "based on my experience, it doesn't matter

whether the senior HR professionals in the C-suite think of themselves as a coach. It is a sure bet that, at some point, the senior HR professional in the C-suite will need to coach" (Wright 2015, p. 141). We may say Wright sees the value of an HR Leader as a coach but does not go deeper into the understanding of their acceptance to adopting this approach, as well as the acceptance of it by their organizations.

Bringing new perspectives on the role of HR Leaders, in *The Chief HR Officer. Defining the New Role of Human resource Leaders*, Wright et al. (2011) discussed how the HR Leader role has expanded and incorporated what I would call clinical coaching lens to the strategic partner role. In the last chapter (Wright 2011), "Bringing it all Together", Wright (2011) mentioned the areas that play critical roles in the success or failure of an HR Leader: know the business, know how to lead, know people, and know yourself. By knowing people, Wright (2011) explained that, "knowing the basic condition can guide people to fantastic success or unbelievable failure. Knowing people means knowing human nature and the implications for decisions and group dynamics." (p. 299) According to Wright (2011), in a discussion about knowing yourself (Wright 2011, p. 301), they mention that the worldview of the ultimate value of people as an end and not as the means was what originally drove many HR Leaders to the HR field. According to Wright (2011), "those who succeed fight such an urge and constantly relearn the lesson of knowing themselves in order to courageously stand up for the values that originally led them into HR. It is the combination of knowing clearly what one believes and the courage to stand up for those beliefs that leads every successful CHRO to be willing to have that "put your badge on the table" moment. Only through knowing yourself internally can you define yourself externally." (p. 302)

Clinical Coaching Approaches

The trend of applying clinical coaching interventions is very positive especially in organizations whose HR Leaders have an appreciation for coaching benefits. (Kets De Vries, Guillen, Korotov, Florent-Treacy 2010 p. 251) "The most natural owner of the clinical approach in the execution and change systems is the

human resources (HR) function. "Strategic HR" is much talked about but seldom used by organizations... this would, indeed, be a valuable and powerful responsibility for the HR function." (Loch 2010 p. 195) HR Leaders are potentially the ones most prompted to trigger the change in adopting and valuing the clinical coaching practice within organizations. It usually helps if there is a clear mandate from top management for HR Leaders to bring clinical psychology into the organization. HR Leaders can then encourage line managers to become more involved in leadership development, as part of a process of developing leaders and building organizations that have a strong vision, a structure, and a culture that provide a compelling offer to their employees (Guillen 2010).

This is when a HR Leader may make a difference. When, in addition to understanding the business, being a trusted advisor to people and organizations, and their relationships with business strategies, the HR Leader uses the clinical coaching approach. Normally, though, it is the HR Leader who is better equipped to learn and apply a clinical coaching approach. It is not that the HR Leader becomes a coach. It is in fact, that the HR Leader engages with clinical coaching mindset. As a player with executive responsibilities, a pure coaching role is not possible to be practiced by the HR Leader. Using the skills, however, makes all the difference. The clinical coaching skill is a critical one that allows the HR Leader to prepare people and organizations towards a more sustainable growth, in an era of discovery.

After reviewing all this literature, further developing a study on how the clinical lens is incorporated by HR Leaders into their organizations' on a daily basis is crucial to discovering a window to disseminate through it the value of the clinical coaching approach for today's organizations in order to face their challenges to survive and grow.

Methodology

To a large extent, this thesis has to do with the life I have experienced. As an HR professional, having worked for large corporations since 1986, as an HR

Leader since 1996, I have my truth. Therefore, I must stress that the dichotomy between author-work is epistemologically unnecessary, once knowledge comes from practice. Objectivity is more related to the observer than to the object, and knowledge is socially constituted. Any theorization can be justified as true if viewed in function of its practice. The concept of truth does not fit in the model that theories result from the practice of whoever formulated them. A theory is wrong only when it does not express the practice of who interpreted it. It is not about relegating us to the level of pure subjectivity, where our existence as praxes capable of overcoming subjectivity and understanding things as they really are would be denied. Therefore, although it could be possible to be refuted in the abstract plan of pure ideas, here I begin an interpretative scheme capable of understanding the reality. This thesis is related to my practice and experience as an HR professional, as well as the practice that other HR Leaders, my colleagues, have experienced.

To shed light on the most prominent role an HR Leader can have, this thesis reviews roles being practiced by distinguished HR Leaders. Using narrative analysis, it considers findings from interviews with them and how they see their current roles and how they envision their roles in the ideal world. It seeks to determine the critical moments during the careers of HR Leaders, which have led them to believe in the clinical coaching approach by eliciting their perspectives of the event. In accordance with the approach advocated by Long and Harding (2013), data analysis was centered on discovering and identifying themes and critical incidents that were common among them/us as a way to understand deeper layers of the personal change process. Interviews were conducted in a manner that would reach its apex when the realization of a critical moment by the interviewee occurred.

Description of the Research Setting

I selected HR Leaders with the purpose of interviewing them. I selected them based on their market reputation for their continuous success and contributions to the companies they have worked for. I selected them to collect their stories, clinically analyze their narratives looking for critical moments, and identify

messages and themes from their stories that might help and inspire other HR Leaders.

Presuming a continuum of possible roles, having the strategic partnering role at one extreme and the clinical coaching role at the other, while in between, having roles like change and transition management, service provider, business partner, and others, the purpose of these interviews was to identify their roles and classify them within either a clinical coaching role or a strategic partnering role, discuss their perceived success, how they have used the HR mindset to influence their choice of strategy.

The design of the interviews was to create a safe environment for both the interviewee and myself to authentically enter into it (Long 2013). Those interviews were designed to establish a trust environment that would enable us to address what different roles they had adopted in their organizations and how their performance of these roles impacted their organizations.

The number of 8 interviewees was determined in the belief that a pattern would be presented by their narratives. This pattern would allow me to conclude what critical moments fostered and prompted an awakening towards the value of using a clinical lens within organizations.

All interviewees have or had reported directly to the top-ranking professionals of their respective organizations. These companies span across a diverse range of industries in the private sector, comprising Pharmaceutical, Consumer Goods, Telecommunications, Finance, and Consulting.

Due to the need to facilitate the process of conducting face-to-face interviews, all interviewees were Brazilians, selected for convenience of location. All interviewees have international academic and/or professional experiences. They are over 45 years old, with 20-plus years of professional tenure.

Although interviews were scheduled for one hour, they typically lasted a little bit longer. All interviews would be maintained confidential and anonymous, so the research report is constructed to preserve this agreement and it is not possible to identify the individuals.

Each interview began with the verification of the professional information I had previously collected through available bios and LinkedIn profiles. The information obtained included age, nationality, years of professional experience; length of service in Human Resources departments, companies worked for, and countries lived in. Subsequently, the interviews followed along background topics such as the interviewee's family life story, life story up to graduation, schooling, and college graduation and other education programs, coaching certification/programs, career life, current company situation, current position challenges, and reporting relationship with superiors. The purpose of covering these topics, in addition to collecting data, were in line with establishing a reflective safe space for our conversation. The questions I had in mind and got answers to as our conversations evolved were:

- How did you become an HR professional?
- Why HR?
- When did you first achieve a number 1 position in HR?
- What is your company's current and main strategic intent?
- What is the company's CEO's main competency and which one is his/her shortfall?
- How do you view the quality of the leadership in your organization?
- What are your priorities?
- How do you feel about handling the many expectations and demands of different organization stakeholders?
- What is your future plan after your corporate life is over?
- How you see the correlation between organizational health and organizational performance?

Not all questions were necessarily covered. Some of them I had in mind and used as part of establishing an open and deep conversation. At the moment I deemed appropriate, the interviewee was presented with a card containing two

lists of words. One list with words typically associated with an HR Leader who is focused on partnering strategically, while the other list contained words more commonly associated with an HR Leader who is viewed more as a coach (see table 1). After presenting both lists together but with no identification of which role they represented, I asked interviewees to score each item from 0 to 10, while keeping in mind what was going on before the critical moment I identified during our conversation. Once answered, I posed the same question but asking what the score was afterwards.

Card:

Score from 1 to 10	Score from 1 to 10
Leaning in	Counseling, facilitating, advising
Results and action oriented	Transformation agent
Policy and programs management	Going to the balcony
Having answers	Posing questions

(The list on the left contains words related to the role of a Strategic Partner for HR Leaders. The list on the right has words related to the role of a Coach)

After calculating their scores, I adopted a clinical lens in conducting an interview on how interviewees felt living in between the two roles before and after the critical change and asked: how they felt now about those moments; how they behaved before and after; what they learned from it; how they built on it; how they acquired and applied the clinical lens and if they even realized they were using the clinical lens.

People create an identity through the way they connect the dots of their lives. The way they construct their life stories, how they shared them, how they handled their life experiences, how they made meaning from their sequence of life episodes, how they connected and integrated those episodes, and the way they reported their autobiography constitute their narrative identities (McAdams, McLean 2013). Their narrative identities are the key to understanding how

interviewees have dealt with the challenge of creating a meaningful role for their HR leadership within their organization.

Data Gathering and Reporting

To set up the interviews, I contacted HR Leaders by email and/or phone. I presented the objective of my research study and the reason for interviewing as a study to identify the HR Leaders' roles that best contribute towards both maximizing organizational performance and transforming organizations.

Then, a series of semi-structured interviews with a selected group of 8 HR Leaders took place with the initial topic of identifying whether HR Leaders are more inclined towards the strategic partner side or the clinical coaching side of the continuum, and depending on where they are, how they have contributed to the organization's performance. The intent was to find out if there is, and which one is, a more successful HR Leader role that can propel the organization towards formulating superior HR practices and the strategies that can lead to the creation of organizations that are capable of fulfilling the results and expectations of key stakeholders. More specifically, this research study sought to determine whether there was a critical moment that shifted the mindset of the HR Leaders towards embracing the clinical coaching approach.

Here, I summarize the takeaways of the most relevant narratives I collected from the 8 HR Leaders selected. This is my report of what they reported to me during our first round of interviews.

Interviewee 1

He started his career working as an intern for an Audit Company. He enjoyed the competitive environment within his organization, although he did not like the content he had to deal with in his functions. Moreover, he was ashamed of telling his friends, with leftist's political inclinations, he was working for an audit company, as they would consider it a very bourgeois thing.

He decided to pursue a master's degree as a means to create other career opportunities. Although he had entered an MBA program in Finance because it was aligned with his credentials and formal qualifications, he found that he did not like Finance. So instead, he started taking courses in psychology and organizations. He fell in love with all studies regarding critical approaches to organizations. More specifically, he was fascinated with the exploration of power play within organizations, which he attributed to his past participation in competitive sports. According to him, playing collective sports instilled in him the key qualities to deal with competition within organizations.

Subsequently, he switched to a career in HR and achieved the number one HR position. He was enthusiastic about the challenge and believes he did a great job. Then, ahead of another opportunity, he decided to move to another company where he forged a strong alliance and friendship with the General Manager in the country. He acquired tremendous power and was instrumental in many organizational changes and transformations. After 7 successful years, he was promoted to the company's regional HR Leader.

However, one day he was surprised by the information of an audit investigation indicating that his previous boss, the General Manager, had been engaged in unethical activities in his home country. As a result of this audit investigation, he had to terminate the employment of his previous boss and friend. It was a painful process for him, which led to his experience of a phase of disillusionment. After almost one year and still disappointed with the organization, he decided to leave the company.

Today, he runs a subsidiary of a consulting firm in his country and is engaged in transforming organizations into a better place. He believes management and HR tools are important to mitigate bad management practices, but are not

enough to generate behavior changes towards building organizations that are places for personal growth. He is not convinced he will be capable to impact as many organizations he had initially thought would be possible. He acknowledges he is still in transition and that he is dealing with it with serenity.

Interviewee 2

His master thesis was, initially, an attempt to prove that understanding all variables would make it possible to predict and intervene in all systems. Everything would be controllable. While he was pursuing his master's program, his girlfriend broke up with him. He was shocked and put everything on hold for several months.

As a result of this breakup, he decided to study psychology in the hopes of learning how to predict and interfere in human behavior. He adjusted his thesis from a predictive-integrative model to an explicative-integrative one. He realized after less than one year that uncertainty is the norm. He began to find interest in learning topics that are not from the field of the more predictive sciences. He began to study and attend programs like Kabala, Spiritism, Transpersonal Journey, body and energy... He began a journey in spiritual psychological development.

After graduation, he pursued a conventional corporate career by joining a well-known global company and climbed the career ladder. After working in Finance, Business Development, he was groomed for the position of General Manager.

However, due to some discomfort with his career development in regards to what he wanted in his life, he asked to move to HR because he believed this discomfort was related to his need to work closer to people-related matters. What initially began as a training period to prepare him for a General Manager position ended up becoming a new career path.

Subsequently, he moved to another global company as the HR Leader. In continuance to his developmental plan, he was expatriated to another country as a preparatory phase to acquire knowledge of the company's other businesses and within other cultures. Three years later, he returned to realize his dream of opening his own consulting firm.

Although he had climbed up the corporate ranks in different functions, he believes he had in fact always performed as a transformational agent. He has performed the HR role bridging, as he says, the material with the spiritual world. He stated he felt as though as he was leading a double life – pursuing a traditional corporate life while attending programs offering healing with hands, always interested in psycho-spiritual programs. By a double life, he did not mean the dichotomy of consulting-corporate lives, but the dichotomy between the material and spiritual worlds. He says his focus is not on people but on human systems. More specifically, he is most interested about developing systems and communities that will transform organizations and the world.

He believes that the world is shifting towards the spiritual, which is why HR Leaders with strategic skills combined with a clinical lens will make a difference. The mechanic organization development approach is losing space to the organization development with a dialogical approach. Decision-making is shifting to creating choices. The HR Leader as a pure strategic partner is egocentric. The transformational agent is "exocentric". The transformation must be cognitive and emotional and could be either self-spontaneous or provoked.

Interviewee 3

She says one peak moment she had was when she was a critical player in transforming a business unit from having a self-inflicted bias of being of less importance into a unit with high self-esteem. In addition to the many tools she

used, what was truly pivotal in making the transformation successful was the creation of a slogan: "Fuck the Board", meaning that employees have to take the ownership for their problems and solutions and move the organization ahead. This slogan and the feeling it generated created a powerful bond among top-level executives and management, generating a higher than ever level of engagement and sense of hard work. Performing this change management role propelled her career and her decision to accept the invitation to an assignment overseas.

While on this overseas assignment, she underwent a divorce. She decided to move back to her country with the feeling that she needed to start all over again. Moving back was not easy, as she could not fit in a traditional organization any longer. She did not know why, but she could not see herself within conventional organizations anymore. Although she tried, jumping from one company to another, there was always a feeling of non-fulfillment. She now owns a consulting firm with a very suggestive name related to making new lives flourish.

Interviewee 4

She accepted her selection as the head of HR for her company. She was surprised to learn on her first day that a new CEO was coming on board. Essentially, both of them were new to the company, which meant they did not yet know anyone in that company and lacked knowledge of many things, including basic processes regarding the systems and plans of the company. They worked together to diagnose the company's problem and after identifying many serious issues, they decided to completely transform and renew the company.

It was a critical moment for the company because important revenue generators would no longer be available due to a new market policy. It was a moment when

she felt she was truly impacting the lives of many people. With the implementation of some HR tools, she started fostering a new culture for the company. She observed that the change process gained better traction only when those tools were blended with a coaching approach targeting the streamlining of the decision-making process and the flexibility of the organizational structure.

Despite her success in adopting a coaching approach, she believed that companies with a highly competitive internal environment, which are very much oriented to action and bottom line results, are less likely to accept a purely clinical coaching approach. Blending it with a structured tool approach is more effective, tactically speaking. Tools provide structure. Having a structure helps support people in moments of transition and works as a foundation for people to accept coaching.

Interviewee 5

He forged a solid career in HR at national and multinational companies in a variety of industries. He accumulated broad experiences in the development, implementation, and management of local and global HR practices across different countries on several continents. More specifically, his expertise is in turnaround and transformation programs with a focus on people, culture, process, and structure. He received many awards for his contribution to HR and organizations.

One day, while he was spending time with his best friend, the latter received a message about his son being killed in a car robbery. The devastating news led him to question the purpose and meaning of life. As a consequence, he abruptly quit his job to join an NGO for the education of young people, mainly because he believed this would be a way to give back some of what he obtained throughout his career. As a complement to that, he writes about self-knowledge,

career and legacy building, career and inner strength, leadership for a new era, and the power of simplicity. He transformed everything he learned into easily digestible topics to share and educate others.

Interviewee 6

He was the type of person who would make all repairs that were needed in his house, car, or any other object that needed fixing. He believed he could do everything on his own, a personality trait that was a mark for years of his professional style.

He reached the HR Leader position at the same time he was going through many changes. This was a time when he was in his early 30's, recently married, and lived in a different country. When he first arrived, he wanted to be recognized as an achiever and pushed to prove his worth to others. So he worked hard to implement various types of HR tools and practices.

It took him some time to recognize that the organization was not ready to absorb all these tools and practices. In fact, he would come to realize that some of the tools and practices were not necessary. They were merely tools and practices of large corporations he was shoving down the throats of that smaller organization. However, thanks to the support from the local General Manager, he was able to turn the situation around and succeed in creating a competitive organization by readdressing his plan after conducting a broad survey of employee and internal customer priorities. This experience boosted his maturity and taught him about resilience.

Based on this experience, he adopted a new approach when he moved to other organizations. Instead of striving to be recognized for his effort by making all the changes quickly, he preferred to approach the situations by spending his time listening to people and giving them time to build solutions together and waiting

for “we-sights” (insights generated by working in teams). He believed that CEOs and CFOs rarely have a perspective from the dynamics of the organizations and that his contributions that made a difference for the business was the human perspective he brought to the table.

Interviewee 7

A sustained upward career in the field of Human Resources led him to attain the top position as the HR Leader for a subsidiary in Brazil, which was part of a large multinational company, when he was 32 year old. His career was characterized by significant transformative events for the organization in the form of acquisitions, divestitures, and mergers. He capitalized on these events to turn his HR department into a key influencer, by taking the forefront of all aspects related to making profound organizational rearrangements. He became very powerful and highly regarded within the organization, bringing him a confidence that the way he did was the right and best way.

His success then led to his transfer to the headquarters in the USA, where he relocated to with his family. Upon his arrival, he was quick to realize that his fame and power had no value there. Instead of making things happen using his influence, he had to step back and learn a new manner of working to be successful. Although he sought to adapt to the organization's system, he continued to experience difficulties with the new environment and culture, making him less effective. His feeling was that his capability of making things happen and his power were taken away. Although he had good command of his proficiency in business English, he could not cope with conversations in a social setting and, then, he began to close himself and not properly participate in business and social meetings. He was suggested for and exposed to coaching sessions that were very revealing for him. He stated he experienced a paradigm shift and began approaching people and situations in a different way. This shift reverberated beyond his professional life. His personal life was impacted. At work, he searched for different ways to get work done. He became to maneuver

differently. Instead of using the power of his position to get things done, he became a listener and a leader-coach. To a large extent, all this brought him, in his words, a new life style and more peace.

Interviewee 8

She was shocked and devastated when her husband decided to return to Brazil and leave her with their two sons in the United States where they had been living for three years. Although she had known her marriage was collapsing, she had not been able to devote the required attention to it due to her work assignment of a global scale. Nonetheless, she had been hoping to find some time to take care of her marital relationship in the not-too-distant future. But her husband just left one day, unexpectedly. She found herself alone with her sons in another country, with the need to travel around for business.

With support from the Company, she was granted a one-year period of non-paid leave of absence to return to Brazil, her home country. After her return, she got divorced and underwent a period of psychotherapy. In short, she had to make huge efforts to rebalance her life. She started working at another company. She re-married to someone new, got pregnant, and gave birth to a new child. After experiencing all this upheaval, she became a strong believer in the power of the clinical approach to develop mature individuals capable of handling life and work in a healthier way. In her current job, she established a group of internal coaches who are conducting all people development based on clinical approaches. She currently is very enthusiastic about the quality of the transformation wave she helped to create in this organization.

After I finished all 8 interviews and completed the analysis of each, I reconnected, separately, with interviewees numbers 1, 2, 4, and 7. I reconnected and met with each one to dive into the discussion on clinical coaching application inside organizations. In those meetings, we entered deep

into some concepts like adaptive leadership, multi-party management, listening with the third ear, and always making the link to what would be the ideal role for HR Leaders to build healthier organizations.

Findings and Discussion

As expected, because of the selected sample, the projection of an HR function that had no voice, power, or hope to trigger any change in the organization did not appear.

I interpreted a series of narratives, analyzing clinically what was said and not said by them about their careers and about their personal lives, aiming to identify what kind of experience made them achieve greater awareness about their role in transforming organizations. Additionally, topics such as adaptive leadership, multi-party management, business leaders' resistance to psychodynamic approaches, organizational health and organizational performance, and organizational transformation, were explored and deeply discussed in light of their relative importance to the clinical coaching role exercise with 4 of the interviewees.

Interviews were a form of reflection and provided a safe and reflective space that allowed deep and engaged conversations. Some interviewees were grateful to undergo this reflection, which enabled them to organize their thoughts and feelings around their careers and lives.

Through creating a proper safe space for the interviewees during the interviews, it was possible to collect unconscious material, paying attention to signs of unconscious phenomena that lay below the surface, understanding that my career experiences as an HR Leader, in fact a peer of the interviewees, generated a mutual process of exploration on an issue.

Critical Incidents

During the data analysis phase, I looked for a pattern in the narrative analysis of HR Leaders, specifically, a critical incident that would help to explain the interviewees' shift towards a belief in the clinical lens approach, which ultimately led them to implement it.

The analysis of the interviewees' narratives and careers revealed that the critical moments worked as "aha!" or "Eureka" moments. It worked like that because the interviewees were in fact ready for them. These moments worked as tipping points (Gladwell, 2000) - events of major significance that contributed to meaningful life changes.

All interviewed HR Leaders edited their life stories very coherently, in a way that they have created new identities for themselves along the transformational journey they went through. They created meaning out of their careers and life incidents. Their awakening came about through their experience of unexpected hardships, which forced them to reconnect to themselves. What they learnt about themselves in stressful situations triggered their sense of compassion and led them to recognize the importance of looking at the human behind the professional.

As a matter of fact, the similarity of the transition cycles of all HR Leaders interviewed was very high with nuances of differentiations.

When the interviewed HR Leaders conceptualized their career lives as tasks of redemption, marking a transition in their life narrative from an emotionally negative scene to a positive outcome about the self (McAdams & McLean, 2013), they sustained the confidence that setbacks would lead to a long-term commitment to transforming organizations into better places. They made a positive transformation out of the critical moment.

When interviewed HR Leaders narrated a high protagonist role to create change in their own lives and those of others, with demonstrations of self-

mastery, action orientation, and empowerment, they were behaving like key agents in managing changes (McAdams & McLean, 2013).

In situations when interviewed HR Leaders were able to find positive meanings in their narratives, particularly with regards to how they overcame challenging situations, they turned challenging critical moments into positive turning points (McAdams & McLean, 2013).

There were moments in all narratives of emotionally distressing or traumatic experiences that are very meaningful on a personal level. During those moments, they realized the importance of choosing an authentic way of living (McAdams & McLean, 2013).

In moments of the narratives, the tipping point seemed to come from more banal events. Regardless of whether the critical incident was a big or banal event, it resulted in a moment when all the pieces fell into place and triggered a process that culminated with the realization of the patterns of thinking and behaving that had commanded their lives, and that those patterns can and should be constantly challenged and reviewed. Based on the narratives, after critical moments, the interviewees were ready to look at their lives in a different light and pursue a more constructive and peaceful way of life. They built a life with greater purpose (Kets de Vries, 2011b). Reading in between the lines of these narratives also revealed that those moments existed only when they were ready for it. Whether small or great, tipping points occurred after a specific sequence that started with frustration — a feeling that something in life was missing. They might have seemed happy with most of the regular aspects of their lives until those critical moments came; however, inside, they had a feeling of emptiness — a sense that something should be done differently.

As captured in the interviews with HR Leaders, their critical moments and moments of organizational transformation were connected to such a large extent that the effects on their own lives were substantial.

The critical incident, which worked as an awakener for the need to understand the feeling of emptiness, was more a culmination of insights that they had accumulated along the way. Apart from the visible dramatic event, incidents came out of periods of reflection and preparation that led to the formation of new cognitive, emotive, and behavioral ways of being. Regardless of whether it is a critical moment or a series of small everyday emotions that are negative or difficult, the change was triggered if the HR Leader experiencing this situation was already concerned about where he/she is. The moment of truth arose when HR Leaders were ready to confront the situation and overcome the defense mechanisms that were holding them back. These moments were normally followed by a period of silence and inner reflection before one was able to achieve the new stage. Critical incidents call attention to problems that have existed and precipitate moments of discovery (Ketd De Vries, 2011b).

HR Leaders as Adaptive Leaders

Interviewed HR Leaders recognized that after understanding and overcoming the critical moments, they had increased transformational capability for people inside organizations and for organizations. Interviewed HR Leaders said they entered the HR profession as part of their journey or desire to become an agent of change and support the humanization of organizations. However, they believe they really became more qualified to take the accountability for change after going through the experience of these critical moments. All interviewees asserted that they developed their clinical lens abilities in tandem with their careers, which bolstered their impact on their respective organizations. In fact, this is how they had made meaning out of their work life experience.

The interviewees' capacity to respond successfully to business and life challenges — critical moments in their lives — was related to their capacity to orchestrate a context for themselves, which moved them through losses to a new place, wisely taking with them the best from their history. They were compelled to respond like adaptive leaders (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009). As Heifetz et al. (2009) explained, such moments challenge individuals' "investment in relationships, competencies, and identity. They required a

modification of the stories they have been telling themselves and the rest of the world about what they believe in, stand for, and represent” (p. 11). As adaptive leaders, they succeed because of their ability to “distinguish the DNA that is essential to conserve from the DNA that must be discarded and then innovating to create.” (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 11) They were able to adopt an experimental mindset that opened them up to learning so that they could move to a new level of dealing with their lives. Being adaptive involves adhering to an iterative process of observing events and patterns, interpreting and formulating various hypotheses, and then designing interventions to address the adaptive challenge (Heifetz et al., 2009). Therefore, the HR Leader who is capable of being adaptive is in constant self-reflection: they apply their diagnostic skills to themselves by continuously analyzing what is happening within them and how their ways of behaving are impacting the entire system. Successful HR Leaders know the multiple roles they play in organizations. They become adaptive leaders. As adaptive leaders, they need to overcome resistance in order to implement clinical coaching approaches. They need to overcome resistance that comes from the fact that business leaders in organizations are usually more comfortable with interventions based on consulting products that promise quick fixes with strategies focused on rational factors. In contrast, interventions based on clinical coaching concepts typically engender resistance. HR Leaders with clinical coaching expertise level the strategic partnership at a superior stage, overcoming the resistance from business leaders, thus contributing to transforming organizations.

Clinical Coaching Lens

In fact, interviewed HR Leaders had a strong opinion that a clinical coaching lens is what can propel an organization through an authentic transformation that leverages the organization and business to another superior baseline of performance. They believe the resistance of business leaders to clinical coaching approaches should be overcome in order to make it possible for organizations to achieve the triple bottom line of generating superior profits, developing people, and supporting the sustainability of the planet.

Although HR Leaders are not the only ones who understand the value of the clinical coaching approach, in the organizations of interviewed HR Leaders, they were often the ones to inoculate the transformation virus for the benefit of the business in the long run. It is valuing the application of clinical coaching that enabled the HR Leader to intervene at the highest level.

Interviewed HR Leaders were open to accepting clinical coaching methodologies and could perform a critical role in building a coaching environment within organizations “where the behaviors and practices needed for continuous learning, the exchange of both explicit and tacit knowledge, reciprocal coaching, and self-leadership development are actively encouraged and facilitated. It supports formal but also informal open exchanges of information and knowledge; individuals feel free to discuss challenges, concerns, and evaluate appropriate actions. A coaching culture contributes to a sense of mutual ownership, better networking, more effective leadership practices and higher commitment, creating better results across the organization.” (Kets De Vries 2008, p. 8) This outcome can only be achieved if the coaching culture is linked to the business strategy and if the executive leadership team champions the change. This was the opportunity for the interviewed HR Leaders to encourage a clinical perspective to create genuine organizational transformations.

Interviewed HR leaders pointed out the need for balancing the use of tools that give some structure and the use of clinical coaching. They say a careful professional approach is needed to address the reasons underlying resistances executive leaders may have to clinical coaching approaches. HR Leaders with the understanding of clinical concepts know that the demand business leaders have for tools sometimes are a defense, while sometimes they are not. A toll can be of help and used transitionally to get meaningful data, decrease anxieties, and open up the avenue for clinical coaching.

The adoption of the clinical approach is not a task that one can start and program when to check off. Once started, it is important to know it takes time to

address objectives. In these occasions, interviewed HR Leaders had applied a pedagogical step to explain and help the understanding of the advantages and the results of a clinical coaching methodology. Explanations are along the lines that using a clinical coaching approach is different from accomplishing a task and using tools to fix issues and that the employment of clinical coaching skills is about building healthy environments where people speak up fully and listen actively, fostering quality conversations.

Interviewed HR Leaders are all in agreement that clinical coaching interventions suffer also from being considered valid for those who demand methods for measuring bottom line contributions of such interventions as all other types of investments on people and organization development. The importance of investing in people and organizations is the impact on organizational health, and as a consequence, its impact on organizational performance. Conventional metrics such as turnover and absenteeism, the amount of time needed to fill positions, and hours of training have limitations in capturing the impact on bottom line results and do not predict organizational performance (Bassi & McMurrer, 2007).

A point presented in the interviews with HR Leaders regarding the adoption of a clinical coaching approach is a complement and cannot erase the role of the strategic partner. In addition to the clinical approach capability, interviewed HR Leaders were much aligned that HR Leaders should also possess, and retain, the capability of a strategic partner. If HR Leaders expect to be a strategic partner, they must remain adept at showing how HR practices can contribute to business results. While there is no shortcut or one approach to building change capabilities, the profile of a strategic change leader includes the following characteristics, as described by Burkett (2015):

- Understands the complexities of change;
- Shows the business acumen to analyze the context of change;
- Demonstrates the ability to assess, manage, and take risks;
- Displays sensitivity to the impact of change;
- Actively recruits, develops, and rewards change capability;

- Fosters adaptability and customer-centric responsiveness; and
- Possesses the ability to measure the business impact of change projects

Clinical coaching skills can serve as an invaluable complement to the aforementioned qualities. Therefore, an HR Leader with clinical coaching skills who plays the role of a strategic partner is capable of contributing to organizational health and exerting a positive impact on business results. An improvement in organizational health will lead to the increase of interconnections between employees, the organization, and other stakeholders.

When HR Leaders are open to approaching people and organizational development with a clinical paradigm, they will contribute to achieving organizational health, which will in turn bolster business performance. As Kets de Vries (2011) described in his book, *Reflections on Groups and Organizations: On the Couch with Manfred Kets de Vries*, healthy individuals do not just operate at full capacity; rather, they have developed a stable sense of identity. They typically possess a positive view of the world and a strong sense of self-efficacy and trust in their capabilities to deal with the circumstances that impact their own lives. They cope well with anxiety; thus, they do not lose control easily and take impulsive actions. Moreover, they do not mindlessly conform to all situations. They display the capacity for self-observation and self-analysis and invest time in self-reflection processes.

In the additional interviews with 4 of the HR Leaders of the sample, it became clear that for an HR Leader to succeed when applying a clinical coaching lens, they have to understand and practice the importance of fair processes, pose questions to obtain genuine answers in a free manner, hold back to provide a space of reflection, and display the skills of a participant observer. Moreover, they have to reflect through metalizing (cognitive skills) and empathizing (feeling and cognitive skills). They believe that, to be effective, HR leaders have to exercise impulse control and self-awareness, using reality testing to forge and build collaborative relationships that make others feel understood and to utilize

motivational interviews to explore and resolve ambivalences. In order to do so, they must employ deep listening skills and demonstrate the awareness of vulnerability as the birthplace of creativity and connection. In addition, they need to build transitional spaces, meaningful spaces for people interaction. Furthermore, they understand multi-party management, keeping the whole in mind and understanding that no part alone can build a solution and no part alone can destroy everything. They are aware that the ideal solution depends on everyone. Hence, it is important for HR Leaders to lead collaboration processes to educate others about multi-party complexity and ensure that challenges, risks, and difficulties are always shared openly and publicly. It is important that they engage in self-exploration, display great self-awareness, and connect meanings. They have to be qualified and capable of adapting to situations, i.e. knowing when to give answers, ask questions, and promote the collective quest for answers.

Multi-party Management

Another point they raised is that HR Leaders are very much involved in ensuring effective multi-party management, starting with getting all leaders to jointly agree upon a shared sense of purpose and then having all of them take responsibility for the future direction of the organizational transformation (Gray, 1989). It is important that a transformational process has win-win dynamics; therefore, roles, rules, and procedures should be defined upfront and understood to create cohesion. Mutual trust is key to steering the process of organizational change (Hirschhorn, 1999), as well as educating all stakeholders about multi-party complexity, managing emotions throughout the process, and defining procedures for sharing not only positions, but also difficulties and ambivalences, in the board meeting room. To ensure full alignment among top executive team members, the team has to be predominant over each leader's self-definition and needs (Turquet, 1975). It must also take into account a realistic appreciation of human functioning and the non-rational dimension of organizational life (Krantz, 2010). The organization's members should be aware of the value of paying attention to individual differences in leadership styles so that interdependence is appreciated. They need to create a culture of mutual

support and trust, as well as reduce stress and conflict, so as to generate creative solutions (Kets De Vries, 2007). Essentially, the conditions for fostering a collaborative environment are valuing diversity, granting people the freedom to behave emotionally in congruence with the value of diversity, and jointly setting rules in a way that enables every team member to feel some control over the developments of the organizational changes (Vansina & Taillieu, 1997). This process requires the leaders to evolve from exercising authority with control towards containment. As such, leaders perceive their interactions with their teams as between individuals, rather than a meeting with mere subordinates and technical people (Hirschhorn & Gilmore, 1992). It is the ecosystem for HR Leaders to lead transitions.

Organizational Transformation and HR Leaders

Holding this role of championing organization transformation endows HR Leaders with a sense of importance and possibly fulfills their fantasies of power. However, for the HR Leaders interviewed, the explicit desire is related to their capability to help the next understand his/her value proposition within the organization, bring meaning to him/her, and thus, help him/her decipher his/her riddle of the Sphinx. In this sense, HR Leaders take on the role of a symbolic leader as Long (2010) stated in *Images of Leadership*. HR Leaders will only be successful if they can capture the desire of the organization's members and bring meaning to them. Through the cognitive and emotional unfolding of purposes and provision of meaning for an organization's member, HR Leaders can supply that which is fundamental for successful organizational changes.

Managing change and organizational transformations are clearly a universal trend that poses a critical challenge for HR Leaders. Pressures for change are real and organizations are looking for leadership from HR Leaders. They have a responsibility to heed the call by helping leaders gain the confidence, capabilities, and insights needed to thrive amidst the complexities of a fast-paced global marketplace. HR Leaders have a responsibility to step up and embrace the role as agents of change. It is only by transforming their own skills and capabilities can HR Leaders take bigger leaps into the future and deliver on

the promise and opportunity of dynamic change (Ulrich, Schiemann, and Sartain, 2015).

Another point that the interviewed HR Leaders brought is related to their role in taking care of the quality of the working environment. A key role for HR Leaders during moments of organizational transformations is associated with the extent that they are capable of performing as the containers that de-stress the contained. This capability depends on the degree to which the HR Leaders are able to maintain a relatively mature stance themselves (Obhozer, 1996). It is a process that leads HR Leaders to exercise authority through the containment of conflicts and anxieties that may disrupt systems and processes. They do so by interacting with individuals and endeavoring to deal with frustrating and difficult personal relationships through the diagnosis of why they have gone wrong (Hirschhorn & Gilmore, 1992).

HR Leaders should build an environment that provides cohesion, thus enabling the executive team and people to focus on core issues collectively. This environment is critical for adaptive work that requires safe structures for people to express and discuss different perspectives, values, and ideas with regard to the challenge, mainly those related to change. Some elements that can strengthen cohesion within the context include: shared purposes, values, work history, and language, processes and structures, authority figures, meeting ground rules, and even a comfortable meeting room (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009).

In the narratives of interviewees, the way HR Leaders dealt with political games inside organizations was critical for them to sustain the organizations during transitions. HR Leaders have multiple and conflicting loyalties and allegiances that emerge when they are trying to lead an organization through change. HR Leaders must know their own default settings that revolve around loyalties, personal triggers, and inventory of methods for leading change to ensure that they have the liberty to respond in creative and valuable ways. Knowing their system also means knowing the various roles they play in their organization.

Their behavior in these roles is largely determined by the context of each situation. Knowing the higher purpose is a critical element in understanding their selves as part of a system. Understanding their purpose puts everything in a broader context, which will sustain them through a difficult path. Understanding their purpose gives meaning and focus beyond ambition. In this circumstance, an HR Leader needs to create a personal holding environment for him/herself in order to have time and space for renewal and reflection (Heifetz et al., 2009).

In sum, an HR Leader with clinical coaching skills can help move organizations into a new era. Today's organizations are entering an era whereby many of the current practices are no longer capable of producing sustainable growth. In these fluid, turbulent, and uncommon times, characterized by extreme political, economic, and environmental interdependence, there is a need to find effective ways to cooperate and build a sustainable world. In this world, all stakeholders have a legitimate stake in the performance of the organizations. To achieve organization and business objectives, business leaders should be developed and motivated to focus on ethics, employee well-being, sustainability, and social responsibility, along with the more conventional aims of profitability, revenue growth, and excellence in performance (Fry & Slocum Jr., 2008).

Transforming organizations is about the ability to use the clinical lens to advance organizations and their stakeholders towards a new model that rescues the excellence of the human.

Limitations

Critical moments were determinant for this selected group of interviewees to really start using a clinical lens in a deeper and broader way. This group was selected exactly for their reputations as successful HR Leaders and that have experienced nontraditional ways of transforming organizations. The list of interviewees reflects, therefore, a very specific sample, and this may be a reason for the similarity of all interviews.

Additionally, for the past 10 years, the economic scenario in the country of the interviewees has been of growth, which offers a positive environment for experimentation and possibly some level of acceptance for a greater use of the clinical lens may be attributed to this positive circumstance as well.

Future research

A possible interesting research would be to investigate the connections of how an HR Leader chooses to execute his/her role with his/her Core Conflict Relationship Theme – CCRT (Book 1997). In addition, it would also be interesting to include its connections with the CCRT of the superior of the HR Leader.

Conducting similar research and interviews with younger HR professionals, who are in other career and life cycles, may bring additional information on what triggers, if it triggers, the valuing of a clinical coaching approach.

Deeper discussion on ethical issues concerning the exercise by the HR Leader of a clinical coaching approach may be valid. This discussion is very pertinent given the increased popularity and expanded reach of coaching training programs as an alternative career path for many people.

Conclusion

What the process of deciphering the riddles of life presents us is representative of our own development and growth. In the organizational world, where organizations occupy a central place in many people's lives, designing and building new forms of organizations are pivotal in transforming the world. HR Leaders who adopt a clinical coaching approach has the potential to transform the environment and foster the creation of a context of generative connections between the leadership team members within organizations.

There exists no leader who will not agree that people are their most important "asset", that a culture of talent development is critical for business success, and that feedback is a very important tool. Nonetheless, based on internal surveys

and performance reviews, effective people development, quality feedback, and coaching remain a challenge and are rarely prioritized.

Having the HR Leader operate as the corporate conscience that raises the tough questions regarding people and culture issues and drives leadership towards consistent behavior is pivotal in furthering the development of the business. It is about building a coaching organization as described by Kets De Vries (2008): "A coaching organization creates an environment where the behaviors and practices needed for continuous learning, the exchange of both explicit and tacit knowledge, reciprocal coaching, and self-leadership development are actively encouraged and facilitated. It supports formal communication but also informal open exchanges of information and knowledge; individuals feel free to discuss challenges, concerns and evaluate appropriate actions. A coaching culture contributes to a sense of mutual ownership, better networking, more effective leadership practices and higher commitment, creating better results across the organization" (p. 8).

HR Leaders may contribute to people and organizational growth as much as their clinical coaching capability. A clinical coaching approach is the differential for a HR Strategic Partner to effectively contribute to overall business results. HR Leaders contribute to results by increasing the organization's value, expanding the interconnections of its people, and fulfilling the expectations of both the organization and its stakeholders.

HR Leaders have the potential and is better positioned to be transformational agents given their expected functions and expectations of an organization's members. Other leaders of the organization should also step up to organizational transformation processes. When the top leader of the organization does so, the strength to create the new reaches its maximum.

People in organizations may have what they need to engage and live through frequent organizational changes if they have a sense of purpose and move from operating in survival mode to actively seeking fulfillment. Situations of profound

organizational changes and transformations provide opportunities for HR Leaders to step up, intervene, and play a meaningful leadership role. As observed in the interviews with HR Leaders, adopting such a role would in turn affect the HR Leaders' behavior: "role is the link between the individual and the organization" (Borwick, 2006, p. 7). In fact, when HR leaders step into the organization transformation role, they change themselves and their behavior. Essentially, by changing the role they play, they change their behavior, as explained by Bazalgette (2011): "role is inextricably related to behavior and action: it can be continuously examined in a dynamic and iterative process of finding, making and taking a role" (p. 16). "What is critical here is that anyone who finds, makes and takes their role on the basis of their perception of contributing to the purpose of the system and is willing to be held accountable for what they do is offering leadership" (Bazalgette, 2011, p. 16).

The distinguishing characteristics of anyone in a leadership position is the ability to understand oneself and others, human behavior and the hidden dynamics of organizations, and what goes on below the surface within oneself and others, so as to create a fit between people, organizations, and planet. An HR Leader with clinical coaching knowledge should be conscious of a limitation to apply it in a strict sense, and aware of the need to gain the support from experts outside the organization, whenever needed. However, being an insider with clinical coaching knowledge and skills, the HR Leader is in a privileged position to influence the choice of strategy and foster an ecosystem where people are not only seen as technical experts with instrumental capabilities, but also as human beings in search of meaning and their pursuit of truth.

It is all about rescuing the excellence of the human.

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