



SUCCESS VS. WISDOM

PHENOMENOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL PRACTICE

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PROGRAM OUTLINE

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1. INTRODUCTION

Four years ago, an urgent call from an obviously stressed CEO thrust me unexpectedly into the world of high stakes executive coaching.

“You’ve got to help me,” began the CEO. “We have an increasingly critical function that’s unraveling, and I have an individual who’s a natural to lead this function and be one of my direct reports. Only problem is if I promote this guy maybe half of my key people will leave. No one wants to work with him. He throws everybody under the bus, beats them up with their own data, and calls people out for being stupid. But I have no other options. So Dr. Les you’ve got six weeks to fix him so I can make the announcement at our quarterly meeting. And by the way I haven’t said anything to this guy yet, but I’m sure he’ll call your office in the morning.”

Everything we do starts with assessment. So when the guy, whom we’ll name Mr. T, called in, he was invited online to complete two personal style questionnaires and two critical thinking measures. We then sat in his office to share the results and set some strategy for our six week marathon. But the person I met seemed very unlikely to engage in the ruthless behaviors described by the CEO. True, Mr. T was a bit rough around the edges, but he revealed himself to be warm, a bit humorous and truly concerned about the development and well being of his current team. I wondered how he was experiencing his world in a way that triggered such nastiness. The answer came almost immediately. Mr. T’s scores on our two very challenging measures of critical thinking were at the upper 90th%iles for our managerial professional population; quite a surprise since he had not had much formal education beyond high school. When he asked me to explain what scores that high really meant, I pointed out that his scores occurred in the general population about one time in a thousand, and since he was that one, he might have to meet almost two thousand people to find someone else who had the same extremely high level of critical thinking that he possessed.

Silence for a long moment and then in a very quiet voice, “You mean they really don’t get it the way I do?”

I always thought my capabilities were the same as most people, and that others were just being lazy or mean when they didn’t reach the right conclusions in a timely manner.” Mr. T’s entire way of being with others in the world had dramatically transformed in an instant.

The next weeks were a whirlwind of activity as we thought through together how he was perceived by key stakeholders and what he would have to do to change those views. We devised a grand tour around the United States, visiting each stakeholder to explore their situation and their needs and inviting them to explain how Mr. T could best help them meet their objectives. Although I never labeled the activity as such, what I was modeling for and rehearsing with Mr. T was of course phenomenology, the intentional relational awareness of how others in the organization believed they were positioned for success. At the end of the six weeks, when the CEO made the announcement of Mr. T’s promotion, there were cheers not only from the leadership team but also from most of the key people whom the CEO had feared would leave. “We can’t wait to have you as a boss!” rang out loudly from stakeholders who had flown in for the event. Two years later Mr. T led a team that brought in the organization’s largest ever contract, turning the bottom line from deep red to a very comfortable black.

A presentation on the phenomenological foundations of psychological practice may seem incongruous coming from a consultancy known for its depth of expertise in psychometrics. Our reputation in psychometrics comes primarily from the fact that I studied with Oscar Buros at a time when “Tests in Print” and “Mental Measurements Yearbook” existed in their formative stages as thousands of index cards in hundreds of shoe boxes in Professor Buros’ Highland Park home.

What is less well known is that after completing my Ph.D. at Rutgers, I went on to Duquesne University for post-doctoral studies in Existential Phenomenological Psychology. And the services our current clients most applaud all are grounded by this phenomenological perspective.



2. PSYCHOLOGISTS' HISTORICAL DISDAIN FOR PHILOSOPHY

But today's journey actually begins a decade before my post-doctoral studies at Duquesne. My undergraduate program at Rutgers was specially designed so that I could include pre-seminary coursework one day each week at Hebrew Union College in New York City. And my own doubts about the relevance of philosophy to psychology were born during that time. One day in 1958 there was an announcement that Martin Buber, the renowned existential philosopher, was to give an evening lecture at Hebrew Union College. His topic: "Communication".

I was crushed when I realized that my parochial school teaching schedule wouldn't allow me time to return to New York for the evening lecture. So the next day, back at Hebrew Union, I eagerly sought out my most erudite classmate, David, for a chronicle of what I had missed. "Yes", said David, "Martin Buber lectured for two and a half hours on 'Communication' - and no one understood a word he said!"

Many years later I learned that doubts about or even outright disdain for philosophy were widespread among psychologists and psychiatrists. In "The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud" Ernest Jones, his biographer tells us that Freud always had a strong but ambivalent interest in philosophy; he distrusted and even feared it. Freud felt that his own potential proclivity for philosophy "needed to be sternly checked and for that purpose he chose the most effective agency – scientific discipline."

And since the term phenomenology frequently was used and abused in conjunction with other often hyphenated elements that clearly were part of the philosophical enterprise, it's not surprising that psychologists and psychiatrists alike failed at first to notice its merit as a foundational scientific method.

3. PHENOMENOLOGY AS FOUNDATIONAL SCIENTIFIC METHOD

Phenomenology as a foundational scientific method does indeed have its roots in philosophy. In fact the groundwork for phenomenology and several other advances in scientific thinking was laid by Kierkegaard who posited that truth is relational. For Kierkegaard the person's relationship to a fact or situation is what is significant for that person. The question of whether or not that fact or situation is objectively true occurs on a different level. This statement of truth as relational radically changed the nature of science. It made possible the approach of Bohr and Heisenberg who said the "ideal of a science which is completely independent of man is an illusion". What Kierkegaard had done was to put an end to the subject-object split in Western thought.

Henri Ellenberger whose chapter, "A Clinical Introduction to Psychiatric Phenomenology and Existential Analysis" in the 1958 Rollo May edited book, "Existence" is as close as you will find to "Phenomenology for Dummies" describes the impetus for phenomenology as coming from both psychology and psychiatry as these disciplines recognized that traditional frames of reference were no longer adequate for the exploration of psychopathological conditions.

Ellenberger goes on to explain that phenomenology as conceptualized by Husserl was seen as the basic methodology that could provide a firm foundation for a new psychology. In Ellenberger's words:

"In the presence of a phenomenon (whether it be an external object or a state of mind), the phenomenologist uses an absolutely unbiased approach; he observes phenomena as they manifest themselves and only as they manifest themselves. This observation is accomplished by means of an operation of the mind which Husserl called the epoche, or 'psychological-phenomenological reduction.' The observer 'puts the world between brackets,' i.e., he excludes from his mind not only any judgment of value about the phenomena but also any affirmation whatever concerning their cause and background; he even strives to exclude the



distinction of subject and object and any affirmation about the existence of the object and of the observing subject. With this method observation is greatly enhanced: the less apparent elements of phenomena manifest themselves with increasing richness and variety, with finer gradations of clarity and obscurity, and eventually previously unnoticed structures of phenomena may become apparent.”

In the 1967 Maurice Natanson edited “Alfred Schutz Collected Papers Volume One The Problem of Social Reality” Schutz explores the psychological-phenomenological reduction in his paper entitled, “Some Leading Concepts of Phenomenology”. Schutz explains what he believes is required by this reduction:

“Not only our practical knowledge of the world but also the propositions of all the sciences dealing with the existence of the world, all natural and social sciences, psychology, logic and even geometry – all have to be brought within the brackets. This means that none of their truths, tested or not by experiences or proofs within the mundane sphere, can be taken over in the reduced sphere without critical examination. And even more – I, the human being, am also, as a psycho-physiological unit, an element of this world that has to be bracketed.”

Of course one might wonder at the possibility that anyone could entirely remove themselves, their history, their biases, their theoretical contexts from their engagement with the phenomena being observed, especially when those phenomena are another’s way of being in the world. And indeed Merleau-Ponty in his “Phenomenology of Perception” tells us that “the greatest teaching of reduction is the impossibility of a complete reduction.” For Merleau-Ponty, Husserl’s guidance on the conduct of the phenomenological reduction can no more be obeyed in its entirety than can the guidance given in the classic psychology experiment to undergraduate volunteers, “Remember, during the next five minutes you are not to think about white elephants. Got that? No thoughts about white elephants.”

In practical terms what’s really happening when I use the phenomenological method is that not only am I

engaging the other in a fully attending, completely open manner, I’m also paying special attention to my own state of consciousness as I engage. Client feedback tells me that I’m actually pretty good at this fully attending open engagement. Last summer when visiting an HR executive with whom I interact primarily on the phone, she opened our face to face conversation by saying, “Les, whenever I’m talking to you I have the very real sense that I’m the most important person in your world.”

The part of the reduction I personally find most challenging is the bracketing of my gut reactions when I’m engaging employment candidates whom I sense might be extremely successful or extremely unsuccessful on the job for which they’re being considered. When I sense an individual who might be extremely successful, I find myself subtly reshaping what they share in order to improve their chances of being hired. When I sense an individual who might be extremely unsuccessful, I find myself getting angry at them for wasting my time and my client’s money applying for something at which they have, at least in my view at that moment, no chance of performing with even a modicum of effectiveness.

In psychological practice the aim of phenomenological analysis is the reconstruction of the inner world of experience of an individual with whom we are engaged. Understanding how that individual is being in their world can radically alter how the psychologist approaches such activities as interpreting psychometrics, writing assessment reports, and coaching individuals. In the three sections that follow we’ll explore how phenomenology might be applied to each of these elements of psychological practice.

4. THE ARGUMENT FOR A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH TO PSYCHOMETRICS

Almost every assessment of personality or personal style has one or more indices designed to measure the validity of the individual’s responses. These indices carry such differing names as Lie Scale, Fake Good, Positive Impression, and Social Desirability, but all are



designed to capture response patterns that are believed to distort the picture of who the individual truly is. In psychometric terms, these indices are attempts to identify and/or correct for the individual's non-veridical pattern of responding. These indices assume that this response pattern is error variance, obscuring the true picture of the individual.

Phenomenologists would argue that the treatment of an individual's style of responding as error variance is misguided. The individual's pattern of responding is central to how that person engages with their world and therefore is not error variance at all, but true variance that needs to be examined and understood.

Over the years we've joined the phenomenologists in departing from the accepted view of impression management as error variance. And we've demonstrated very conclusively that at least on a widely used measure of work-related personal style, the OPQ, and probably on the Emotional Quotient Inventory as well, impression management is definitely true variance. On the normative version of the OPQ we've identified an Impression Management Pattern anchored by an elevated score on the Social Desirability Index, the index that OPQ's publishers warn is a signal of the presence of error variance. In fact the publishers aggressively market ipsative and item response theory versions of OPQ designed to eliminate or at least control impression management. But these versions that claim to eliminate or control impression management actually reduce true variance and ultimately the limits of validity that can be obtained with the OPQ assessment, demonstrating that indeed the dreaded impression management actually contributes to true variance!

Here's our take on the Impression Management Pattern in the OPQ: This pattern signals Impression Management because approximately 80% of respondents who display this pattern fail to deliver the outstanding performance suggested by their scores on the remaining OPQ scales. Rarely are these individuals consciously lying or intending to fake their OPQ responses, although a few do indeed try to fake at the suggestion of a recruiter or the instigation of a "savvy" family member or friend. Almost everyone in this 80% perceive themselves to be the individual they describe,

even though they are unlikely to deliver the behaviors that others would expect from someone with their OPQ scale score pattern and they typically have a long sequence of short tenure positions.

Their lack of success has produced no wisdom about the need to be more effective. Instead they remain convinced of their own potential and interview in an amazingly seductive manner that convinces others as well. They are poignant exemplars of Kierkegaard's position that their truth is in their relationship to themselves. The question of objective truth about their actual job performance and success exists on another plane.

What about the remaining 20% who manifest the Impression Management Pattern? Many are new to the workforce, fresh out of impressive schools where they were told they could accomplish anything, and not yet beaten up by the realities of the adult world. And increasingly they are growing up in a culture where everyone who plays gets a trophy, win or lose, and where parents hover and protect them from the need for reality testing. These young people also are not faking; they've really grown up to believe their own PR.

And, yes, there are a few genuine super stars displaying the Impression Management Pattern. These individuals are so competent and confident that they actually have a documented history of delivering outstanding results without breaking a sweat. And most often they're in the job market by no fault of their own. Typically their employer has downsized or gone out of business, or they are trailing an even better compensated spouse to a new community. If one of these rare folks should show up on your radar, don't let them get away.

5. THE CHALLENGE OF A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH TO REPORT WRITING

Dozens of books written on how psychological practitioners should go about their report writing responsibilities emphasize the need for objectivity



and professional distance. The reports produced in compliance with this guidance contain lots of data bites about the individual being described, but the actual experience of that individual in their lived world is strangely absent from the pages. Thus the typical report writing exercise is much like trying to describe your beloved pet canine by cataloging their breed characteristics.

Although Connie Fischer, a long time Duquesne University faculty member, uses the word phenomenology less than a half dozen times in her 1974 book, "Individualizing Psychological Assessment", her phenomenological stance is evident throughout the text. And nowhere is this stance more central to her work than in the section entitled "Individualized Report Writing".

Her paragraph on the focus of the individualized report guides the report writer to think in phenomenological terms:

"The individualized report focuses on life comportment as primary data, with test performance being presented as specialized instances of such comportment. The word 'comportment' is purposely used to evoke the Latin and French meanings: the way one carries one's self. The idea is to evoke the simultaneously actional, decisional, stylistic and habitual aspects of 'behavior'. The report represents the individual through selected examples of experience and action taken both from test performance and from his or her daily life. The examples are chosen to evoke for readers the assessor's sense of both how the individual experienced those situations and how the individual acted."

Fischer continues her guidance on taking a phenomenological perspective by making three critical points:

"I try to describe the client in motion rather than statically, so the reader will be attuned to the ways the person moves through and shapes and is shaped by his or her environment."

"The (report) reader's own past experience is called into play through the vividness of the description and

through the inclusion of my own presence as assessor and as a necessarily autobiographically rooted and involved observer. Objectivity, in its broader and more basic sense, is served. The reader is aware that no description is independent of the observers, and that we are all referring to the same publicly observable events while respecting the variability-within-generality found in our 'participant observations.'"

"Personality, ability and other constructs are not allowed to become more real than the situated, complex interpersonal events that comprise the report."

Let's look now at how Fischer's principles for conducting individualized psychological assessment inform the writing of reports that are part of our Career Insight Analysis executive assessment process. A quick glance at a Career Insight Analysis report outline reveals section headings virtually interchangeable with those of many other consultancies engaged in executive assessment.

Reason for Evaluation

Strengths

Developmental Opportunities

Biodata

Learning and Problem Solving

Special Skills and Abilities

Job Relevant Competencies

Work Style

Interpersonal Style

Organizational Roles

Feelings and Emotions

Summary

Development Recommendations

But the way the sections are written clearly reflect the phenomenological process recommended by Fischer. Following are two excerpts from the report of a fictional individual synthesized from people who have recently been through our assessment process:

WORK STYLE: Ms. X called several days ahead of the assessment interview to get detailed directions to our office and to inquire about appropriate attire. On the day of the interview she arrived quite early and asked if she could use the pad she had brought to take notes



during the feedback session. Her assessment data suggested an individual who typically engaged in long range planning and made attention to detail a high priority.

INTERPERSONAL STYLE: Ms. X appeared completely engaged throughout the interview process. In fact for the most part she was obviously enjoying the experience, and she expressed appreciation for the self-reflection opportunities provided by the interview questions. At no time did she exhibit any sign of discomfort and anxiety; instead she was relaxed and often animated in her descriptions of her life experiences and their impact. Her assessment data suggested an individual who had a high level of social confidence that enabled her to quickly build a rapport and comfortably navigate even through unfamiliar social situations.

While the assessment and report writing process described by Fischer clearly is rooted in phenomenology, she positions the role of the participant assessor somewhat differently than do others who take a phenomenological approach. In Fischer's view the assessor is autobiographically rooted and makes no attempt to bracket who they are, because in Fischer's words, "The assessor uses his or her own life as an assessment instrument."

In this statement Fischer makes explicit what most of us know and view as our own dirty little secret: assessors benchmark individuals based on the depth and breadth of the assessor's own experience. Fischer not only sees nothing devious or inappropriate in this benchmarking, she can't imagine how an assessor could perform without using their autobiography as an instrument for assessment.

The implications of viewing the assessor's life as an assessment instrument are more profound than one might at first imagine. Perhaps the most fascinating implication for the validity of the assessment process is that the longer and wider the life experience accumulated by an assessor, the more effective they will be as an assessment instrument. And of course individuals who have truly evolved from the length and breadth of their experience are said to have

obtained wisdom. Is accumulated wisdom, then, a prerequisite for assessor success?

I've engaged in thousands of individual assessments over more than four decades, and indeed my experience of the people I see now is illuminated in ways that would have been impossible when I was assessing earlier in my career. And how vividly I remember 1969 and the first employment assessments for which I was given total responsibility. I became so intensely stressed that a lump actually formed at the base of my spine!

So, is wisdom a prerequisite for assessor success? If true, then what is to be made of the legions of newly minted Ph.D.'s who are launched into assessment assignments by consultancies all over the globe?

Let's flip this argument on its side for a moment. In I/O psychology, more often than not, assessments have to do with the evaluation of an individual's actual or potential success. Rarely is the I/O psychologist asked to assess an individual's wisdom, and not surprisingly most traditional assessment processes are not designed to reveal wisdom. But what happens when the assessor really does engage the individual phenomenologically? If indeed the individual possesses wisdom, it should reveal itself in a manner that resonates in some way with the assessor's own autobiography. The impact of such a wisdom resonance dwarf's anything the assessor might uncover about the individual's actual or potential success.

Here's an example of the game-changing magnitude of impact that can occur when wisdom is uncovered: A publicly traded company known for its white male, fraternity boy culture began to see its historic growth rate subside. The revenue plateau was caused primarily by its competitors who cut prices dramatically as a result of sourcing product from Asian nations. And soon I was conducting assessments of candidates for a Director of International Sourcing position. Not surprisingly every one of these candidates fit the company's fraternity boy image, and not one of them had any real savvy about sourcing in Asia. After several weeks, a rather startling candidate showed up: a somewhat haphazardly dressed, out of



shape guy from New Jersey who had never graduated college. As I began to engage him in an exploration of how he was in his world, he shared that he really had two parallel modes of existence that he could live out either alternatively or simultaneously. Trained as a linguist by the U.S. military, he delighted in first visiting and then residing in each country whose language he had learned. By the time we met, he was fluent in Russian, Mandarin, Thai, Korean, Japanese and several other nearby languages. He had residences in New Jersey and Asia and was awake the appropriate working hours in both time zones. In fact he rarely slept. He had intimate knowledge of each country's customs, preferred ways of doing business and cultural etiquette. And he really was welcomed by royalty in several of the Asian states he frequented. Here indeed was an individual with the wisdom to act prudently on behalf of my client company.

My challenge was to get the CEO to take seriously a candidate who deviated so far from the company's stereotypic executive. I used the assessment report to recreate the candidate's world and wisdom as I understood it. And then in the Summary I wrote, "Do you and your organization have the maturity to benefit from what this candidate could bring to the role of Director of International Sourcing?" To my amazement the CEO immediately hired the candidate, and here's the game changing impact: After the candidate had been in the role only two and a half years, the company's annual report devoted an entire half page to the Asian sourcing initiative, identifying the individual by name and announcing that his personal efforts were now responsible for 40% of shareholder value!

6. THE INEVITABILITY OF A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH TO COACHING

Being one of the rare licensed psychologists who does not engage in a clinical practice can be bothersome at a cocktail party. So I'm always ready with my conversation-stopping reply when inevitably someone who has overheard that I'm a psychologist approaches and says, "Hey, heard you shrink people." And I answer, "Actually not, I prefer to expand them." Now how to

actualize that claim short of feeding someone a diet of beer and Krispy Kremes is a challenge to which I've given a lot of thought.

But isn't or perhaps shouldn't coaching be about expanding the individual, not fixing them? Actually I'm not even sure I remember how I first began to coach people. Certainly coaching was not part of my first three decades of practice. But somewhere in the past decade as coaching became ever more popular and coaches of dubious credential and capability began to hawk their services, I took on occasional coaching assignments within established client organizations.

The coaching adventure I described at the beginning of the presentation was done as a favor to the CEO, and I was delighted that it had a happy ending. But then with the big contract won by Mr. T, the company had money to invest in more systematic development, and the HR executive called me into her office. "We were very impressed with how you turned around Mr. T who today is second only to the CEO. We'd like you to launch a coaching program for ten to twelve people in the coming fiscal year. How soon can you get me a proposal outlining your coaching process and what it would cost?"

My coaching process? What coaching process? All I was doing was simply being there, or as Binswanger might say, being present in the relationship as the individual learns to live out their own potential. Rollo May in the introductory chapter of his edited book, "Existence" explores this phenomenon of presence in the therapeutic relationship. He writes "By presence we mean that the relationship of the therapist and patient is taken as a real one, the therapist being not merely a shadowy reflector but an alive human being who happens, at that hour, to be concerned not with his own problems but with understanding and experiencing so far as possible the being of the patient." May continues, "The therapist is what Socrates called the 'midwife' – completely real in being there, but being there with the specific purpose of helping the other person to bring to birth something from within himself."



What I needed was a similar statement about presence in the coaching relationship, a statement about how to be an expander. And thus in January 2009 the Assessment Technologies Group Coaching Credo was born.

ASSESSMENT TECHNOLOGIES GROUP COACHING CREDO

January 2009

- 1. An ATG coach guides development by being fully and authentically present to the individual and being fully committed to that individual's potential for career success.*
- 2. An ATG coach functions as a uniquely reflective capability who can shine light, change perspective and see more deeply as the individual engages with the coaching experience.*
- 3. An ATG coach endeavors to enter into the phenomenology of the individual while maintaining the capability of pulling back to an outside perspective in order to increase the individual's awareness.*
- 4. An ATG coach models and guides the individual's increasing self-awareness by making explicit the encounter between phenomenological engagement and outside perspectives.*
- 5. An ATG coach uses relevant assessments, surveys and interviews to aid in the identification of coaching needs and will not begin a coaching assignment until such data are available and fed back to create a mutual understanding of the individual's situation.*
- 6. An ATG coach recognizes and respects the boundaries that separate coaching from clinical, therapeutic activities and engages the individual only as a coach.*
- 7. An ATG coach works within a time-defined assignment designed to move the individual toward increasing self-sufficiency in situational awareness and interpersonal effectiveness.*

The ATG coaching process I created consists of several steps that on the surface appear unremarkable, and, like the section headings of our Career Insight Analysis reports, not particularly different from steps that might be proposed by other coaching organizations.

- > Coaching request
- > Candidate meets coach for overview of coaching process
- > Stakeholder rationale for coaching and goal setting interview
- > Online assessments
- > Self-report assessment feedback
- > 360 degree profilers identified
- > Online Benchmark 360 degree assessment
- > Benchmark 360 degree feedback
- > Development coaching dates (typically 16 hours over 4 months)
- > Online Accomplishment 360 degree assessment
- > Accomplishment 360 degree feedback
- > Goal attainment report to individual, stakeholder, requestor

But these steps are executed in accordance with our ATG Coaching Credo, making the phenomenological approach central to the coaching experience.

Now in 2010 ATG has a coaching process, a coaching credo, even a coaching pricing structure, and I'm comfortable marketing our consultancy as a coaching capability. Or at least I thought I was until last week when I was visiting with the unusually competent HR executive for a large healthcare system. We were talking about a talent hunt initiative that would involve the system's top executives when she warned me that getting these executive team members to engage in personal assessment and development activities would be a really tough sell. Two years ago the leadership team had contracted with a consultant of unknown pedigree for 360 degree assessment and coaching; the results were disastrous. The 360 feedbacks were devastatingly negative, and the coaching consisted of canned development recommendations taken directly from a self-development reference manual. What an unfortunate



example of a consultant treating clients as objects instead of engaging with them more authentically. Clearly this mundane referencing activity is not coaching. And we know also that therapy is not coaching. But do we really know what's in between resource referencing on the one hand and therapy on the other? It's one thing to set boundaries for what coaching is not; but it's very much another thing to say what coaching actually is.

Richard Boyatzis and Annie McKee in their book, "Resonant Leadership" provide this definition of coaching: "Coaching is helping others in their intentional change process. It's helping people engage their passion in pursuit of their dreams and aspirations." And Bob Lee when accepting the 2008 SPIM Award for Distinguished Psychologist in Management, defined coaching "as a helping practice that requires comfort with one's own history of striving, succeeding, and climbing back from reversals – making those life-lessons available to the client through the coach's belief in the possibilities of intentional growth." So there's some agreement that coaching is about enabling intentional growth and change. But what more can we say about what coaching is?

Lee's discussion of doing better coaching takes him right up to the brink of making the phenomenological reduction: "Doing coaching is based on agreeing that we each see the world through the filters of our own histories, identities and agendas. Good coaching begins with affirming the validity of individual perspectives. Better coaching requires being aware of the way the coach's filters create a systematic tilt to what is seen."

Lee's comments on coaching also channel Fischer's 1974 work on individualized assessment as he notes that "Being yourself as a coach has to do with being able to use yourself as the primary instrument of assessment and change."

Now I can construct a definition of coaching a phenomenologist can live with: Coaching is using yourself as an instrument to enable intentional growth and change in others.

But with this definition we are again faced with the question of the impact of the individual's experience, their accumulated wisdom, on their success as a coach. If wisdom is a prerequisite for assessor success, how much more critical is wisdom for the success of the coach? And the legions of newly minted Ph.D.'s launched into assessment assignments pale in comparison to the hoards of variously credentialed coaches running rampant in the marketplace.

What are we as a profession to do? Do we set some threshold of wisdom as a prerequisite for becoming a coach? And do we even have any research that indicates that the extent of a coach's wisdom actually is related to their degree of coaching success? And, oh, by the way, do we know what success in coaching or for that matter success in anything really looks like?

7. CAN WISDOM BE FOUND IN A PHENOMENOLOGY OF SUCCESS?

How do we know what the experience of success is like? If an individual tells us that they believe themselves to be successful, just what is it that provides that insight? It's questions like these that phenomenology can be most helpful in exploring.

When conducting an interview of a candidate for selection or promotion or engaging the first interview of a coaching assignment, I deploy a very structured set of questions. One of my favorite questions, "How do you tell how well you're doing?" sets the stage for conducting a phenomenology of success. Almost always the first set of responses will be metrics such as increasing sales by 20%, reducing waste by 5%, implementing a new process that saves \$40,000 a year or progress indices such as getting a raise, bonus, or promotion.

"That's how your organization let's you know what you've done for them. But how do you tell how well you're doing?" is my usual response. Often there's a next round of responding that goes something like this: we just bought a bigger house, my kids go to the



best private schools, I was able to give my spouse the dream vacation.

“That’s how your family measures what you’ve done for them. But how do you tell how well you’re doing?” After another round or two we finally start getting to how the person really does tell how well they’re doing. And it’s not about metrics, it’s about how they feel when they look into their psychological mirror.

“What is the experience of success like for you?” is a logical follow on question and the opener for the explication of how the individual is in their world when they identify themselves as having the experience of success.

Phenomenological explication doesn’t have to limit itself to the single case. Some phenomenologies, Adrian VanKaam’s anthropological phenomenology is a good example, actually build toward the typical or idealized case. So, we might ask a group of psychologists or of coaches to talk about what the experience of success is like for each individual and then look for communalities in the responses. Such a method could indeed lead us to understanding what success in coaching might be like for the coach. A parallel investigation would lead us to understanding what success in coaching might be like for the individual being coached. And dare we consider a comparison of the two sets of results?

Since our goal is the application of phenomenological method to actual practice, take a moment to write down what the experience of success is like for you. And perhaps later in our session you’d be willing to share how it is that you’re in your world when you identify yourself as having the experience of success.

8. HOW COULD A PHENOMENOLOGY OF WISDOM BE SUCCESSFUL?

There might be some wisdom to be gained from phenomenological explications of success, enabling us to re-ask the question of the relationship of wisdom to success in assessment or even more importantly to success in coaching. The bigger hurdle, however, would be determining what wisdom really is. How do you think that exercise would go?

It certainly would be fascinating to contemplate what people meant when they said that someone possessed wisdom. And methodologically the question seems a natural for phenomenological investigation. But could a phenomenology of wisdom be successful? I welcome your thoughts.

