
Rites of Passage: A Transformational Matrix for Developmental Coaching

White Paper

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Abstract

Since its mid 20th century beginnings, the modern field of coaching has sought recognition as an evidence-based profession, with its best practices being predominantly informed by contemporary Western scientific perspectives of human development. (Cox, 2018) However, in emphasizing materialism, analysis and linear logic, the Western empirical approach often overlooks other crucial factors, such as culture, spirituality and environment, that also shape identity and growth. (Mazzochi, 2006) Rites of passage are culturally-universal events for marking or facilitating significant life transitions that acknowledge these critical factors, while also foregrounding traditional wisdom, community support, and connection to the natural world. (van Gennep, 1960)

This paper argues that a rites of passage coaching model acknowledges the importance of all these areas to human development, and explores how this approach contributes to a more holistic developmental process. Additionally, it highlights how incorporating nature-based approaches and traditional wisdom into coaching fosters deeper connections to self, others and the environment, and generates a vital sense of place, purpose and inter-relatedness with all of life.

Keywords: coaching, rites of passage, ritual, environment, myth, developmental coaching

Introduction

Rites of passage are ceremonies or events marking or facilitating important transitional life stages, notably birth, puberty, marriage and death. Still widely practiced in unadulterated forms in many traditional cultures, versions of them still prevail in modern settings as witnessed in ceremonies such as the Jewish Bat Mitzvah and Mexican Quinceañera.

As both coaching and rites of passage serve the key purpose of facilitating important transitional life stages, particularly in terms of personal growth and development, it's proposed they lend themselves well to the comparisons made here.

Despite the many evidence-based models populating the contemporary human development purview, rites of passage remain somewhat unique in offering a transformational framework evidenced across all human societies and implemented as far back as records and memories appear to extend. They therefore grant us a language and framework that is as evidence-based, and close to culturally universal as one could be, for discussing human transition, change and development.

Additionally, Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory established that human learning, growth and development is also never a solitary affair. Our cognitive functions are significantly impacted upon and formed through interactions with those around us. (Vygotsky, 1978) Furthermore, Vygotsky demonstrated that growth, while influenced by community, cultural values and perceptions, is even more reliant on skilled mentor-type figures such as teachers, elders and guides. Similarly, van Gennep highlighted the crucial importance of the same roles within rites of passage (van Gennep, 1960), and it is proposed here to add the appropriately skilled coach to this list as well.

Rites of Passage and The Hero's Journey

Rites of passage have significant cultural correspondence with the mythic traditions, a point the renowned mythologist Joseph Campbell underscored in his 1949 classic *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. (Campbell, Cousineu, 2003) There Campbell aligned adult developmental change (primarily the search for personal meaning) with the universal cultural theme of a hero archetype and the always difficult voyage of self-discovery and personal enlightenment (Please note: while acknowledging that feminist writers have challenged Campbell's thinking on his meaning, the word "hero" here is viewed as a universal, heroic archetype regardless of gender.)

This monomythic journey is an almost universal cultural theme. Consider, as Campbell and those who have stood on his shoulders do, the commonalities among the heroes of European fairytales, the Buddha, Odysseus, and Luke Skywalker.

In making the epic grandeur of the hero archetype more relatable to the modern mind, Thomas Moore writes

"We are on the hero's journey when we submit to the deep processes of life and allow them to affect us and bore their necessities into us. We are the hero when we take on the challenges and go through our initiations and transformations, enduring loss and gain, feeling happy and sad, making progress and falling back. ... The hero may not look heroic from the outside but may go through powerful developments in a quiet way. The difference is that the real hero engages life and reflects on it. She becomes more and more what he or she is destined to be."
(Moore, 2014, p84)

Understood this way, the Hero's ultimate task might simply be articulated as: to achieve change through experiential self-knowledge—a description that is that is equally aligned with the core intentions of developmental coaching.

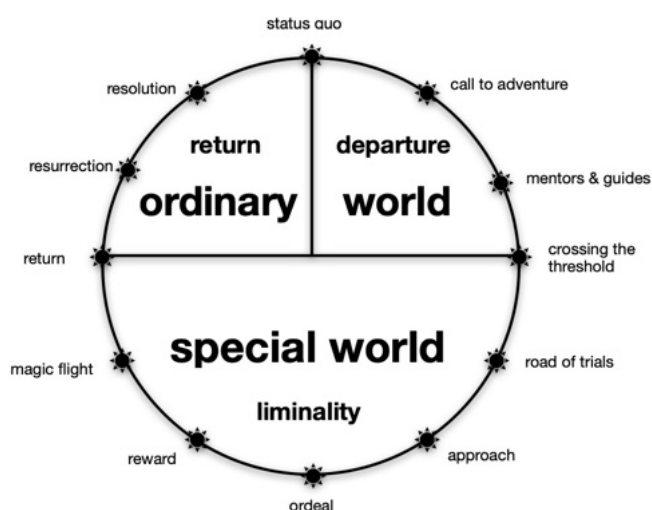


Figure 1 The Hero's Journey

Visualized in fig. 1 and moving clockwise from the top the Hero senses call (a kind of summons to depart from the monotony of everyday life), they encounter individuals who can serve as guides, cross a threshold into a “special world”, experience ordeals which they overcome, and eventually return into their prior context, yet they are unequivocally

transformed. As will be shown this transformation cycle also bears a curious resemblance to the coaching process.

Cultural anthropology conceptualizes rites of passage through three key domains—Separation, Liminality (or Transition), and Incorporation (van Gennep, 1960)—all of which quite logically map to Campbell's notions of Departure, Ordeal & Return.

In the model proposed (fig. 2), beyond employing the terms Severance and Descent in place of Separation/Departure and



Figure 2 The Rites of Passage Matrix

Liminality/Ordeal, the third domain of Return/Incorporation is divided to create a four quadrant matrix. This opens a crucial distinction between the in-session time of *orienting* to re-entry (labelled Return) and the client's actual post-session return into "ordinary" life when their changes and new behaviors become practically integrated and implemented in Integration.

Wildness and Nature in the Developmental Matrix

While the term "rites of passage" has been relatively recently coined by Western researchers, it describes ancient, pancultural practices which are rooted in animism and the cycles and truths of the literal natural world. (van Gennep, 1960) In largely ignoring these types of traditional and environmental sources of human experience and facilitated insight, it's proposed that the coaching profession is missing a crucial opportunity. As mythologist Martin Shaw emphasizes "*Wildness is a form of sophistication, because it carries within it true knowledge of our place in the world.*" (Shaw, 2011 p.8)

Like many other modern disciplines, coaching has often bowed to a particular interpretation of scientific rigor: heavy on the quantifiable, on performance-based metrics and a certain type of empirical logic. In so doing, it has tended to excise the romantic, the ancestral, and the organic principles of natural order — all of which are deeply rooted in human psychology, biology and experience. (Weber, 2016) While this mindset revels in the neat linear clarity of the spreadsheet and the reliably measurable it misses a key point: the human process, particularly the inner process, is not so linearly ordered, nor is it fully illuminated even by the modern sciences. Our inner workings, like

much of nature, remain something of a mystery.

Despite the metaphors that have proliferated since the scientific revolution, we are certainly not machines. Nor are we defined by algorithms or understood by numerical calculations of inputs and outputs — as the mid 20th century humanistic revolution keenly disavowed. (Aanstoos, 2003) Just as the natural world functions with some degree of predictability (the sun unarguably rises in the east and sets in the west), both it and we are also complex, inter-relational, dynamic and not *entirely* predictable.

Invoking natural world motifs therefore introduces a more organic mode for discussing human change. Sometimes the late summer is abruptly slammed with an icy snap only to be followed by days so warm that even the trees express their spring shoots in confusion. Similarly do all humans experience a non-linear to and fro as they negotiate the unpredictable conditions of life and change.

For eons the most manifest exemplar of change for humans has surely been the observable passage of time in our natural world, and time related nature motifs and metaphors continue to enrich at least the English language: We enter our *twilight years*, we *sunset* a program and face *the dawn of a new era*.

Throughout human history these passages of sun and moon and the longer arc of seasons have provided similar go-to analogies for human growth and change, and the journey of life itself. Whether it's the Biblical king Solomon reminding us that, "*To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven ...*" (Ecclesiastes 3:1) or the contemporary farmer and writer Wendell Berry musing

Within the circle of our lives
we dance the circle of the years,
the circles of the seasons
within the circles of the years,
the cycles of the moon
within the circles of the season,
the circles of our reasons
within the cycles of the moon. (Berry, 1999, p141)

Seasonal metaphors have performed long and faithful service for symbolizing human developmental change. A key reason is how they embody the paradoxical reality of change within repetition, so common to many life stories. Accordingly, when an annual cycle completes, a new season revisits an equally altered landscape. Similarly a coaching journey reaches a time, season and place that is familiar yet altered. Experience, insight and intentional action over time has transformed both pilgrim and their context.

The two dimensional matrix seen previously might

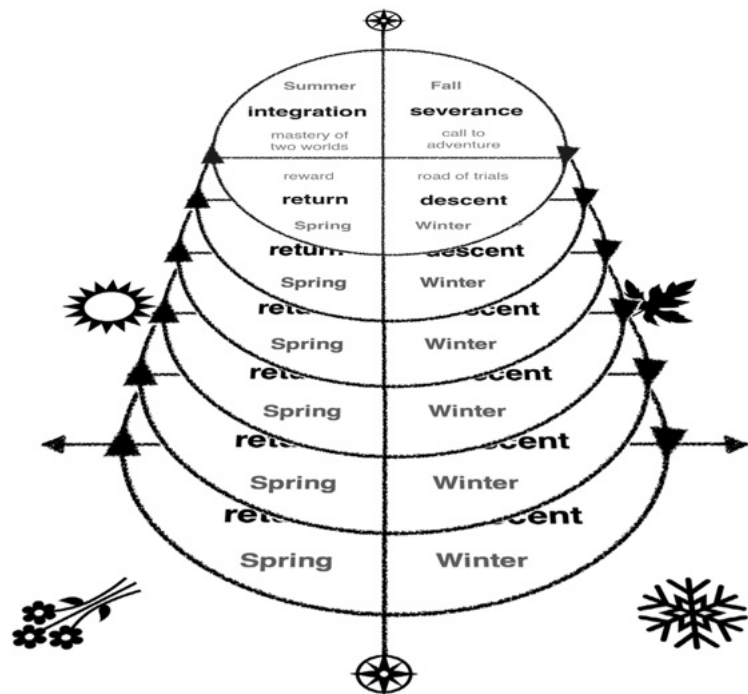


Figure 3 The ROP Matrix Rising

therefore be more justly rendered as the vertically rising model seen in fig. 3, in which each coaching cycle, while revisiting the same places, evolves upwards to a more enhanced level. The star icons at top and bottom symbolize the client's goals. Established in the initial phase these provide crucial direction, a kind of Pole Star for orienting the coaching journey.

As the client descends into the thorny business of challenging their beliefs, assumptions and perspectives, at any point, their view of self, situation and task can begin to shift, necessitating their original goals to be reviewed and adjusted, if not remade. Therefore, the metaphoric lodestar that led descent may not be the same one that guides return, and these dual icons symbolize this and the likelihood of the client's goals to evolve over the developmental journey.

Denaturing and the Great Separation Wound

The contingent relationship between human nature and wild nature is made vivid in the many psychological, cognitive and biological benefits research currently tells us accrue through physical exposure to the natural world (Bratman, 2012). Studies galore tout the vast rewards of simply walking in nature (Olafsdottir, 2020), listening to birdsong (Hamoud, 2022) or “forest bathing,” as the Japanese practice of Shinrin-yoku is translated (Furuyashiki, 2019).

However, instead of being the positive therapeutic interventions that these activities are generally suggested to be, it's proposed that these findings in fact reveal the downsides of the domesticating path our species has opted for, especially in the past 500 years. The grim inheritance of human *denaturing*. The amputation of ourselves

from the rest of the natural world, the heady rush into the sharp right angles of civilization and urban sophistication has evidently extracted a heavy price. As some are beginning to comprehend, this dislocation has visited a self-inflicted existential trauma upon humankind. (Merchant, 1980).

Now seen primarily as a collection of resources—or at best a theme park—to be bent to human will rather than entered into relationship with, the forest and its language are now foreign to almost all of us. No longer do we even consider ourselves as part of the very world that nurtured us into being. According to Weber

“In the last decades, postmodern culture has celebrated this gap as self-evident and denounced any attempts to bridge modernity with “nature” as romanticism or as a misguided nostalgia for authenticity. But this diagnosis is in itself misguided.” (Weber, 2016, p10)

The solution would seem self-evident: a *rewilding* or *renaturing* of humanity. A recalibration that makes room for true wild nature, human and earthly, to find a seat at the table and dine alongside the modern, neat and empirical.

While a few floral motifs, some poetic flourishes and a seasonal matrix might seem an almost comically scant move in these directions, the intention here is to offer inspiration, provocation and a rites of passage-oriented map for coaches, rather than attempt to heal humanity’s wound.

The Big Move: Wild Environmental Mind

Wilderness vigils are intentional periods of retreat, fasting and reflection in the land that honor the rites of passage stages of separation, liminality and return. These deliberate moments of retreat from society to interact with and receive wisdom from the wild have seemingly been part of the initiatory and transformational landscape since humans took their first steps. (Hansford, 1985) On this, Shaw has commented that *“The wilderness vigil is something immeasurably ancient, and the way our ancestors tuned their ear to the living earth.”* (Shaw, 2019, p6)

The Buddhist Suttas, themselves source material for the Hero’s Journey, abound with tales of forest retreat and nature interaction (Olendzki, 2006), further witnessed in Christ’s forty days and nights in the desert (Mathew, 4:1-11), and in Moses’ enlightening conversations with a burning bush (Exodus 2 NIV). Similar practices can be found ranging from early Celtic and Scandinavian traditions through to the many diverse native American and Australian aboriginal communities (Hansford, 1985). Retreat to the wild breast of Mother Earth for reconnection, renewal and transformational insight is evidently baked into our most ancient pancultural DNA.

For us moderns, these practices offer two entwined gifts: an encounter with and transformation of the personal psyche and a healing of the chasm separating Homo sapiens from the rest of the natural world. While perhaps appearing developmental in the modern sense, they reveal the potential for nature interactions to impact far more than an individual’s psychological self-concept, as Shaw again poetically captures when discussing the impacts of wilderness rites of passage work that

“There’s sometimes been too much emphasis on the giddy upswing of psychological transformation... I believe it’s really about the move from the psyche that lives in your chest, to you within a wider psyche of lapwing, oak root and granite tor. That’s the big move” (Shaw, 2019, p7)

And yet, professional coaching has largely ignored such a move. To its detriment. That the forest, the wild and wildness are inextricably encoded within our DNA is plausibly why those “interventions” cited above are so healing. The circular rendering of the matrix and its natural-world motifs might also be seen as an attempt to visualize nature mind and human mind as the inseparably inter-relational elements of a vast intelligent environmental matrix that both traditional and emerging contemporary wisdom suggest them to be.

The philosopher David Abram writes on the “big move” that *“Intelligence is no longer ours alone but is a property of the earth; we are in it, of it, immersed in its depths.” (Abram, 1996. p262)* In this eco-phenomenological view, mind—the very thing that coaches labor to engage with and develop in their clients—becomes a far larger and environmentally interconnected process than the discursive chatterbox preoccupying an individual’s conscious workspace that it’s often considered to be.

Abram’s notion of the extended mind emerging from immersive encounter within the natural environment (Abram, 1996) also brings us to a curious empirical intersection. One where his ecocentric take on Hüsserlian intersubjectivity (Durranti, 2010; Abram, 1996) rubs shoulders with the emerging 4E approach of cognitive science, which argues that *“cognition does not occur solely in the head, but is also*

embodied, embedded, enacted, *or extended by way of extra-cranial processes and structures.*” (Carney, 2020 p1)

An additional intriguing datapoint arises in theories of brain lateralization, which suggest that the left hemisphere is primarily concerned with literal and abstract interpretations of the world, emphasizing self-interest, detachment, and individuality (i.e., the self *as distinct from* the world), while the right hemisphere is associated with empathy and tends to process wholes, connections, poetic expression, and the intersubjective relationships with the environment. (We might say, it experiences self as world.) (McGilchrist, 2009)

For an indigenous perspective on these areas, Aboriginal academic Tyson Yunkaporta writes that indigenous “...*thinking and learning also occur outside of the brain in the objects and beings we interact with and the relationships in between.*” (Yunkaporta, 2020 p101) Moreover, he states that “... *Indigenous epistemology demands being able to see beyond the object of study, to seek a viewpoint incorporating complex contextual information.*” Adding that, as oral indigenous cultures innately perceive “...*all things as interconnected*”, they take the view that “...*all thinking is dependent on the field or context*” (Yunkaporta, 2020 p152) Which, of course, includes the very land itself.

Taken together, these points suggest a need to reevaluate the dominant assumptions—particularly within coaching—about self, mind, and cognition. This reevaluation should accommodate indigenous wisdom, and recognize the vast potential for natural-world interactions and other traditional practices to tap humans into a broader conception of intelligence, and engender a crucial, felt understanding of their

interconnectedness with all things.

This non-dualistic notion of an ecological, extended, and interconnected mind undoubtedly challenges conventional ideas about cognition. However, as the type of emerging Western scientific views expressed above increasingly align with these traditional perspectives, a more holistically evidence-based view of our true cognitive potential is taking shape—one that can equally contribute to a more integrated, embodied, and interconnected approach to life transition and the lived world.

Defining Liminality and Threshold in the Matrix

A threshold is a place or point of entering, leaving or beginning. In science, it's also the point at which a stimulus reaches sufficient intensity to begin to produce an effect. Modern psychology and physiology uses the latin term *limen* to speak of the threshold where experiences such as pain or consciousness become sufficiently acute enough to be registered.

Limen is the root of the adjectival *liminal*. *Liminal* therefore describes a transitional zone between one place and another—an unformed place of in between.

In this model, threshold or doorway moments merely signify the transition points between each of the four phases. While it might be said that coaching conversations are potentially littered with mini-threshold moments, in this model threshold is merely used as a device to describe the crossing places, while liminal signifies the Winter zone of descent, gestation and incubation; a place of tending new insights and re-forming the sense of self.

The ROP Matrix in Coaching Sessions and Engagements

In coaching, the term engagement describes the entire contract period that a coach and client agree to work together. It is typically comprised of a series of coaching sessions.

The ROP Engagement Matrix

This cycle initiates when a client locates a coach and, entering the top right of the matrix at Fall/Severance, begins a period of discovery, building connection, contracting, defining the Pole Star of goals and outcomes, and prepares to enter into the coaching journey proper.

Winter/Descent defines the long period when the client is deep in the developmental process of the engagement—challenging, testing,

learning and remolding their self-concept and behavioral repertoires. Throughout this liminal stage clients often find themselves feeling “in-between”, as though they’ve taken two steps forward and one back—feeling neither who they were, nor yet who they aspire to be—and it can be easy for them (as does the Hero archetype) to feel a little disconsolate and lost in their developmental underworld. Coaching moves such as

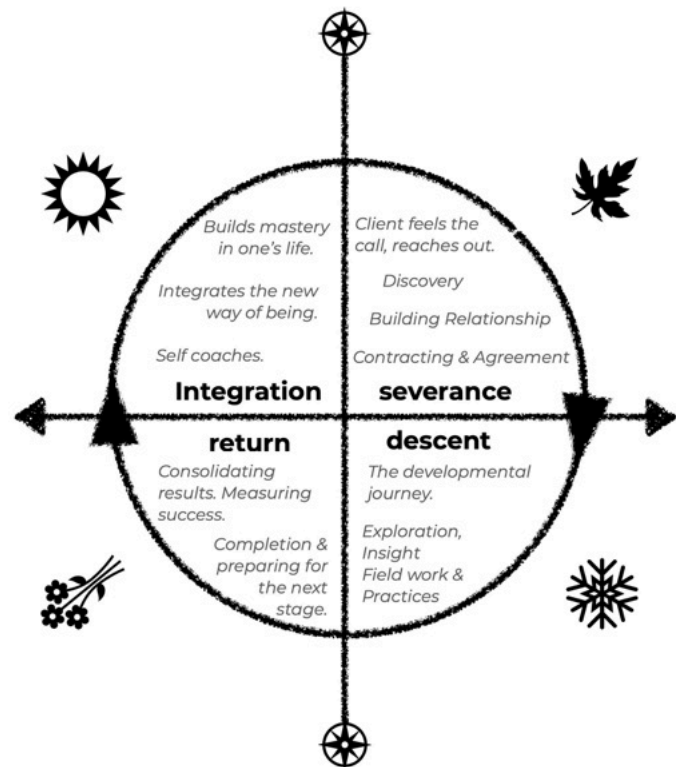


Figure 4 The ROP Engagement Matrix

simply exploring gains and movement towards their Pole Star generates confidence in the process and revitalizes their energy and sense of commitment to the path.

As their journey deepens, it's crucial to ensure that the Pole Star goals which led the way through descent are still relevant. In a developmental coaching approach one expects the path to change a client, and check-ins ensure that the objectives remain true to the traveler's evolving needs and aspirations.

Crossing the threshold to Return/Spring after the long Winter, the client prepares for their next phase of life. Closure sessions offer an important space to reflect on and consolidate the lessons learned, the skills acquired and the gains made over the journey, and to prepare for the business of going solo "out there".

Integration/Summer is when clients live all their new insights, skills and ways of being, now suitably empowered to coach and facilitate themselves from a whole new level of self. Alternatively, they may heed the call to continue the coaching partnership immediately or at some future point, and in either case the matrix renews with re-contracting and together pressing further upwards on the developmental spiral.

The ROP Session Matrix

Commencing again in Fall/Severance (fig 5), the client and coach attune to each other, build agreement on the session objectives and generally prepare. Crossing, both descend into the exploration, unpacking the client's assumptions, beliefs and sense of self. Ever eyeing the agreed Pole Star of the session goals and outcomes as a way to orient the conversation, here is where they generate new thinking and perspectives for getting there.

As the session transitions into Spring/Return, now with fresh

insights in hand, the coach supports the client to develop actionable strategies for applying their new learning post session. The coach also helps them plan for re-entry,

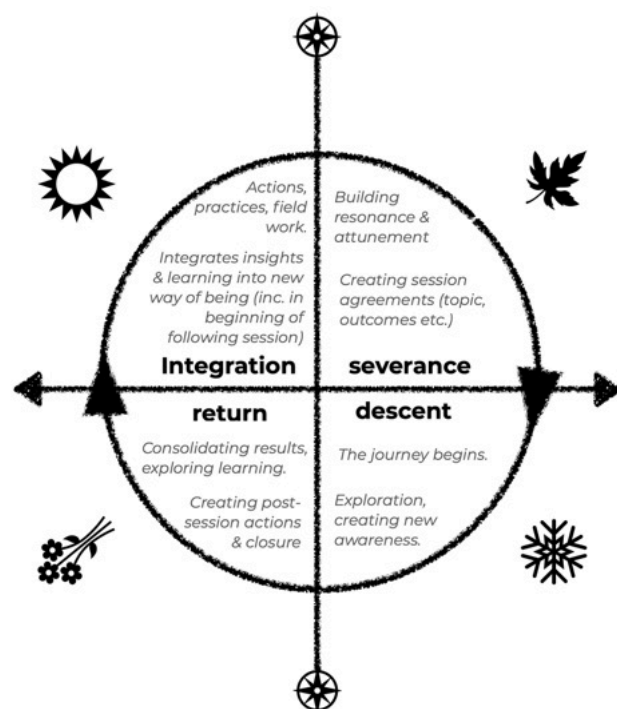


Figure 5 The ROP Session Matrix

ensuring that challenges can be addressed in new ways, with the appropriate resources in place to sustain their new behaviors, thinking, and ways of being.

The Summer/Integration quadrant is the post-session time “out there” in the world, implementing actions, practices and consolidating the new emerging self. Here the client actively tests their new modes of being and acting in “real-world” interactions while gaining

important feedback. It may seem unusual to consider the time outside of a formal session as coaching, however, as in facilitated rites of passage work, the process is still seen as “at work” far beyond the time actively in the interaction.

As creativity theory has highlighted, our most profound insights generally need some downtime to incubate (Sadler-Smith, 2015). The important inquiry within the session often merely stirs the mixture, and the most transformative ideas can burst through into consciousness at any point in the client’s day, often well outside the formal session. Coaches who fail to play this longer game, confining their interest to merely the formal session time together, will often tend to miss the bigger prize, or foreclose on it

altogether in order to have a quick in-session take-away.

All that “real world” experience, insight and data are subsequently unpacked in the following session, where the coach—just as a rites of passage facilitator does—supports their client to make meaning of and integrate all the “out there” insights and learning into their larger developmental project of self.

The Matrix Applied

Firstly, the effective application of these principles within coaching relies more on the attitude, experience and mindset of the practitioner than any discrete set of skills or tools. This requires coaches to embrace the deeper lineage of their craft and commit to their own developmental work in this area.

Beyond the notions already expressed, such as employing the matrix frameworks, and the introduction of mythic and natural elements, some additional ideas include the following.

Coaches should initially consider their literal coaching context. A core principle in behavioral science is that psychology and behavior are significantly influenced by the surrounding context or environment, and furthermore that environmental cues can hold the greatest potential for impacting upon behavioral change (Marteau et al., 2020).

It’s been shown that the natural world has a multitude of verifiable positive effects on diverse aspects of human experience—biological, psychological, cognitive, and more. Perhaps most critical is its potential to activate the extended environmental cognitive modes referred to earlier that support more adaptive, complex, “*high context reasoning*”. (Yunkaporta, 2020) While taking clients away for a fully immersive rites of

passage experience or even working outdoors may not be practical or suitable, coaches can explore creative ways to bring nature into the coaching space, even in online settings.

For example, simply viewing the natural world including representations of it such as images on a computer screen can have powerful effects (Jo et al., 2019).

Replacing office or urban backgrounds in online coaching calls with natural world wallpapers, or screen sharing nature-based imagery, can subtly yet significantly impact a client's thinking in positive ways. Inviting a client to simply look out of a window at the sky or trees or perhaps briefly venture outside during a session can facilitate a powerful shift in their mindset and problem-solving process. Coaches might offer questions that encourage clients to reflectively interact with the environment while doing so in-session or as post-session field work. For example, they might ask, "If you were to ask the clouds about this situation, what might they say to you?" Although this approach may initially appear trivial or whimsical, extensive personal experience in client-facing work has demonstrated otherwise.

Coaches might explore metaphors that draw upon the natural world to guide clients towards more organic modes of thinking instead of ones which lean towards mechanistic comparisons. For instance, in a recent interaction, a C-Suite client described themselves as "an oak among the saplings" when reflecting on being older in a competitive business environment surrounded by younger individuals. This natural world reference has since provided a rich and ongoing organic metaphor for exploring the client's situation and identity and for generating alternative behavioral options.

Supporting the creation of mini rituals or symbolic ceremonies within the

coaching process can provide profound and transformative experiences for clients. For example, if a client is seeking to let go of past challenges and embrace a new chapter in their life, they might create a ritual involving the release of symbolic objects into a flowing river, representing the release of the old and the embrace of the new.

These physical rituals can create a powerful sense of closure, initiation, and commitment to a desired change, allowing the client to engage their emotions and integrate their intentions on deeper, more embodied levels.

Similarly, at the beginning of a session or engagement a coach might incorporate reflective rituals for grounding and becoming present. During them the coach can remind the client of the threshold they are crossing into a more liminal space, mentally and emotionally priming the client towards a more rites of passage mode. Likewise, a ritual can be employed to honor the closure of each session or the conclusion of a coaching engagement to prepare for Return.

Another way to incorporate rites of passage is through the use of storytelling and mythology. By exploring myths and archetypal stories related to the client's challenges or aspirations, the coach might offer the client a kind of symbolic vocabulary to support, enrich, and capture the process of self-reflection and transformation.

For example, a client might find solutions and inspiration by investigating themselves and their situation through a mythic Hero's Journey. By exploring their challenges, choices, and lessons in mythic contexts or themselves in archetypal ways, a client can gain new perspectives, uncover hidden strengths, and find new ways to navigate their own personal odyssey.

Incorporating rites of passage as a coaching framework also extends beyond

individual clients. It can be applied to teams and organizations, facilitating group transitions, fostering a sense of shared purpose, and deepening collective identity. For example, rituals that acknowledge and deepen connections, celebrate achievements, and honor the collective journey, can importantly help cultivate cultures of growth, resilience, engagement and cohesion.

Conclusion

With their mutual goal of transformation of the self by facilitating shifts of perception, self-concept and meaning-making that allow individuals to function from a more expansive reality, clearly developmental psychology, developmental coaching and rites of passage all have considerable correspondence. (Kegan, 1982; Cox et al, 2018; van Gennep, 1960),

After all, adult development is not merely a modern human behavioral artifact. The urge to transform and evolve over life stages is an innate aspect of being a human. Yet where contemporary Western empiricism has often prided itself in excising traditional wisdom for contemporary scientific linearity in these and other human processes, it appears to have not been without cost.

While coaching has comparatively recently emerged from the humanistic psychology movement and is equally keen to have itself viewed as a forward-thinking, evidence-based profession, its roots now look inescapably deep and ancient. As has been shown, the modern coach is, in many ways, an updated version of the rites of passage guide. This means that, whether intentionally or not, coaching's lineage extends to both modern psychological and ancient, traditional fields of transition

partnership.

Furthermore, as modern Western mindsets have increasingly inclined towards individualism (Santos et al, 2017), this appears to have driven a loss of inter-relatedness and sense of place within the very world we inhabit. As Katherine May warns *“We’ve come to see ourselves as profoundly separate from the landscapes we inhabit, as superior beings who do things to the world, instead of being woven into it. When we speak of nature, we mean “not us”. (May, 2023)* While more non-dualistic perspectives are common to indigenous and other non-Western worldviews (Yunkaporta, 2020), as Weber highlights below, the Western mind’s individualism delusion may be the locus of humanity’s greatest self-inflicted wound.

“Humans can only fully comprehend their own existence as cultural beings who are existentially tied to the symbolic processes active inside nature. For humans, the biggest risk of biodiversity loss is that it would bury this understanding ...Without experiencing our real emotional and physical connectedness to the remainder of life, we risk having stunted, deformed identities; we will yearn narcissistically for a completeness we alone cannot achieve.” (Weber, 2016. p8)

As earth wavers at the brink of a potential mass extinction event (Cowie, 2022), with an overwhelming scientific consensus on it being due to relatively recent human efforts (Lynas, 2021), it seems imperative that the container of human development and the role of coach embraces a bigger vision. One that neither restricts the focus of change to the personal, nor limits the objective to self-gain; nor should it

elevate modern Western empirical logic while excluding all that is wild, traditional, natural, and intuitive. MIT based systems theorist Otto Scharmer characterizes this as a shift from ego-system to eco-system consciousness. (Scharmer, 2019)

These points seem acutely salient considering AI's recent rise to ubiquity. While many in the coaching industry are giddily rushing to embrace it, others (including the author) remain more circumspect about the prospect of replacing (or augmenting) organic, living human interactions with algorithmically contrived ones.

However, this paper is not intended to provide solutions to such weighty challenges. It is more an invitation, or perhaps a provocation. It aims to highlight some critical gaps, and provide a potential map for coaches to reorient around and, hopefully, begin bridging them in ways that might help address these larger issues at hand, as well as the personal ones. It isn't entreating them to serenade the new moon or open a dialogue with the nearest oak (not that these would do any harm!), but to recognize their clients as part of the great ancestral and ecological matrix that they are, and engage with them accordingly. To consider injecting some mystery, magic and ancient wisdom into their professional skillsets, personality profiles and Positive Psychology.

While the many benefits of adopting the principles outlined in this paper should be obvious, perhaps the most pressing response for the industry to heed at this point, is simply one that prioritizes addressing that great wound of separation between us and the non-human world. This requires a recalibration in which the conventional Western perspectives of human development currently informing coaching best practices will need to make space for traditional wisdom and the innovative scientific approaches that broadly align with them.

This shift asks coaches to embrace their deeper lineage and metaphorically step a little further towards the forest and the old skills. Perhaps most importantly, it calls upon the professional coaching industry gatekeepers to widen their vision and make room for the embodied, the wild, the mythic and the traditional worldviews within their rigorously attenuated competencies for modern professionalized change partnership.

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From the Author:

Endless gratitude goes to my dear friend and colleague [Sarah Chayes](#) for her inscrutable editing, genius suggestions and incomparable support.

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