The Diffusion of Innovation: A Coaching Framework

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For the past half century, a model of innovation diffusion, offered by Everett Rogers (1962), has guided the thinking and perspectives of many people who are involved in change initiatives of all kinds (ranging from water purification systems to the distribution and use of contraceptive devices to the introduction of new digital technologies in a "flat world"). While popular with certain people, the diffusion of innovation model and research, ironically, has not itself diffused very successfully—until Malcolm Gladwell's *Tipping Point* (Gladwell, 2000) was published (offering a somewhat condensed and some would say distorted version of Rogers' diffusion model). I propose to do some diffusion of Rogers' model (hopefully without major distortion) by applying it in a preliminary way to the ways in which a professional coach might assist her client. I will also borrow from the work of Sally Kuhlenschmidt (2010) who has provided an insightful metaphor regarding diffusion.

The Innovators/Explorers

These are the men and women who boldly go where no one has gone before (to borrow from the intro to "Star Trek"). These are the brave (and sometimes foolish and often impractical) people inside (and often outside) organizations who declare that they are going to be the first to venture out into the wilderness, bringing only the bare essentials to stay alive. They usually haven't gathered much information about the terrain into which they are going to travel and often are not really clear about why they are moving out into the wilderness or what they expect to find when they get "out there."

I would suggest that there are several kinds of innovators/explorers. The first cluster consists of the "idea people." They produce new ideas that seem to come "out of the blue." Second, there are those who produce new combinations of old ideas. Third, there are those innovators who bring an old idea over from one field or discipline to another field or discipline. In each of these instances, the Innovator/Explorer is likely to experience a high rate of failure. Either the idea doesn't work or there is

great resistance to the idea and it is never accepted. At the extreme this new idea will produce a paradigmatic revolution that threatens to alter the very way in which we view our world.

There is a second cluster of innovators. These are the practice-leaders—who have innovated not primarily with new ideas, but rather with new programs or new strategies for change. They are the first to offer a training program in the use of a new technology (or the first to fund an organizational coaching program!) They are the first to embrace a new production process or the first to install a new harassment policy in their division. Like their fellow innovators who produce a new idea or product, these practice-leader innovators are rarely received (at least initially) with enthusiastic support and their new programs and strategies often meet with failure. They feel out of step with everyone else and wonder if they really belong in this hostile organizational setting.

How might a professional coach best address the needs of the Innovator/Explorer? First, we know that all learning and new ideas emerge within a threshold between profound challenge and substantial support. On the one hand, if there is a great deal of support and not much of a challenge, then the person dwelling in the threshold is unlikely to find much of a motivation to take a chance. He might remain contented in the threshold or is more likely to grow bored and return to home. This is rarely the condition being faced by the Innovator/Explorer. It is much more likely that there is too much challenge and not enough support. If there is nothing but challenge, then the anxiety can be overwhelming and the person dwelling in the threshold is overwhelmed with anxiety and the desire (perhaps need) to survive; "The wilderness is too much for me. I'm being attacked on all sides." What is the response to this challenging condition? Sometimes it is counter-attack: "I will have to spend all my time and energy fighting off the attackers." This is the response, as the old saying goes, when someone spends all their time fighting off alligators and soon forgets that they were sent there to clear out the swamp. A second response is also common. This is the flight (rather than fight) response: "I need to get out of here!" Or there is the freeze response: "I won't survive unless I sit absolutely still and maybe they won't see me."

Under these challenging (and often overwhelming) conditions, a primary role to be played by a coach is the provision of sufficient support to counter the challenge. This doesn't mean taking over from the Innovator/Explorer: the coach can't take on the Innovator/Explorer challenge; however, it does mean the

coach can provide assurance, can point out where small successes have already been achieved, and can help her client craft a strategy for something more than just survival.

The coach can also help her client be a bit more realistic and a bit more focused regarding the direction in which he is moving. Coaching often involves moving through three domains: (1) the domain of *information* (where the client is right now), (2) the domain of *intentions* (where the client wants to be at some point in the near future) and (3) the domain of *ideas* (how the client can get from where he is right now to where he wants to be). The Innovator/Explorer is often comfortable dwelling in the domain of ideas. She often loves to generate many new ideas. On the other hand, the Innovator/Explorer is frequently indifferent to or even uncomfortable dwelling in the domains of information and intentions. She isn't very realistic or practical, nor does she have a clear direction. While a coach doesn't want to take away the spirit of adventure and the willingness to journey out into the wilderness, he can help temper his coaching client's inclinations to stay only in the domain of ideas. The coach can ask something about the resources his client is bringing with her into the wilderness, about what other people think about her venture (and how they might react to her ideas) and about how she will return home. The coach might also ask the difficult question (from the domain of intentions) about why she is going out into the wilderness (not expecting a clear answer, but at least encouraging some pondering about the motivation). He might also ask his coaching client about her criteria of success: how will you know whether or not this new or adopted idea works?

The coach can work in yet another way with his Innovator/Explorer client. He can become a "learning coach" by asking his client periodically to identify what she is learning from this new venture. This might be considered *formative learning*—gaining new insights while in the midst of a project and modifying the project based on these insights. This learning probe can take place instead at the end of the project or a major segment of the project. This might be considered *summative learning*: what did you learn from this project and how will you make use of this learning in the future?

Finally, in the case of innovations and explorations that emerge from the combination of two or more old ideas or from the use of an old idea in a new field or discipline, there is the crossing of boundaries. When this occurs, resistance is often found among those who have been using the old ideas for many years. They resent the "newcomer." The coach can help her client confront this resistance—particularly

by helping her client make effective use of metaphor, story and language that the holders of the old ideas can appreciate and that honor their contribution. The old idea-holders will themselves feel like innovators if they can see how their old idea is being engaged in new ways and with new effects. Furthermore, a coach can help her client frame the criteria of "truth" or "success" in ways that appeal to both the original holders of the old ideas and those who are about to discover the recombined or reapplied idea for the first time.

Early Adopters/Pioneers

The Early Adopters are the ones who are willing to "venture West" after the explorers map out the territory. The Early Adopters are willing to embrace or at least try out a new idea – often because in other areas they have themselves been innovators. As a result of their own past experiences, these pioneers do not need much convincing. They will try out a new idea or procedure, find its faults, assist in its improvement, and tell the world that it has great potential.

In many instances, the Early Adopters are the "make or break" folks. If they don't support or try out the new idea, then no one else is likely to get on board the covered wagon (or train) as it "heads West." There seem to be several different types of Early Adopters when it comes to professional coaching. First there are the funders. They pay for the wagon or train (and often the wagon master/facilitator).

While funding sources were very important during the early stages of contemporary professional coaching, there was a second cluster of men and women who were invaluable in moving this innovation to early adoption. These were the sponsors of professional coaching. Closely related to this second cluster are those women and men who actively promoted professional coaching. These promoters neither had the money (funders) nor the formal institution position of authority (sponsors) to bring about early adoption of professional coaching. However, they were like Johnny Appleseed—moving across the land planting seeds. And they are the group most likely to engage a coach themselves. They don't just plant the seeds—they eat the apples! A third cluster of people who help move innovations to early adoption are those who bring order to the innovation and identify how best to administer these innovations. These are the early managers who take over from the often-disorganized innovators. Seymour Sarason (1972) identified the critical role played by these managers when describing the creation of new settings. He noted during the 1970s that the managers are often bringing concepts and

practices from the old order into the new order (and in this way can thwart the efforts of the innovators who are particularly involved in the creation and promotion of new processes rather than new products or customer services). His insightful analysis seems to still hold true.

What about those who coach these Early Adopters? First, as in the case of the innovators, the Early Adopters are often enamored with ideas. They are inclined to move forward without sufficient information and not a clear set of intentions. They will try out any new idea and are the innovators' best friend with regard to taking a risk. As a coach to these Early Adopters, we often must become realists, encouraging them to do a little more data gathering before devoting themselves to a new idea. As coaches we also are likely to find ourselves in the business of clarifying the reason(s) for taking on a new idea. The Early Adopters are often overwhelmed with new projects and often are not very disciplined in their allocation of time and resources. They need to clarify their intentions and set priorities—this is where the organizational coach can be of greatest assistance.

The coach to Early Adopters will also be of great value in encouraging reflection—particularly with regard to the lessons to be learned from both successful and unsuccessful projects. The Early Adopter is not only a risk-taker but also someone who often jumps from one bright new idea to another. What can be learned from the project already engaged? Were the time and resources devoted to this project worth the outcome that was achieved? While Early Adopter are to be commended for supporting new ideas and innovations, they are also likely to become disillusioned when many of the new ideas and projects they embrace don't work out. Rather than backing away from support for new ideas, the Early Adopter needs to begin asking the right questions before supporting the new idea. He should begin asking the right questions in the midst of (formative learning) and at the end of (summative learning) of a new project. A thoughtful and provocative coach can assist the Early Adopter in identifying these questions and, more generally, by encouraging her client to pause and become more of a learner throughout the process of engaging a new idea. As pioneers the Early Adopters have much to learn about the new terrain in which they are traveling and a skillful coach can assist in this challenging process of continuous learning.

Early Majority/Settlers

The next two diffusion categories are filled with men and women who are less likely to request professional coaching services—and when they do request these services it is often for the wrong reasons. The coach must be particularly careful when working on the coaching contract with those in the Early and Late Majority. This is usually a high priority for a coaching client who is in the Early Majority. These men and women generally prefer clarity and consistency—after all they want to settle down in a safe place rather than venturing forth into new territory. The Early Majority also like to see evidence that new ideas are valid and proven—so if they are attracted to coaching it is because some respected leaders in their organization have demonstrated (or at least accepted) the value inherent in coaching (the so-called return-on-investment). The Early Majority often ask for coaching because something new (innovation) has happened in their organization and they want to adjust to this change. They are good "organization men" and "organization women" (to use an old phrase from the mid-20th Century) and want to cooperate and adapt to the changing conditions in their organization. Like the settlers on the frontier, they are primarily in the business of surviving in an environment that can sometimes seem quite hostile.

Two challenges are immediately apparent with regard to the coaching of someone in the Early Majority. First, the Early Majority need to be convinced that they should use a coach. They want to see the evidence that coaching can be of value to them. Second, the coach needs to assess the unique issues that Early Majority clients are likely to bring up in coaching sessions. Let's turn to the first of these two challenges. Members of the Early Majority are much more selective than the Early Adopters. They want some proof before making a commitment to anything—product or service. How do I know that this product will work? Can you assure me that this service will be effective and of value to me? Do we have any evidence that this product or service is worth the money we will have to spend in order to bring it to market? In populating the American West, these are the settlers who wait until they know that there is something to settle into. They wait for reports from the pioneers and check to see if these reports are accurate. They look to the Lewis and Clarks of their world to provide credible accounts of the "true" West.

What kind of issues are those in the Early Majority likely to bring up in coaching. First, the Early Majority client is likely to be attracted to the domain of information. They not only want evidence that coaching can be of value, they want evidence about everything before moving forward. The Early Majority are often trapped by "analysis paralysis." They keep waiting for sufficient evidence to be accumulated so that risks are minimal. They don't want to be surprised. They are settlers who move West only after the pioneers have mapped out the territory and blazed a trail that is clearly marked. An organizational coach will often have to nudge their Early Majority client forward and help them identify one or more compelling reasons to take a risk and move forward. These compelling reasons reside in the domain of intentions. The Early Majority are motivated first and foremost by security. This is their career anchor (to use Edgar Schein's term) (Schein, 2006). This, however, is not their only anchor. What stirs their passion other than just security—perhaps technical/functional competence, general managerial competence or even service to other people (to mention three of Schein's other anchors)? "What are the important rewards that you (the client) envision will be waiting for you at the end of this journey?" "In what way(s) is the journey itself going to be rewarding?" Many organizational coaches who provide personal coaching will be particularly effective in helping the Early Majority client move forward.

Several dynamics are unique to the Early Majority client. First, reasoning is highly valued by most members of the Early Majority. They not only like to linger in the domain of information, they also like to set this information in clear and tidy categories. However, with the encouragement of their coach, Early Majority clients also need to trust and honor their own intuition—as Jonah Lehrer (2009) suggests in his provocative book, *How We Decide*. Second, the Early Majority client needs to know that she is not alone. She wants to know that she is in the Early Majority rather than being an isolated outlier. She wants to settle in a community, not live alone out in the wilderness. An effective coach will help his client find an enduring support network.

Third, in keeping with their orientation toward rationality and information, the Early Majority client is likely to be quite tactical in their approach to problems they are confronting in the organization. As settlers rather than explorers or pioneers, they will look to short-term, low-risk solutions to their problems. They are unlikely to project very far into the future nor look very far beyond their own settlement. An effective coach should encourage these reticent clients to engage in more strategic thinking—to look a bit more into the future and at the big picture. This does not necessarily mean taking

more risks, but it does mean examining and reflecting on how various elements of their organization fit together and how the actions they do take impact on other parts of the organization (thereby appealing to their desire to be rational and information-based).

Late Majority/Burghers

In Europe the term "burgher" was used to identify a person who resided in a formally chartered town. I will use this European term because I think it conveys the essence of Rogers' Late Majority. These people only embrace an innovative idea after it has been fully certified and accepted as a legitimate idea or operation. In Western America, these are the folks who only move in when the town is "well-established"—with the requisite schools, paved roads, general store and church. Gladwell uses the term "tipping point" when describing this broad-based acceptance of an idea that has been legitimized. The term "band-wagon" is also appropriate in that the acceptance of a product or service by the Late Majority often means a substantial increase in the number of people using this product or service.

This is the diffusion population most likely to use coaching for the wrong reasons. These men and women are most likely to either misuse coaching or find the coaching experience to be disappointing. The Late Majority seek out coaching for one of three reasons: (1) it is the "thing to do" ("everyone else has a coach so I guess I should get one too"), (2) it is the way to "look good" ("maybe it will enable me to get a promotion or at least avoid a negative performance review") ("it makes me look cooperative, seeking to improve myself, ready to change"), or (3) because it is an "exciting" fad that could "really transform me" (an unrealistic expectation often built on the over-promising of those promoting coaching services). The Late Majority are often "immature" about innovation and are vulnerable to sales pitches that don't really represent the real world.

While the "band-wagon" phenomenon can initially be very gratifying to someone who has been laboring for many years to get a new product or service accepted, it can also create major problems—because this new product or service is typically not fully understood by the Late Majority and is often misused. This can lead to "casualties." For instance, jogging may become an "in-thing"; however, Late Majority joggers are likely to injure themselves because they do not properly prepare for this new form of exercise. The band wagon can also lead to failure and anger: "why doesn't this darn thing work". Alternatively, uncritical Late Majority acceptance of a new product or service can lead to neglect or

inefficiency. The newly-purchased desk-top computer, for instance, may either sit on the desk unused or be used only as a glorified typewriter or expensive play station.

What does all of this mean in terms of coaching the Late Majority? First, it means that the coach must spend quite a bit of time at the start of the coaching engagement exploring with her client the reasons for wanting to be coached. The coach must be in a place to either cancel the engagement or help her client discover a legitimate and potentially beneficial reason for working with a coach. Even if the coaching engagement is supported by the Late Majority client, the coach often must help her client differentiate between fads and foundations (viable ideas) in his organization. How does one differentiate between ideas that are sound (based on a solid base of valid and useful information) and those that are based on nothing more than good marketing and superficial acceptance by many people in the organization? How does one determine that a new idea is aligned with the mission, vision, values and purposes of the organization? When is a new idea being accepted not because it is based on a solid (and organizationally-aligned) foundation, but because it is convenient, low-cost, exciting, or not very complicated? A coach can provide invaluable service in helping her client address these difficult issues and discern which ideas are and which are not viable.

Second, the security anchor identified by Schein is even heavier for the Late Majority client than it was for the Early Majority client. The client often has a very primitive sense of what he expects from his organization in terms of job stability, public recognition and rewards. Schein writes about the psychological contract that exists in the head and heart of members of organizations. This contract consists of the expectations (conscious and unconscious) that the member has of what he will receive from the organization in exchange for the work he does and attitude he exhibits on behalf of the organization's welfare. While I agree with Schein's observation that these expectations exist in virtually all organizations, I propose that it is not a psychological contract, but rather a covenant that is not easily renegotiated. Furthermore, as a covenant that is often unconsciously held, it is not revoked by the organization and is considered a betrayal if not honored by leaders of the organization. Anger, harassment and even violence in an organization can often be attributed to this sense of betrayal. The client who comes from the Late Majority inevitably has embraced a covenant that is unconscious, non-negotiable and considered external to the Late Majority client's own psyche. It is important to differentiate between an internal and external locus of control when working with men and women in

9

the Late Majority. These coaching clients tend to view the world from the perspective of an external locus of control. They believe that most of the important things happening in their organization (and in their life) are outside their control. These men and women are inclined to feel helpless and hopeless when considering their own role in the organization where they work. They typically don't have the anger that we will witness when considering the mind set and affect of the last diffusion group (the Laggards)—they are more likely to experience low-grade depression.

Those in the Late Majority are particularly inclined to feel betrayed if something changes in the organization which impacts on their work or which challenges their own mindset (attitudes) about the organization. The unconsciously-based covenant appears on the surface to be nothing more than a desire for security and organizational stability. Yet, the covenant is much more than this and is often emotionally-charged. An effective coaching engagement often can lead to a surfacing of this covenant and to the more realistic addressing of the client's expectations regarding what he should be doing in the organization and what the organization in turn provides him as a dedicated and hard-working member. This exploration of the covenant is difficult and it often produces considerable anxiety. We know that in an anxiety-producing situation, a container for the anxiety is critical. Without a container, the anxiety can escalate and lead to lack of concentration and the type of fight/flight/freeze responses I noted above. In the field of psychotherapy, this container is found in the time-limits of the therapeutic session (the "fifty minute hour"), the nature of the relationship between therapist and client during the therapy session, and restrictions regarding the relationship between therapist and client outside the therapy room. The container is just as important for a Late Majority client as they address issues of security and covenant. The container provides the support that balances against the challenge and anxiety of the coaching session.

What is the nature of this container and support in a coaching session? I would suggest five possible strategies (though many more are possible). First, the coach can provide an agenda or at least a set of desired outcomes for the session. Second, the coach might suggest some "homework" that the client does between sessions involving reflection on issues being faced by the client in his work setting. This homework can help the client prepare for the challenges being faced during the upcoming coaching session. Third, the coach can provide an appreciative perspective—noting when the client is being effective in changing his own expectations behavior or mind-set (the coach is "catching her client doing

it right"). Fourth, the coach can offer legitimate encouragement, indicating how other clients have successfully brought about a change in their expectations, behavior or mindset. Without diminishing the unique challenges being faced by her client, the coach of a Late Majority client can be supportive by indicating to her client that "he is not alone". There is evidence that other people have faced similar challenges in a successful manner, thus turning the "band wagon" effect into a positive for the coaching client. Finally, the coach can be supportive by providing considerable structure—much as the psychotherapist does. This means setting up regularly scheduled and time-limited coaching sessions, holding the sessions in a safe, neutral setting, insuring that the sessions are not disrupted by other people, and providing a follow-up summary for the client regarding what took place in each coaching session.

We often find burghers entering the scene when there is a stable source of funding. This often is a chicken-and-egg phenomenon. There is greater funding because more people and organizations are involved, and more organizational leaders (Late Majority) are involved because there is greater funding. Given the financial instability found in many of our contemporary institutions, we may find a retreat in the funding of coaching program and a subsequent retreat in the number of leaders willing to take a risk. The "burgher" leaders may return to safer financial ground (the chartered town). Despite these potential financial challenges (coaching services being offered during a time of retrenchment), this is a time when the Late Majority might become a focus of attention for those working in the field of professional coaching (with all of the opportunities and challenges associated with engaging this constituency).

We can identify a set of marketing principles that hold the potential of drawing in members of the Late Majority: surveys, focus groups, and advisory committees. In each of these instances, it is not so important that one make use of the data gathered from these initiatives; rather these research tools are engaged as marketing tools. Participants in the survey, focus group or advisory committee get the sense that they are not alone—other people are involved. Furthermore, since they are being asked for their opinion, this activity must be legitimate and main stream: "if it was not legitimate then they wouldn't be among those being asked." Psychologists have counseled us for many years that cognitive dissonance is created if people participate in something that they don't value. Once they agree to participate, these men and women must support (at least minimally) the activity in order to restore cognitive equilibrium. An effective professional coaching program should target several populations, with different

communication strategies being used for each of them. One of these populations can be the Late Majority and cognitive dissonance-based marketing can be an effective leverage point for this constituency. At a more fundamental level, an innovative practice (such as coaching) will become acceptable if it is associated with other traditions, values and activities that are already widely-accepted and respected by the Late Majority. A critical role was being played at an early stage in the life of professional coaching by women and men who linked this innovation to established products and services (Brock, 2009). The field should now take advantage of these early initiatives.

Laggards/Stay-At-Homers

What about those folks who remain back home? They won't move West under any conditions. They can't be convinced, bribed or cajoled. In many instances, they are actively engaged in efforts to discourage the wide-spread adoption of an innovation. They might be silent at first; however, once the innovation begins to pick up steam and threatens to be accepted by the Early Majority, they may become quite vocal. In many instances, the objections of the Laggard to professional coaching can be attributed to their differing perspective regarding this innovation. They view professional coaching as representative of a subculture that is alien to the one they prefer (Bergquist and Brock, 2008). The discarding of managerial "fads" is illustrative. Laggards are likely to assign this term to those who are promoting a "management improvement" or "organizational reform" strategy such as coaching.

There is yet another source of Laggard opposition to a new product or service. Their objections, in many instances, don't arise from the flaws and threats associated with the innovation—after all we all appear to be Laggards with regard to certain new ideas that we consider ill-advised or over-sold. For many true Laggards, the issue is much more personal: these men and women were innovators themselves many years ago and were unsuccessful or burned-out with regard to this innovation. They led a major initiative looking into the reform of some outdated practice, but never saw this reform enacted. They championed the use of a major new technology, only to see their colleagues casually dismiss this technology as a gimmick. They devoted many hours to design of a new training program that was thrown out only four years after being installed in their organization. If a new initiative is successful than what does this say about the Laggard's own past failure(s) as an innovator? An important lesson can be learned from the passionate objections voiced by Laggards: when we isolate or dismiss an innovator, then we not only

lose this person's ideas and potential leadership, but also create a Laggard who can be a persistent enemy of innovation for many years to come.

What should we do about those Laggards who oppose an innovation for very personal (and usually undisclosed) reasons? We can try to isolate them, but this is rarely effective. Alternatively, we can bring in Laggards as historian and advisor: "What can we learn from you about what happened many years ago? What can you teach us? If you were to plan for the successful enactment of this new professional coaching program what would you do?" Yes, this is a co-option strategy. Laggards will see right through it if this request isn't legitimate and if one doesn't seriously consider the advice they offer and listen patiently to the stories they wish to convey. There are certain repeated patterns (fractals) that are found in most organizations. We can identify these patterns with the assistance of our colleagues, who happen to be Laggards, and can effectively leverage these patterns to our advantage and to the advantage of the organizations in which we work and coach.

What about providing coaching services to a Laggard? We first have to ask why a Laggard would ever seek out assistance from an organizational coach. I suggest three reasons: (1) this provides a setting in which the Laggard can "vent" their frustrations (the coach as witness), (2) this provides a setting in which the Laggard can tell "their side of the story" having often turned off/bored all of their colleagues inside the organization (the coach as patient listener) or (3) they are required to get a coach (and therefore are determined to prove that coaching doesn't work).

As coaches to Laggards we can engage one of three strategies to confront the difficult (but sometimes very gratifying) challenges inherent in work with these men and women. First, one can be appreciative—helping to identify (or reinforce) the contributions made by this client in the past (given that the Laggard was often an innovator in his former life). Second, one can engage in reframing of the information, intentions and ideas presented by the Laggard. Information can be reframed through the reinterpretation of the current issues facing the organization (and comparing these issues/conditions to those in the past when the Laggard was an active innovator) "What can we learn from the past?" Reframing of intentions occurs when a coach encourages her Laggard client to identify and clarify the broad goals, vision and values of the organization on which the Laggard and the organization's leaders can agree. Finally, the reframing of ideas occurs when a coach can provide an appreciative perspective

regarding the insights and actions the Laggard is offering in his organization. "Which of the ideas from the past are still relevant?"

Third, the coach can ask the tough questions: (1) "Why are you still working in this setting?" (2) "Where might you be more fully appreciated?" (3) "How do you help to create conditions in which your background, talents, skills, knowledge are more fully aligned with what an organization needs and appreciates?" Without becoming a therapist, the coach can help the Laggard grieve for lost opportunities, lost battles, and lost recognition and appreciation. The coach can also help to empower the Laggard—help her client (as in the case of the Late Majority client) to move away from a sense of helplessness to one of hopefulness. This is a crucial movement from an external local of control (I am a victim and can do nothing about it other than grin-and-bear it) to an internal local of control (I can do something about this and don't need to stay in the current, destructive circumstance).

Conclusions

At the heart of any diffusion process is the issue of credibility. From the perspective of a potential coaching client the two fundamental diffusion questions are: Why should I want to engage the services of a coach? How can a coach help me assess the credibility of new ideas that are being thrown at me every day? At the heart of the matter for both the coach and potential client is the question: What are the ingredients that make an innovation "respectable"? How did professional coaching become respectable—or is it still at the fringe of organizational life? What about the credibility of other ideas that are being offered to or generated by coaching clients? An organizational coach can be of great assistance in helping her client sort out the credibility of potential innovations in her organization. Is there a solid base of evidence to support the credibility of this innovative idea or practice? This doesn't necessarily mean that the idea or practice is already proven to be successful—there certainly is great value in the encouragement of exploratory and pioneering work. The idea or practice, however, should be linked to the information already existing in the organization about need, resources and opportunities. It should also be aligned with the core intentions (mission, vision, values, and purposes) of the organization.

But what about the even more fundamental credibility issue: is coaching itself a credible idea and practice? We must often look to the establishment of a profession if we are specifically considering the

14

credibility and long-term acceptance of a new type of human service initiative—such as coaching. During the 1970s, Bledstein proposed that American society is deeply enmeshed in a culture of professionalism. By extension, other societies are also moving toward a culture in which professional credentials are replacing social-economic class structures as the defining criterion for social stratification (Bledstein, 1976). This social dynamic would seem to be particularly poignant with regard to a newly-emerging field like professional coaching. The concepts and strategies associated with the diffusion of innovation are directly relevant to those seeking to establish professional coaching as a viable and enduring human service enterprise and are of great value as guidelines regarding the expectations and needs of those who are seeking to make use of the distinctive services being offered by a professional coach.

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