



Transpersonal coaching offers a more complex technique than those based on simpler models such as Grow. Its proponents argue it is especially useful in leadership development.

Coaches are always looking to supplement their technique tools. As neuro-linguistic programming shakes off its fringe image to become almost standard issue in most coaching menus, so another and less controversial method is moving out of psychotherapy and psychology and into business coaching.

It is called transpersonal coaching, and is an off-shoot of transpersonal psychology that has had a high profile in the UK since the early 1970s.

As a coaching approach it is difficult to define, but it is one that its champions, an increasing band of executive coaches and business psychologists, see as relevant. They believe it can address the stress and malaise that sour modern society and the corporate world, and is a well-rounded approach to developing focused and energetic leaders.

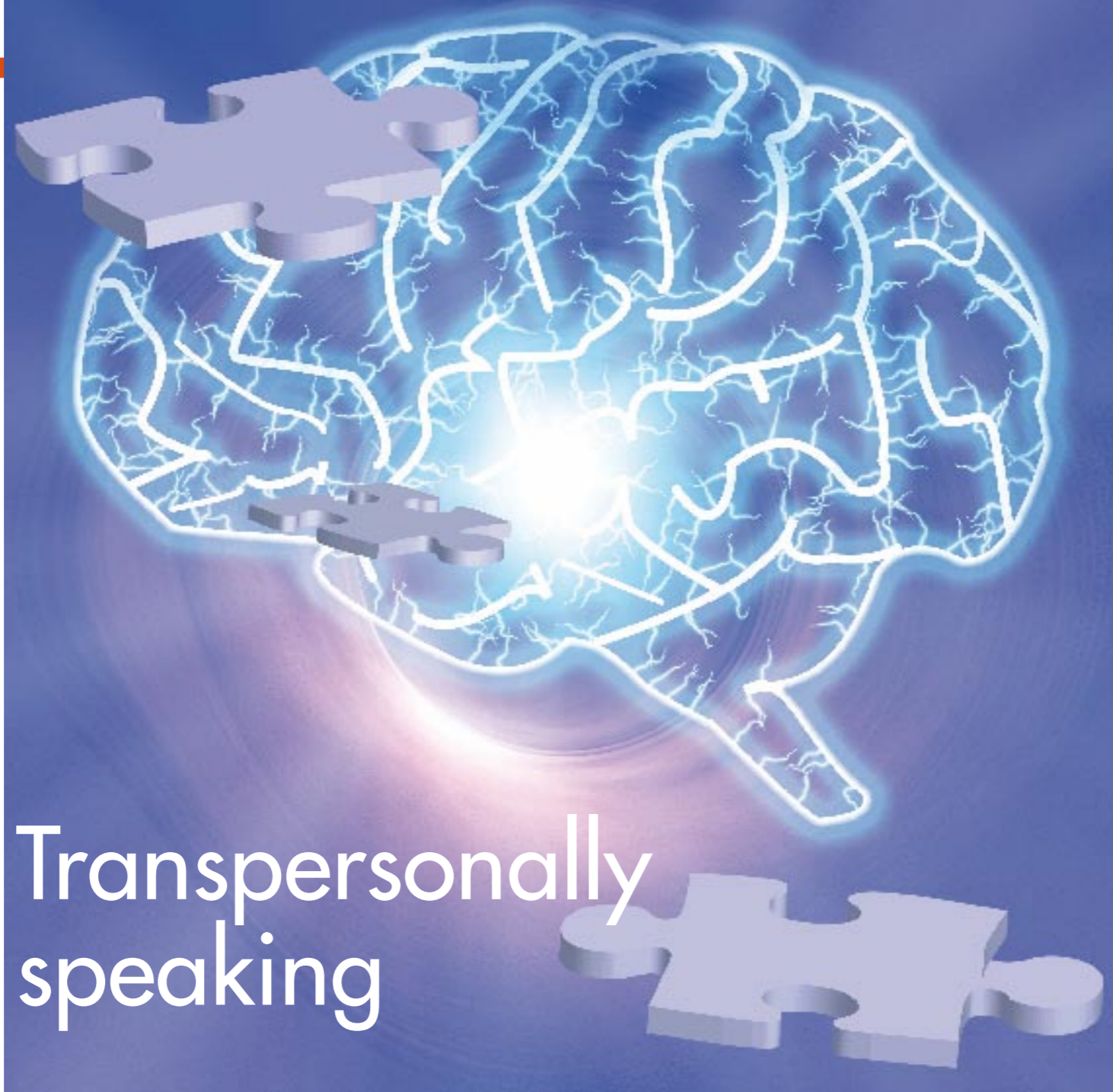
Finding meaning

The best-known exponent of transpersonal coaching is Sir John Whitmore, executive chairman of Performance Consultants International. "In recent years, people – especially in Western cultures – are waking up to the transpersonal within themselves, through the emerging need to find meaning and purpose in all aspects of their lives, and to work in the service of something beyond just making a profit," he says.

He believes: "Affluence, global communication and the secularisation of society have brought the transpersonal onto many people's agenda, both personally and at work."

So just what is transpersonal psychology? Does it have a place in business, or it merely a hangover from the hippy days of love and peace?

Transpersonal means "beyond the person". Its psychology is based on the idea of a spiritual centre or self within each individual. It draws together threads and influences from many high-profile, 20th-century psychologists such as Abraham Maslow (who explored the relationship between self-realisation and motivation), Victor Frankl (a prisoner of Second World War concentration camps who found that those who could invest their



Transpersonally speaking



Sir John Whitmore, Performance Consultants International

lives with meaning had a greater chance of survival), and Carl Jung (who studied how individuals can feel fulfilled).

The late, but still influential, transpersonal psychologist Ian Gordon-Brown defined his task and that of his colleagues as "facilitating the release of energy [from the self] in individuals and in groups".

It is this reference to energy, combined with values, which is most relevant in understanding the role of transpersonal coaching and how it chimes perfectly with the perception of coaching as a positive, as opposed to remedial, activity.

"If we look for where the positive energy is, the vitality, and the spirit, and explore and build on it, then this is what

will grow within an individual or a company," says Whitmore.

In turn, this will lead to transpersonal coaching being "an empowering process", he says, because drilling into an individual's core values allows the coach to unearth the coachee's core strengths and creativity.

Such ideas may sound rather intense in a UK business environment but they are relevant to business, says Roisin Murray, who runs the programme for the post-graduate certificate in business coaching at the University of Derby.

"For example, transpersonal coaching is important in leadership development because no-one can be a good leader

unless they are self-aware and develop as a whole person," she says. "The bottom line is how can you lead people if they don't want you to lead them?"

Murray sees transpersonal coaching as helping to "uncover the stories" – which she defines as personal concepts – that a leader has to create.

"The role of the transpersonal coach is to work with the story that the coachee is telling themselves and to uncover other stories because they are part of the coachee's success strategy."

Murray doesn't think it unusual to spend time with people working on their self-awareness as well as business strategy. "Everyone needs an awareness of

their own approach and style," she says. Transpersonal coaching is increasingly appearing on coaching training programmes. At the Coaching Supervision Academy, trainer Fiona Adamson is bringing her 10 years' experience in transpersonal psychology to bear on a new set of coaching programmes.

From this October, Adamson and her colleague Edna Murdoch will run courses that introduce coaches to the subject and train them to use transpersonal skills. She hopes that coaches will pick up "inner wisdom as a means of helping clients gain spiritual and emotional intelligences".

Adamson also uses transpersonal methods elsewhere, such as in profiling individuals and helping them advance their careers. "Once someone is aware of their strengths and weaknesses, you can help them and release their energy," she says.

Whitmore says transpersonal coaching can also be employed when energies are blocked or misaligned, or when there is a mismatch between employee and organisation. "In executive coaching, the executive will often raise the question about their work situation and say 'what is the meaning of all this?' The valuable question for the coach is 'where is the conflict and how would you [the executive] make a difference in a valuable way and find more job satisfaction?'"

HOW TO USE TRANSPERSONAL COACHING

Professor Stephen Palmer says that transpersonal coaching is useful for coachees who need more than just a framework (such as the Grow model) for a coaching conversation. "Their objectives are not just about achieving a career or personal goal," he says. "They may wish to explore existential or spiritual issues, and this is where transpersonal coaching can be helpful. They may feel something is missing in their life but they are unsure what it is."

Palmer points out that good transpersonal coaching practice is informed by transpersonal psychology "and enables the client to focus on these important issues".

One of the claims made for transpersonal

coaching is that because it focuses on spiritualism, it is the ultimate approach to coaching. Palmer disagrees and says that it is more a case of finding the appropriate form of coaching to fit the need.

"People have different developmental needs over their lifespan and different approaches to coaching may be more suited to their needs or personality," he says.

"For example, cognitive behavioural coaching is excellent in helping clients to enhance their performance when the client has performance-inhibiting thoughts, but may be less helpful when the client wants to consider spiritual aspects of life. I do not believe that there is an ultimate approach to coaching," he says.

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Transpersonal coaching can also raise performance, says Whitmore. "It does this by making a person into a solid human being who is not reactive," he says. "They choose their behaviours, rather than react, and so perform at a much higher level."

He believes that self-awareness also gets rid of the fear factor that has affected their focus. "The transpersonal is about building maturity in people," he says, "and their capacity to learn from experience, which helps us to learn quicker."

Most transpersonal psychologists and psychotherapists talk in terms of the heart, which they see as the core of the person. "To get to know people I ask them what makes your heart sing," says transpersonal counsellor and psychotherapist Hazel Marshall, based in Leicestershire.

"I also ask what is at the heart of your organisation? The opposite of this is the heart attack – caused by stress and unhappiness. It is no coincidence that this can occur when our lives are out of balance," she says.

For Whitmore, transpersonal coaching, with its emphasis on getting to the heart of the matter, can help with work-life balance issues. "Putting managers through a short course of coaching to change from command and control mentality can make whole management culture changes," he says. "But as with all coaching initiatives, one doesn't get effective change without full support from the boardroom."

by Stephanie Sparrow

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