

Executive Coaching Encourages Experimentation

Using the AMSP to Lead Innovative Teams

Leading innovation is a difficult assignment. Even managers with the will to change may not know the way. They may need executive coaching to be successful. Coaches need a profiling tool that reveals how a manager’s personal style may unwittingly thwart innovation. If that tool can also guide the client on how to un-block the path to change, a virtuous cycle of change and renewal emerges. This case study follows Mitzi Desselles’ experience of using the AMSP with Oliver to encourage greater innovation within his team.

Oliver is a brand manager for a consumer goods manufacturer; responsible for a department of 45 staff. The brand he manages is facing rapid new product introductions by competitors, and market share had been on a downward spiral over the past 6-8 months. Oliver is well-respected by peers and senior management for his expertise and top-drawer packaged goods experience. But there was a significant amount of tension in his interpersonal relationships with those below him, to the point of outright animosity. As a result, management was hesitant to offer Oliver a planned promotion to takeover the company’s flagship brand across Europe.

Oliver’s technical expertise has helped him identify several possible product innovations that could very well return his brand to its former stature. Unfortunately, his ideas have not been accepted nor acted upon by his team and he feels increasingly frustrated by their failure to act.

The Coaching Sessions

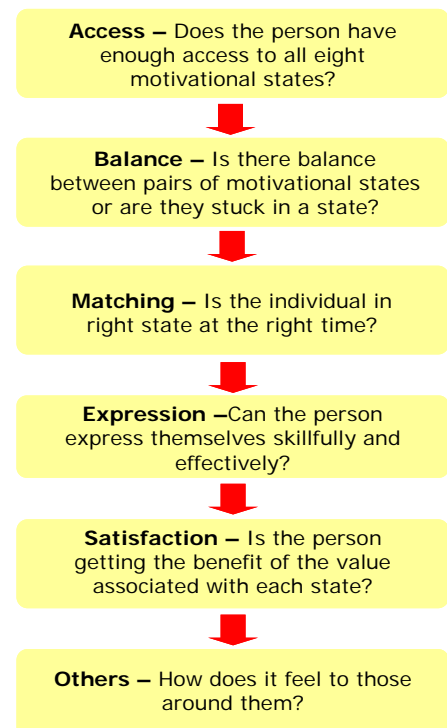
Through the AMSP, we helped Oliver understand his motivational profile and how this was affecting his behaviour, as well as the performance of his team. Prior to receiving feedback on his AMSP profile, Oliver claimed his staff was discontented because he was innovating “too fast for them.” He described them as “conservative” and “entrenched” and unwilling to take on the new challenges he was asking of them.

Based on his self-description, we expected to see a high score on Rebellious on Oliver’s AMSP. This was not the case. His AMSP revealed that his dominant motivational states were Self and Mastery, with a relatively low score on Rebelliousness. Oliver realised his staff was not being given a say in innovation and change. By spending so much time in the Self-Oriented and Mastery states, he



Supporting Innovation using the AMSP

Typical Feedback Flow



was trying to “push” innovation through by force or. Oliver realized that by under-playing the Other-Oriented state, he was working against the spirit of innovation. He was creating a climate that demanded high levels of Conformity. By demanding innovation “his way,” Oliver created a double-bind: his deeds and his words were out of sync. This eroded trust and raised resentments.

In talking through these competing values, Oliver resolved that the best way to achieve his career goals would be to involve staff more in decisions about where, when and how to innovate the brand. (The Serious state - achieving significant, long-term goals - was another important motivator for Oliver.)

We explored various strategies to encourage and solicit ideas from staff members. Once released from having to shoulder the entire burden for innovation, Oliver turned whole-heartedly to building innovation from the grassroots and he called upon a set of motivations he had not often used before in the work setting – his Playful side.

He used “mini-experiments” (see box) such as holding staff meetings at the local coffeehouse, rather than around the large, imposing conference table in his office. He encouraged his team to role-play how they might approach innovation from an alternative perspective. In these alter-egos, staff were released from old habits, old ways of thinking and old grudges within the team.

The Outcome

The process took 6 months of coaching sessions. The impact on the department and Oliver personally were substantial. In the year since the coaching took place, the brand team has introduced several new innovations in the marketplace and has reversed its decline in market share. The refreshed brand has even been able to command a higher price in the market.

Based on the changes Oliver initiated, his team also won a coveted company-sponsored award for innovation and leadership. Oliver is now thriving.

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The Eight Motivational States



The AMSP and Reversal Theory

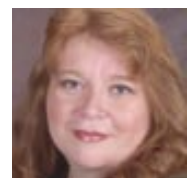
The key insight is that our experience is shaped by a set of alternative ways of seeing the world.

People are driven by eight core motivational states - organised into four pairs of opposite states – and we are constantly moving through a dynamic pattern of reversals within each pair.

Performance and psychological health is maximised when people are able to experience all eight states, and match their state to the demands of the situation.

Mini-Experiments

- No experiment ever fails
- One learns something, no matter what the outcome
- Start with low-risk trials
- Watch what happens
- Gradually increase the stakes



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