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Levi Nieminen
Wayne State University

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Radford University

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ALIGNING LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE: THE LEADER–CULTURE FIT FRAMEWORK FOR COACHING ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERS

Levi Nieminen
Denison Consulting, Ann Arbor, Michigan

Benjamin Biermeier-Hanson
Wayne State University

Daniel Denison
International Institute for Management Development, Lausanne, Switzerland and Denison Consulting, Ann Arbor, Michigan

This paper describes the conceptual underpinning and application of a novel framework for coaching organizational leaders. Rooted in person–environment fit theory, the leader–culture fit framework yields a set of inferences about leader–culture fit and leads to several unique perspectives on coaching. The intent of the framework is to organize and augment the coach's subjective insights about how the organizational culture may support the leader's development of certain capabilities while potentially constraining the development of others. The proposed model also has the potential to better align leader-development strategies, vis-à-vis coaching, with the broader organization's development needs by identifying key ways in which the leader can serve as an agent for positive culture change. From a methodological perspective, we discuss three requirements: the use of parallel attributes, commensurate measures, and evaluative judgments of attributes. We also briefly illustrate the model's application using a case study that combines data from an organizational culture assessment with data from a parallel 360-degree leader assessment, and finally, discuss several key challenges and limitations to implementing the framework within a coaching engagement.

Keywords: executive coaching, leadership development, context, organizational culture, 360-degree assessment

The literature on leadership development is replete with scholars and practitioners describing the importance of context and calling for more attention to leader-context dynamics (Day, 2000). However, to borrow a quote from Porter and McLaughlin (2006) based on their review of published leadership studies from 1990 to 2005, "context is . . . like the weather . . . [with] many talking about it, but very few doing much about it insofar as empirical research is concerned" (p. 559). We believe that a similar state of affairs is also true with respect to the science and practice of coaching. Although coaches and scholars of coaching no doubt have a great appreciation for the context in which leaders operate, our review of the published coaching literature suggests that there is a lack of evidence-based approaches to understanding and integrating context considerations into the objectives, design, and delivery of coaching.

In particular, the way that coaches gather information about the context and tailor their coaching techniques is generally subjective and highly idiosyncratic (Feldman & Lankau, 2005; Saporito, 1996). This lack of rigor (when it comes to assessing the context) stands in stark contrast to the plethora of evidence-based practices for assessing the individual leader participating in the coaching (Bono, Purvanova, Towler, & Peterson, 2009). For example, a host of psychometric tools is commonly used to assess the leader's skills and abilities, attitudes, values, and personality (Allworth & Griffin, 2005; Bourne, 2008). This information is often supplemented by the use of multisource feedback instruments that shed additional light on the leader's performance behaviors as perceived by direct reports, peers, and bosses (Goodstone & Diamante, 1998; Luthans & Peterson, 2003; Smither, London, Flautt, Vargas, & Kucine, 2003). In this paper, we argue that *context-focused* assessments have not gained similar popularity in coaching because practitioners and researchers have not fully elaborated (a) the value and importance of rigorous assessments of context within an *individual-focused* intervention, such as coaching, (b) the features of context that are most relevant for the leader's success in the short and long terms, and (c) the conceptual frameworks and corresponding methodologies needed to integrate assessment-driven insights of the individual and the context.

To help address these gaps, we introduce the *leader–culture fit* framework (LCFF) as a conceptual model intended to guide coaching based on the types of fit between the leader's capabilities and corresponding elements of the organization's culture. By considering attributes of the leader and the culture in tandem and identifying areas of both fit and misfit, coaching can be tailored to better prepare leaders for their dual role of operating *in* and *on* the organization. For many leaders, this means recognizing the ways in which the culture of the organization presents certain opportunities and constraints on behavior and individual development, particularly for the short-term survival and success of the leader. Beyond these opportunities and constraints, the effectiveness of many leaders is also contingent on their ability to successfully change the culture of their organizations. Understanding leader–culture fit can help to identify the aspects of the culture that need to change *and* the ways in which the leader will be most capable or challenged to facilitate the change process. Applied through coaching, the ultimate objectives of the LCFF are to improve leader and cultural capabilities. As both sets of capabilities improve over time, this will result in better "fit," but the primary objective of the model is enhanced individual and organizational effectiveness, not enhanced leader fit with the current culture (because that culture may need to change).

The use of parallel attributes, commensurate measures, and the evaluative judgment of leader and culture attributes as positive or negative, given the context, are the three methodological requirements for applying the framework in coaching (Caplan, 1987; Edwards, 1991; Kristof, 1996). In addition, we outline a number of methodological choices and the corresponding practical implications and tradeoffs, such as what attributes to focus on, what data-collection strategies to use, and what specific instrument types to consider. To make some of these issues more tangible, we illustrate one approach that combines a 360-degree assessment of the leader with a parallel survey of the organization's culture. Before introducing the LCFF and key methodological considerations in greater detail, we first root our discussion within the systems view of coaching and describe person–environment fit as the theoretical foundation for the proposed framework (Caplan, 1987; Caplan & Van Harrison, 1993; Kristof, 1996).

The Systems View of Coaching

As a description of the current state of coaching practice, it might be suggested that there are nearly as many approaches as there are coaches. This observation follows from the wide array of professional backgrounds and orientations of coaches, the diverse clientele of coaching interventions, the lack of standardized qualifications or licensure of coaches, and the widespread disagreement about the specific processes and tools that are most effective in bringing about behavioral change (Bono et al., 2009; Feldman & Lankau, 2005).

Though the specific practices of coaches vary widely, a number of core principles have emerged that differentiate coaching from other interventions with leaders. Kilburg (1996) defines coaching as the set of behavioral techniques used to improve a leader's performance and personal satisfaction, and consequently, the effectiveness of the organization. Coaching interventions typically last between two and 12 months (Kauffman & Coutu, 2009) and involve a structured and highly personalized exchange between a coach (often a consultant) and coachee (Feldman, 2001; Feldman & Lankau, 2005). Coaching is undertaken for a variety of purposes, most commonly for the preparation of high-potential leaders for career advancement, and less commonly, for remedial purposes with leaders at risk of derailing (Coutu & Kauffman, 2009). However, at the heart of most coaching interventions is a focus on feedback and behavioral change, with the ultimate goal of increasing the leader's effectiveness and advancement in the organization (Bono et al., 2009).

Recommended approaches to coaching have emerged from several schools of thought. Peltier (2001) describes five perspectives: psychodynamic, behaviorist, person-centered, cognitive, and systems-oriented. Each perspective takes a slightly unique focus, calls for different types of interventions, and suggests different criteria for evaluating progress (Feldman & Lankau, 2005). What differentiates a *systems-oriented perspective*–the perspective that our proposed framework most closely represents—is its focus on the leader as embedded in a complex system of relationships and processes (Peltier, 2001; Orenstein, 2002; Tobias, 1996). By understanding the interplay between the individual and system, coaching can be tailored in a way that maximizes the leader's development and fosters alignment with organizational imperatives (Peterson, 2009; Saporito, 1996).

The systems-oriented perspective sometimes characterizes the individual as bound by the context, detailing the many ways that context directs the occurrence and meaning of behavior by creating a set of opportunities and constraints that leaders must negotiate. However, this view neglects the other side of the leader-context interplay (Chatman, 1989; Johns, 2006; Mowday & Sutton, 1993). *Agentic leadership* encompasses the range of actions and decisions that leaders take that can directly or indirectly shape, change, and influence the context they inhabit (Klimoski, 2012). Taking a balanced viewed, Klimoski reminds us that leaders are both *pawns* and *kings*, bound to operate within certain constraints, but nevertheless tasked with the crucial role of changing organizations for the better. Therefore, coaching should be designed to address both issues and facilitate a deeper understanding of the organizational context (Feldman & Lankau, 2005; Kilburg, 1996).

Building on this perspective, we propose a conceptual model for understanding crucial *context-to-leader* (opportunities, constraints) and *leader-to-context* (agentic leadership) dynamics and leveraging these insights within a systems-oriented approach to coaching. In developing a practically useful model, we needed to resolve three fundamental questions. First, what is the appropriate theoretical perspective to inform the model? Second, which features of the context and leader should be considered, and how can these be compared? And third, what are the fundamental methodological requirements and choices for implementing the model in coaching? We introduce the proposed LCFF model in response to our first and second questions, describe key methodological considerations in response to the third question, and conclude with a discussion of key challenges and limitations.

Question I: What Is the Appropriate Theory to Inform the Model?

The proposed model builds on person–environment (P-E) fit theory. This theory describes how the compatibility that evolves between an individual and his or her work setting is an important factor in the individual's performance and well-being (Caplan, 1987). In general, research has found positive effects of increasing fit on a range of workplace outcomes, including job performance,

satisfaction, organizational commitment, intent to stay, and organizational citizenship behaviors (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005; Kristof-Brown & Guay, 2011), though some evidence has also begun to emerge in support of more nuanced relationships, such as moderated and nonlinear effects, and some attention has been paid to the possible *dark sides* of fit, including misfit and homogeneity (De Cooman et al., 2009; Wheeler, Gallagher, Brouer, & Sabylnski, 2007).

Comprehensive reviews of the P-E fit literature also outline a number of decision points related to how fit is conceptualized (Edwards & Shipp, 2007; Kristof, 1996; Kristof & Guay, 2011). One approach focuses on whether the environment meets the needs and preferences of the person (needs–supplies), as well as whether the person's abilities meet the demands of the environment (demands–abilities). A second approach characterizes fit as supplementary or complementary, i.e., when a person adds to what is already present in the environment or adds to what is lacking in the environment. A third perspective focuses more directly on the degree of similarity between the person and environment, such as whether an individual's values are similar or dissimilar with an organization's values (Chatman, 1989).

Fit can also be specified and nested within multiple *levels*, such as fit with the occupation, organization, job, work team, or supervisor (Jansen & Kristof-Brown, 2006). Given the multilevel nature of the construct, it is important to specify which level(s) one is considering in any research studies or practical applications of fit (Edwards & Shipp, 2007). The model advanced in this paper focuses on leader–culture fit. Fit with culture is in itself a nested construct, as leaders can demonstrate varying levels of compatibility with a societal (or national) culture, as well as the culture of the organization in which they work (Burns, Kotrba, & Denison, 2013). Given both the importance of organizational culture to firm performance (Sackmann, 2011) and the role of leaders in creating and reinforcing the culture of the organization (Schein, 1985; Hartnell, Ou, & Kinicki, 2011), we chose to focus on the leader's fit with the *organizational culture*. It is our judgment that this scope best matches the intended purpose of our model and the intended purpose of coaching to enhance leaders and organizations (Kilburg, 1996). At the same time, we recognize that fit at other levels could also be important to consider in coaching and note that the framework introduced here could be applied to fit at other levels as well.

As described above, the focus of our model and approach is most similar in scope to person–organization (P-O) fit. Kristof (1996) defined P-O fit as, "the compatibility between people and organizations that occurs when (a) at least one entity provides what the other needs, or (b), they share similar fundamental characteristics, or (c) both" (p. 4). The elements of the definition reflect different types of fit and also allow for special cases of congruence (or similarity) and incongruence (or dissimilarity) between the person and organization. Following from Kristof's definition, our model specifies four basic types of fit, based on the presence or absence of attributes in the person (leader) and the organization (culture). For the purpose of labeling the types in the model, we characterize the strong presence of an attribute as "high" and relative absence of an attribute as "low."

In this way, congruence can be due to the shared presence (high-high) or absence (low-low) of an attribute, and alternatively, incongruence can be due to an attribute present in the leader that is absent in the organization (high-low) and vice versa (low-high). It is important to note that these four basic types specify instances of fit and potential misfit (Harrison, 2007). For the purpose of coaching leaders, we argue that both perspectives are important to consider. In addition to the positive outcomes typically associated with fit, misfit or lack of congruence has been linked to turnover (De Cooman et al., 2009) or counterproductive behaviors in the event that turnover does not occur (Wheeler et al., 2007).

It is also important to differentiate our multiattribute characterization of fit from global fit conceptualizations. A multiattribute framework yields multiple inferences in reference to a single person and organization using a set of *parallel attributes*, which create the common language and basis for comparison. As a result, it is possible to determine how a leader fits along some attributes while lacking fit on others and then use this information to guide the choice between potential developmental objectives and coaching strategies.

More commonly, fit researchers have taken a global fit perspective, focusing on the degree of overall fit a person has with the organization. For example, O'Reilly, Chatman, and Caldwell (1991) developed a q-sort measure—the *Organizational Culture Profile* or OCP—for assessing the compatibility between

job candidates' preferred organizational culture and the values espoused by the organization (Caldwell & O'Reilly, 1990; Chatman, 1989). Research has found that the overall degree of values congruence for new employees is positively related to their subsequent job satisfaction and organizational commitment and negatively related to turnover (Verquer, Beehr, & Wagner, 2003). Though this perspective could be particularly useful to guide binary hiring decisions (Werbel & Gilliland, 1999), our model was designed to help coaches prioritize development actions on specific attributes.

Question II: Which Features of the Leader and Context Should Be Considered?

Much has been written about the dynamic interplay of leaders and organizational culture and their dual influence on organizational effectiveness (e.g., Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Hartnell & Walumbwa, 2011; Trice & Beyer, 1991). Schein's (1985) seminal work in this area describes the creation and management of organizational culture as the single most important role of the leader. Founding leaders instill their personal beliefs and values in the organizations they create through their decisions, the people they hire, and the structures and processes they build (Schein, 1983). Thereafter, effective leaders are able to continually shape the culture through their strategic vision and through the things they pay attention to and celebrate (Hartnell & Walumbwa, 2011). Schein's view also recognizes the recursive effects of culture on leadership, such that leaders become increasingly constrained by the culture over time, particularly late in the organization's life cycle when core beliefs and values are firmly entrenched.

Given the critical importance of leader–culture dynamics, there is an increasing recognition of the value added by incorporating a cultural mindset within the practice of coaching (e.g., Rothaizer & Hill, 2010; Tobias, 2004). Despite growing interest, few frameworks have been advanced that involve a systematic assessment of the culture, nor that allow for the integration of culture and leader data, and those that do exist focus on societal culture rather than organizational culture.

One example of a societal culture approach is provided by Coultas, Bedwell, Burke, and Salas's (2011) DELTA paradigm[1], which was developed to improve the cultural sensitivity of coaching interventions across national boundaries. At the foundation of the DELTA approach, Hofstede's (1980) dimensions of societal culture are used as a basis for understanding potential cross-cultural differences in motivation. A second example is provided by Rosinksi and colleagues (Gilbert & Rosinski, 2008; Rosinski, 2003), who developed a coaching intervention that focuses on the cultural orientations and competencies of the individual. Their cultural orientations framework (COF) seeks to enhance leader self-awareness by identifying "the consistencies or gaps between their espoused cultural orientation and their ability to straddle different orientations" (p. 83, Gilbert & Rosinski, 2008). Because DELTA and COF focus on aspects of *societal culture and identity*, these approaches may be particularly well suited for cross-cultural coaching scenarios, such as preparing a leader for an expatriate assignment or developing a leader's competence within a culturally diverse team or organization.

In contrast to these approaches, the LCFF was designed specifically to help coaches facilitate leader development and agentic leadership within the cultural context of the organization. Consistent with other scholars, we define organizational culture as the values, beliefs, and assumptions that are held by the members of an organization and which facilitate shared meaning and guide behavior and work practices at varying levels of awareness (Denison, 1996; Schein, 1985). However, we also recognize that this definition does not go far enough to make clear the performance relevance of organizational culture. Interest in culture within the management discipline was fueled early on by a number of popular books pointing to corporate culture as a key factor in achieving a high-performance organization (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Kotter & Heskett, 1992; Peters & Waterman, 1982). Since then, a number of empirical studies have tested the existence and nature of the

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[1] DELTA stands for five components: "(a) determining cultural values, (b) employing typical coaching techniques, (c) looking and listening for motivational needs and deficiencies, (d) Tailoring coaching techniques to motivational needs and cultural values, and (e) assessing the effectiveness of the approaches used" (Coultas et al., 2011, p. 149).

culture–performance linkage. Recent reviews of this literature highlight growing evidence of the direct effects that culture has on organizational effectiveness (e.g., Hartnell, Ou, & Kinicki, 2011; Sackmann, 2011). Thus, in line with Chatman and Cha's (2003) description, we also view organizational culture as the set of values and norms that energize and coordinate performance behaviors within the organization.

Accordingly, leader–culture fit refers to the compatibility of the leader with the norms, values, and performance behaviors that typify the organization (Burns et al., 2013). In their recent review, Burns et al. (2013) point out the lack of empirical research to date testing the effects of leader–culture fit. They posit that this particular type of fit is critical to organizational effectiveness and demonstrate through an initial study that both congruence (supplementary fit) and incongruence (complementary fit) can lead to increased ratings of leader effectiveness, thereby underscoring the importance of considering both types of fit in future research and theoretical developments. These authors also note that, whereas some progress has been made toward identifying which attributes are most important with respect to a leader's fit with national culture (e.g., Yukl, Fu, & McDonald, 2003), more research is needed to develop the theory and multiattribute frameworks that apply to leader–culture fit at the organization level.

Following from these authors' conclusions, the model specified here can be applied with flexibility to different sets of leader and culture attributes. However, for the purpose of introducing the framework in greater detail, we describe attributes in the following paragraphs that focus on categories of the leader's *effectiveness behaviors*—that is, the typical behaviors, skills, and managerial styles that contribute to the leader's effectiveness in the organization. As an example, *teamwork* can be defined as a parallel attribute involving the leader's skills in building and managing effective teams and the corresponding cultural norms and values that support or inhibit teamwork in the organization.

As described previously, the proposed model conceptualizes leader–culture fit using the joint exploration of "highs" and "lows" or the extent to which attributes are present versus absent. The model is amenable to measuring leaders and culture through either prescriptive or descriptive instruments. Descriptive instruments measure characteristics without attempting to attach significance or meaning to the assessment results (e.g., the good or the bad). They are value-neutral. In contrast, prescriptive instruments do attempt to infer meaning from the assessment results by building an evidence base or measurement approach to justify how scores are linked to particular outcomes of interest, such as leader or organization effectiveness (Ashkanasy, Broadfoot, & Falkus, 2000). Although either measurement strategy could be used, the interpretation of the model requires evaluative judgments about whether particular attributes should be further developed or not (i.e., is more or less of an attribute desirable?). We describe these inferences and the corresponding implications for coaching in the section that follows.

Types of leader–culture fit. The LCFF describes leader–culture fit in terms of the four basic types shown in Figure 1. Consistent with the focus of coaching, the model specifies the leader as the focal point, characterizing his or her attributes as "matched" or "unmatched" by the organization's culture. As with prior fit research, instances of congruence and incongruence can be identified within the model (Edwards & Shipp, 2007). Congruence results from a high degree of similarity between the leader's behavior and culture on a particular attribute, such as when a leader has strong teamwork capabilities at the same time that the organization is strong on this attribute (matched high), or conversely, when both the leader and organization are weak in terms of using teamwork effectively (matched low). Alternatively, incongruence occurs when the leader and organization are dissimilar in one of two ways. Specifically, a leader can possess strong capabilities in teamwork at the same time that the organization is low on this attribute (unmatched high), or vice versa, the leader could possess weak teamwork capabilities while the organization is high on teamwork (unmatched low). These four types are not intended to capture all possible nuances, such as variations in degree of leader–culture fit, but rather to uncover the basic dynamics so that coaches can incorporate this information to guide their perspectives and inform the design and delivery of coaching.

Unmatched lows. The culture presents a unique opportunity for a leader's development when a weak or absent attribute of the leader is matched with a corresponding attribute that is present in the organizational culture. This is because current behavioral norms and work practices likely
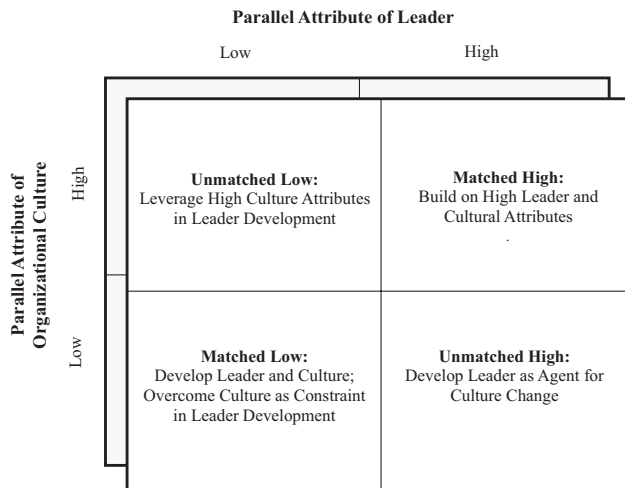
Parallel Attribute of Leader

Figure 1. Four basic types of leader–culture fit underlying the LCFF.

provide a rich set of experiences and incentives that promote on-the-job learning. For example, learning can occur rapidly in the context of day-to-day business operations when it is possible to observe others role-modeling the desired capabilities. In the same way, there are likely to be many opportunities to practice new behaviors and receive additional feedback.

As with the degree of cultural support that exists, *expectations* for the leader's development may be similarly heightened. Cultural norms and values that are intensely held within the organization can contribute to a stronger expectation for how leaders ought to behave, increase the salience of managerial behaviors and practices that are misaligned with the culture, and intensify the negative outcomes associated with acting out of alignment with the culture (Hanges, Dorfman, Shteynberg, & Bates, 2006). By the same means, assimilation around deeply embedded aspects of the culture will likely enhance the leader's socialization and upward mobility within the organization, whereas failure to do so could block one's career progression.

Based on these considerations, coaches may wish to prioritize development on attributes that fall into this type of fit, should the conclusion be reached that more of this attribute is needed from the leader. Due to strong "push" (heightened expectations) and "pull" factors (favorable cultural support), setting aggressive goals to focus on these attributes might be appropriate. Of course, this can be adjusted to reflect the degree of separation between the leader and culture, that is, the extent to which the leader's capability is underdeveloped relative to the culture of the organization. For example, a coach may wish to the give the highest priority to leader attributes that are both poorly developed and greatly misaligned with the culture.

Whether in such extreme cases or more moderate ones, the coach can look to the organization as a supportive environment for the leader's development. From this perspective, coaching can help to connect the leader with ongoing development opportunities, encourage the leader to try new skills, solicit additional feedback while on the job, and identify mentors within the organization, specifically leaders with strong capabilities in the focal areas. In addition, coaching offers a safe place to reflect on these experiences, track the leader's progress, and maintain accountability for near-term positive growth. A supportive environment provides psychological safety for learning and growth (Avolio & Hannah, 2008).

Matched highs. This perspective occurs when a present leader attribute is aligned with a high level of the corresponding attribute in the organizational culture. For capabilities that fit this type, the focus of coaching naturally shifts toward a positive psychology view of leadership, in which the primary objectives are to improve upon and actualize the full potential of attributes that the leader may already possess (Grant & Spence, 2010). Consistent with a positive psychology view, it is

important for coaches and leaders to recognize that these areas of "strength" require specific development plans too. For example, there may be ways to fine-tune leadership skills and achieve even higher levels of individual effectiveness, such as by helping the leader to identify advanced learning and teaching opportunities (e.g., stretch assignments, acting as a mentor for others).

At the same time, coaches should recognize that overemphasizing these areas can result in ignoring or even fostering comparative weaknesses that can diminish team performance (Kaplan & Kaiser, 2009). In other words, coaches must take care that these attributes are not blindly developed at the expense of performance, also recognizing that there are other contextual factors besides culture that must be accounted for in this process. Overall, coaching should encourage leaders to explore the upper limits of their capabilities, avoid unnecessary ceilings, and be conscious of managing attributes that they already exhibit, so they are not made redundant or harmful through overuse.

A related point with implications for coaching has to do with how the leader uses culturally aligned capabilities to the organization's benefit. As with individuals, organizations can often benefit from further development of attributes that may already be well-developed (Grant & Spence, 2010). Some aspects of the culture may be highly visible, widely shared, and fully leveraged within the organization, such that cultural maintenance is the most important role that a leader can play. In this case, coaching can help the leader to behave in ways that reaffirm and uphold the culture for *insiders* and teach or illustrate core cultural norms and values for *outsiders*, including external stakeholders and new members of the organization. Other aspects of the culture may represent emerging attributes that have not yet become ingrained throughout the organization. Coaching should enhance leader awareness of these cultural attributes and prepare the leader to elevate these norms and values into the collective awareness of the organization so that they can be fully leveraged and aligned with the strategy.

Unmatched highs. This quadrant reflects a present attribute for the leader which is absent or only weakly developed in the culture. In this case, the leader should be uniquely positioned to influence the growth and expression of the cultural norms and values within the organization, should that be appropriate in the context. However, this scenario can also involve the potential need for a deeper and more fundamental culture shift in the organization, adding significant complexity to the leader's agentic role and the coaching perspective required to effectively facilitate that role. Though the leader-as-agent perspective might appear best suited for coaching top executives, business directors, or other leaders who typically act as the primary drivers of organization-wide culture change, we maintain its applicability with mid-level leaders and even coworkers who are also responsible, though perhaps to a lesser degree, for the maintenance and shaping of the organizational culture (e.g., Schneider, Smith, & Fleenor, 1998; Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008). Furthermore, we anticipate that the complexities described below could play out in a similar way across levels of the organization.

One factor that ought to be considered early on involves the organization's readiness for culture change. The specific coaching strategies adopted will likely differ considerably based on the organization's awareness and acceptance of the current culture, the level of support and momentum for change, and whether there is an ongoing change effort in place. For organizations already engaged in effortful culture transformations, coaching can help the leader to recognize her potential as an agent or champion in the ongoing change process and clarify the level of involvement and role that would be most appropriate. Coaching can also help to define strategies for winning support and building key partnerships with the stakeholders of the change process, and later, explore ways to be more effective in the change-agent role.

On the other hand, the objectives and expectations of coaching should be adjusted when there is either disagreement or general lack of awareness about the state of the culture and its root causes. Depending on a number of factors, such as the leader's experience, credibility, and role in the organization, the associated risks of being on the front lines of a culture change may outweigh the benefits. In other words, the coach may facilitate the leader's decision to defer a central agentic role to a later time or to others in the organization. For leaders with a clearer responsibility and stake in the organization's culture, coaching ought to be aligned with the early stages of culture change, empowering the leader to begin the process of *unfreezing* current cultural norms and values (see Weick & Quinn, 1999). Building a team is crucial. Acting unilaterally as an agent for culture change without first winning the support of key stakeholders and decision makers is likely to derail the

change effort before it can build momentum. Coaching can support this effort by helping the leader to engage in strategic partnerships and cope with possible missteps along the way.

Integrating coaching with organizational development presents a number of challenges that warrant consideration, though we believe that the benefits to the leader and organization will justify the associated costs in many circumstances. Most obviously, coaching may need to secure involvement and buy-in from a greater number of stakeholders than is typically required for individually focused leader-development activities. Second, broadening the scope of coaching to focus on the leader's impact on culture may require the use of innovative tools and methodologies to track and monitor progress (e.g., periodic culture surveys). Finally, in light of the complexity of culture change, an elongated coaching timeline may be necessary. In balance, this may call for greater flexibility in the coaching arrangements that are used, such as a combination of some external and some internal coaching.

Matched lows. Being low on a leader attribute that also lacks strong cultural support can present unique challenges for the leader's development. In this case, culture can serve an active or passive role in constraining the leader's development. Weak or developing cultural norms and values can result in a lack of clarity by creating mixed or inconsistent signals about the leadership behaviors that are valued within the organization. As a result, the leader may find partial or nominal support for learning and applying new skills in the workplace, but without consistent reinforcement from others, is at risk of falling back into more comfortable behavioral routines over time. Other scenarios can involve more active forms of resistance, such as when the use of particular behaviors and managerial styles clashes with the culture. In these scenarios, the leader is unlikely to receive adequate development support within the organization. If development does occur (e.g., through outside opportunities), it may be difficult for the leader to transfer newly learned skills back to the work environment (Orenstein, 2002; Tobias, 1996).

To avoid stagnation and transfer problems, an important first step for the coach is to understand the circumstances surrounding low or inconsistent cultural support. In many or perhaps most situations, we anticipate that the lack of cultural support for certain capabilities will create a challenge for the leader's development rather than an outright roadblock. We also recognize that proceeding with caution may be less feasible if organizational imperatives give high priority to the development of new capabilities that are not yet supported by the culture. The key then for coaching is to understand the unique challenges presented by the culture, enhance the leader's awareness of these challenges, and adjust the development plan accordingly. For example, when cultural support is very low, the coaching strategy might focus on identifying and connecting the leader with external opportunities for development, such as off-site training and workshops. When cultural support reaches more moderate levels, it might alternatively be possible to identify internal pockets of support within the organization, such as key groups or stakeholders that are actively engaged in transforming the culture. In either case, coaches and leaders may need to adjust their expectations and timelines to accommodate a potentially longer and more incremental growth trajectory, as well as the heightened potential for setbacks and frustration.

Question III: What Are the Methodological Requirements?

Having defined the conceptual model, a range of methodological issues must also be considered. Recognizing that a comprehensive treatment of all fit-measurement issues is beyond the scope of this paper (see Edwards & Parry, 1993; Edwards & Shipp, 2007; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005), in this section we describe the specific requirements and considerations for implementing the LCFF as a practical solution for coaching.

In our view, the methodological requirements are threefold. First, we propose that knowing how to use fit information in practice requires an evaluative judgment about the meaning of attributes, based on the degree of their expression. Coaches and leaders will need to determine whether fewer or more of the measured attributes are appropriate within the context to inform the direction of development efforts. If descriptive tools are implemented, coaches will need to facilitate a thorough sense-making process to infer the goodness or poorness of assessment scores. Though prescriptive tools may be helpful in this regard, further contextualization of the results is still needed to ensure that there is an agreed-upon basis for understanding and acting on the results. The second requirement is the use of parallel attributes. As

noted previously, parallel attributes are required to provide the common language and basis for comparing a leader and the cultural context of the organization, such as the teamwork behaviors of the leader and the corresponding values and norms surrounding teamwork within the organization. The final requirement is the use of commensurate measures. Commensurate measures gather the information in a way that facilitates direct comparison of the leader and culture of the organization. This means using instruments and analytic methods that produce scores to be interpreted with a common meaning (Caplan, 1987; Edwards, 1991; Kristof, 1996).

Assuming the basic requirements can be met, the application of the model is not wed to a particular methodology or set of instruments. For illustrative purposes, we present an example application of the LCFF based on the prescriptive instruments developed by Denison and colleagues (Denison, 1984; Denison, Hooijberg, & Quinn, 1995; Denison & Mishra, 1995). This case study incorporates actual leader and culture data that was collected with a utilities company going through a multiyear culture transformation process (for more information, see Denison Consulting, 2008).

Case Study. The Denison Leadership Development Survey (DLDS) and the Denison Organizational Culture Survey (DOCS) were designed to measure a set of parallel attributes that characterize high-performing leaders and organizations (Denison & Neale, 1996a, 1996b). The attributes measured include 12 first-order indexes which can be further clustered into four second-order traits (see Table 1). A series of studies have tested the underlying theory and measurement model and provided evidence linking these attributes to a range of effectiveness criteria (Denison, Kotrba, & Castaño, 2012; Denison, Nieminen, & Kotrba, 2012; Gillespie, Denison, Haaland, Smerek, & Neale, 2008; Kotrba et al., 2012). The evidence presented in these studies linking higher scores on the DLDS and DOCS to better effectiveness outcomes (e.g., higher performance) suggests that the tool can support its use in a prescriptive manner in which lower scores typically connote areas in need of development and higher scores typically connote areas of strength or well-developed capabilities. However, the assessment is intended as a guide for prescriptive inferences, to be confirmed or denied by the coach and leader, and we discuss this "contextualization" of the results in a subsequent section.

The DLDS is a 96-item 360-degree assessment of observable behaviors indicating leader effectiveness. Denison, Kotrba, and Castaño (2012) tested the psychometric characteristics of the DLDS, based on a sample of over 8,000 leaders as rated by over 74,000 peers, bosses, and direct reports. Confirmatory factor analyses conducted separately by rater source supported a second-order factor structure in each case, with the 12 first-order factors, or indexes, nested within four second-order factors, or traits. Coefficient alphas were examined separately by rater source for the indexes and found to range from .73 to .95, indicating acceptable internal reliability. These authors also tested and found support for the psychometric properties of the DLDS within the societal culture clusters specified by GLOBE researchers (Javidan, House, & Dorfman, 2004).

The DOCS is a 60-item assessment of cultural norms, values, and work practices. Denison, Nieminen, and Kotrba (2012) provided the most comprehensive review of the psychometric characteristics of the DOCS to date, using a sample of over 35,000 respondents from 160 organizations. These authors tested and compared alternative factor structures, demonstrating that the second-order nested structure specified by Denison and Mishra (1995) provided the best model fit. They also reported statistical support for aggregating individuals' ratings of the 12 culture indexes to the organization level using accepted measures of within-group agreement (e.g., mean $r_{wg(j)}$ ranged from .85 to .89; ICC(1) ranged from .06 to .10; ICC(2) ranged from .93 to .96). Coefficient alphas for the culture indexes ranged from .70 to .86, indicating acceptable internal reliability.

The requirement of commensurate measurement is established through a benchmarking process used for these assessments. Mean scores for the 12 indexes are converted to percentile scores based on a normative database of leaders (for the DLDS) and organizations (for the DOCS).[2] It is then possible to infer types of fit by comparing the relative highs and lows of the leader with those of the

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[2] At the time this article was submitted, the DLDS normative database included 13,959 leaders (from over 900 organizations) rated by 206,417 raters. The DOCS normative database included 931 organizations. Both databases represent a diverse array of industries and geographic locations. More information regarding the benchmarking process for these instruments is available from the authors of this article.

Table 1

Parallel Attributes of the Denison Leadership Development Survey (DLDS) and the Denison Organizational Culture Survey (DOCS)

Index from the DLDS	Index from the DOCS
Leader behaviors/skills focused on . . .	Cultural values and behavioral norms regarding . . .
Involvement (empowerment and development of people and teams)	
Empowers people	Empowerment
. . . facilitating employee participation and ownership.	. . . employee involvement in work and decision-making.
Builds team orientation	Team orientation
. . . developing and leveraging effective teamwork in the organization.	. . . independence versus cooperation and mutual accountability.
Develops organizational capability	Capability development
. . . building employee capabilities for future challenges and using the diversity of the workforce.	. . . the development of human resources as a source of competitive advantage.
Consistency (coordinated actions and value-consistent behaviors)	
Defines core values	Core values
. . . helping to define and exemplify a set of non-negotiable core values.	. . . the existence of shared principles and an ethical code that guides behavior.
Works to reach agreement	Agreement
. . . promoting constructive discussion and reconciliation of conflicting views.	. . . the importance of reaching consensus on key issues and the difficulty of doing so.
Manages coordination and integration	Coordination and integration
. . . improving access to resources and cross-functionality within the organization.	. . . alignment and coordination across different parts of the organization.
Adaptability (external orientation and responsiveness)	
Creates change	Creating change
. . . challenging unproductive work practices and implementing continuous improvement processes.	. . . flexibility and willingness to change existing work practices.
Emphasizes customer focus	Customer focus
. . . improving the organization's responsiveness to customer needs and wants.	. . . listening and adapting to changes in the marketplace.
Promotes organizational learning	Organizational learning
. . . dealing constructively with failures and rewarding innovation and creativity.	. . . the centrality of risk-taking and learning as organizational objectives.
Mission (clarity of purpose and direction)	
Defines strategic direction and intent	Strategic direction and intent
. . . communicating, clarifying, and implementing the organization's strategy.	. . . the visibility of the organization's mission and strategy and connection to daily activities.
Defines goals and objectives	Goals and objectives
. . . setting clear and ambitious goals and holding others accountable in the goal-setting process.	. . . the use of goals to drive achievement.
Creates a shared vision	Vision
. . . articulating a vision and inspiring energy and commitment to its achievement.	. . . the long-term outlook on the organization's desired future state.

organization's culture. Depending on the pattern of results and degree of specificity desired, fit can be inferred at the level of indexes or traits.

The leader and culture results are shown in Figure 2. The visual reports of the data are a useful heuristic for identifying patterns and trends in the data, such as identifying similarities and dissimilarities across rater sources (for the DLDS). It might also be helpful to rank-order and list out the scores as we have done in Tables 2, 3, and 4, in addition to further detailing the steps of our interpretation.
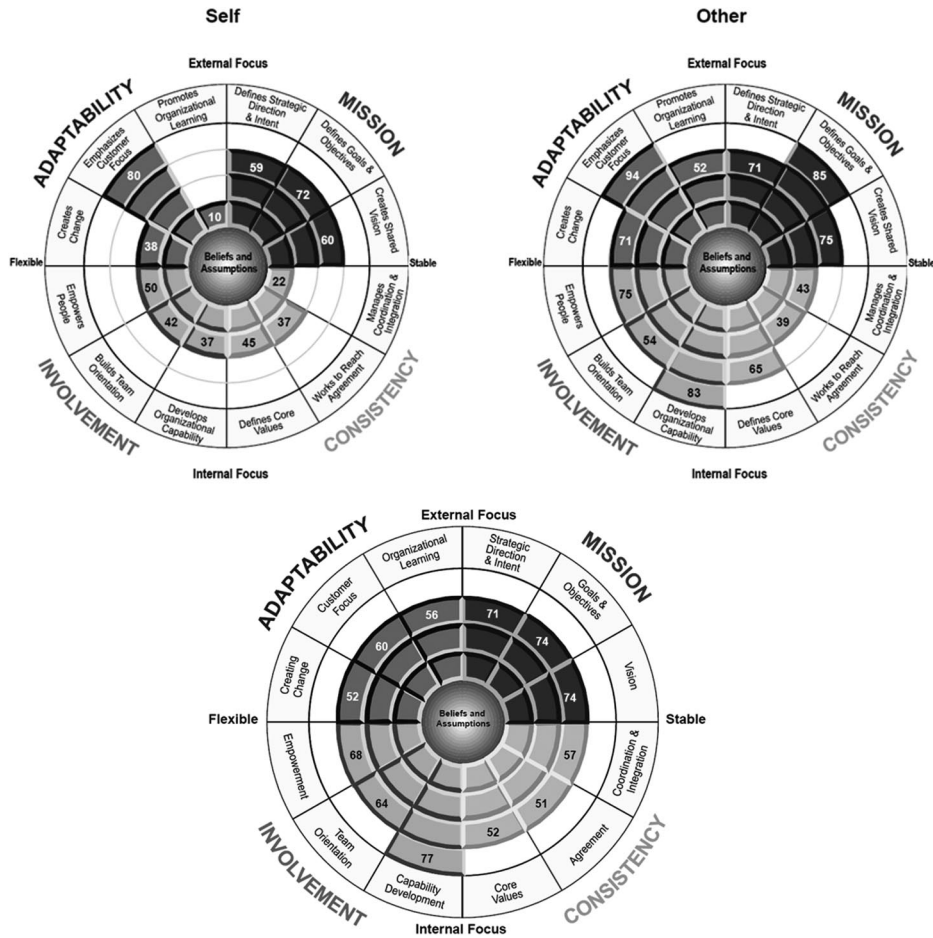
Figure 2. Leadership profile based on the DLDS (top panel) and corresponding organizational culture profile based on the DOCS (bottom panel). *Note.* The top panel shows the results of a 360-degree assessment. Leader self-ratings are shown on the top left, and the combined ratings of five peers, three direct reports, one boss, and four "others" are shown on the top right (i.e., "combined others"). Culture ratings are shown on the bottom. Percentile scores are shown on each index, with concentric rings shaded in to depict the quartile score (e.g., 1–25, 26–50, etc.).

To apply the LCFF, we first used the results of the 360-degree assessment to identify whether a leader is high or low on each attribute. This is done by examining the pattern of highest and lowest percentile scores, first taking into account the combined other ratings and second looking for self–other discrepancies. Separately identifying self–other discrepancies as areas for further exploration and discussion may be particularly appropriate when the magnitude of the discrepancy is large and the direction indicates that a capability is overestimated by the leader. Within our illustration, we have characterized one instance as representing a potential low, despite favorable ratings by combined others ("develops organizational capability"), as research has generally linked self–other discrepancies to lower self-awareness and leader effectiveness (Atwater & Yammarino, 1997; Dalessio, 1998; Fleenor, Smither, Atwater, Braddy, & Sturm, 2010; Luthans & Peterson, 2003; Yammarino & Atwater, 1993). After identifying the leader's highest and lowest attributes, a similar process was undertaken using the results of the culture assessment. Finally, we crossed the results of the two assessments to understand how the highs and lows combine with those of the organization to represent different types of fit.

Table 2
Step1: Identify the Leader's Lowest and Highest Attributes

Leader lows	Leader highs
Works to reach agreement (CO = 39, S = 37)	Emphasizes customer focus (CO = 94, S = 80)
Manages coordination and integration (CO = 43, S = 22)	Defines goals and objectives (CO = 85, S = 72)
Promotes organizational learning (CO = 52, S = 10)	Creates a shared vision (CO = 75, S = 60)
Builds team orientation (CO = 54, S = 42)	Empowers people (CO = 75, S = 50)
Develops organizational capability (CO = 83, S = 37)*	Defines strategic direction and intent (CO = 71, S = 59)

Note. Leader percentile scores based on the DLDS are denoted S for self-ratings and CO for combined others' ratings. Instances of strong self-other discrepancies on the DLDS are flagged by an '*'. These attributes can be codified initially as lows, given research illustrating the typically negative consequences of self-other discrepancies, and either confirmed or denied as areas to focus development efforts. The interpretation should also give more "weight" to the most extreme highs and lows, as these attributes are expected to be the most consequential to fit and, therefore, most important to consider when designing the coaching intervention.

Overall, this example points to several insights about the leader's fit in the culture, drawing on each of the types specified within the LCFF. For example, a matched low in the consistency and adaptability traits suggests that this leader could face cultural constraints when attempting to develop these specific capabilities. In contrast, an unmatched low in the capability development index points to a supportive culture for the leader's development of this attribute. A matched high in the mission trait points to areas in which it should be possible to build on existing alignment, whereas an unmatched high in the customer focus index points to an area where the leader has strong potential for agentic leadership.

Further methodological considerations. Our case study highlights a number of choices that coaches must make when it comes to applying the LCFF, as well as a host of related methodological issues. An early decision involves the choice among possible instruments. This is a keystone decision that determines which attributes will be considered and ultimately shapes the focus of the coaching engagement and the leader's development.

Aside from the specific set of attributes to be measured, there are a number of reasons to start with a *behavioral focus*. First, unlike personal values and personality traits, which are generally stable over time, behaviors are relatively malleable and can be learned or unlearned more readily (Meglino & Ravlin, 1998; Rokeach & Ball-Rokeach, 1989). Second, *what leaders do* is a more proximal determinant of effectiveness than what leaders believe or value. This is because the manner in which beliefs and personal values manifest in the day-to-day actions of leaders can vary widely depending on a range of task and situational factors (Meglino & Ravlin, 1998). Thus, though we recognize the potential of values-based or personality-based assessments to add deeper understand-

Table 3
Step 2: Identify the Lowest and Highest Attributes of the Organization's Culture

Culture lows	Culture highs
Agreement (C = 51)	Capability development (C = 77)
Core values (C = 52)	Goals and objectives (C = 74)
Creating change (C = 52)	Vision (C = 74)
Organizational learning (C = 56)	Strategic direction and intent (C = 71)
Coordination and integration (C = 57)	Empowerment (C = 68)

Note. Organization culture percentile scores based on the DOCS are denoted C.

Table 4
Step 3: Compare the Leader Highs and Lows to the Organization Culture Highs and Lows to Identify Types of Fit Within the LCFF

	Leader lows	Leader highs
Cultural highs	A potential **unmatched low*** was observed in terms of the leader's ability to *develop organizational capability*: *Capability development* is an area of clear strength within the culture (C = 77), and although the leader is rated highly by others on this index (CO = 83), the low self-evaluation (S = 37) may suggest a lack of self-awareness or self-efficacy.	**Matched highs** were observed in all three indexes of the *mission* trait and one index from the *involvement* trait. *Vision, goals and objectives, strategic direction and intent,* and *empowerment,* are potential strengths of the culture that align with the leader's potential strengths in each of these areas.
Cultural lows	**Matched lows** were observed for two indexes from the *consistency* trait and one index from the *adaptability* trait. Potential cultural weakness in *agreement*, *coordination and integration*, and *organizational learning* are matched with the leader's corresponding lows in all three of these areas.	An **unmatched high** was observed in terms of the leader's capability on *emphasizes customer focus*. Though *customer focus* does not appear as one of the lowest cultural attributes (C = 60), it does appear moderately weak relative to other culture indexes, and quite weak relative to the leader's potential strengths in this area.

Note. Leader percentile scores based on the DLDS are denoted *S* for self-ratings and *CO* for combined others' ratings. Organization culture percentile scores based on the DOCS are denoted *C*.
* This inference should be verified given the mixed leader feedback on *Develops Organization Capability*.

ing (Gilbert & Rosinski, 2008), we believe that maintaining a behavioral focus at the core of the LCFF will result in more directly actionable data for leaders (Burns et al., 2013).

As described previously, coaches can choose between prescriptive or descriptive measures (Ashkanasy et al., 2000). The use of descriptive measures will require the collection of additional information to determine whether more or less of the measured attributes are desirable (Ashkanasy et al., 2000). This could be done qualitatively, such as by interviews with key stakeholders, or quantitatively. One quantitative strategy involves asking respondents to complete a measure twice. For example, the OCP is often completed multiple times in reference to personal values, current organizational values, and the ideal organizational values (O'Reilly, Chatman, & Caldwell, 1991). In this case, the results of the ideal values assessment are necessary for deciding whether coaching strategies should increase or decrease the intensity of the measured attributes. Similarly, Gentry and Eckert (2012) have introduced a descriptive measure of leadership that simultaneously measures perceptions of the leader (i.e., actual leader behavior) and expectations of the leader. In this case, the gaps between the actual and expected help to guide judgments of what dimensions of behavior to focus on and whether the solution involves more or less of the expressed behaviors.

It could also be possible to build on existing descriptive culture tools. For example, the Organizational Culture Inventory (OCI) measures 12 sets of behavioral norms that may be required for people to "fit in" (Cooke & Rousseau, 1988). Although the model is descriptive, the OCI is also used to identify ideal cultures for organizations (Cooke & Szumal, 1993). This model could provide the basis for developing a parallel assessment of leader attributes, and in conjunction with the OCI, a coach could then assess fit in order to create a developmental plan stemming from the LCCF model. This and other culture tools that could be applied to assess fit were reviewed by Ashkanasy et al. (2000).

Our case study also calls into perspective some of the practical tradeoffs associated with the use of a 360-degree assessment of the leader versus a self-assessment. In terms of the advantages, 360s yield unique information from multiple perspectives, surface differences between self and others' perceptions, and involve multiple stakeholders in the leader's development process from early on. The main disadvantages include increased time and cost relative to self-assessments and added complexity when interpreting the results (Hazucha, Hezlett, & Schneider, 1993; Hedge & Borman, 1995; Luthans & Peterson, 2003; Seifert, Yukl, & McDonald, 2003). We also note several recent articles describing the strengths and limitations of using 360s to facilitate behavioral change (Bracken & Rose, 2011; Kaiser & Overfield, 2011; Nowack & Mashihi, 2012), as well as discussing their use in a global context (Denison et al., 2012; Holt & Seki, 2012). For example, Holt and Seki (2012) lay out some alternatives that they argue are better measures of leader effectiveness and which could help to avoid the pitfalls of overdoing or underdoing leader behaviors.

Regarding the above point, we attempted to manage this complexity of 360 data in our example by using a few decision guidelines. When identifying the leader's highs and lows, we first rank-ordered the attributes using the combined other percentile scores and then identified the highest and lowest scoring attributes. We also called out special instances of self–other discrepancies as a secondary consideration for possible areas on which to focus coaching. This approach allowed for the construction of a single list of highs and lows for the purpose of our illustration, while also making use of the multiple rater perspectives. It should also be noted that discrepancies between the sources comprising "others" are possible, and indeed, research indicates that ratings by bosses, peers, and direct reports tend to be moderately to weakly correlated (Lance, Hoffman, Gentry, & Baranik, 2008; Lebreton, Burgess, Kaiser, Atchley, & James, 2003). This suggests that, after codifying highs and lows using the more general category, it might also be important to attend to and explore conflicting feedback from different rater sources, as these could point to additional layers of fit and offer useful insights for the coach and leader.

We also focused our interpretation on a small number (e.g., two or three) of the leader's top attributes and biggest development challenges, as this has been shown to be more effective than focusing on a single goal or attribute at a time (Hyman, Pavlik, Taylor, Goodrick, & Moye, 2007). Our intent here was twofold: to focus on a reasonable number of attributes for subsequent development activities and to identify the specific attributes that are likely to be the most salient and defining characteristics that influence the leader's fit with the culture. We simultaneously recognize that the attributes "in the middle"—those that are neither clear highs nor lows—also contribute to the leader's overall effectiveness and fit with the culture, and therefore, might also be important to consider, given the time and opportunity.

An additional layer of technical detail has to do with the use of different possible standards when identifying relative highs and lows. One approach focuses on the rank ordering among attributes. For example, one could define the highs and lows based on the top and bottom three (or the top and bottom two, etc.) scoring attributes. Rank ordering is straightforward and guarantees the identification of both highs and lows, assuming that not all scores represent ties. However, sole reliance on this method becomes problematic when attempting to interpret results in which all or most of the measured attributes fall on either the high or low end of the scale.

An alternative approach attempts to infer meaning from the measurement scale itself to define what constitutes being high or low on an attribute. For instruments that use a Likert-type scale, this could mean identifying as highs (or lows) those attributes that fall above (or below) the scale midpoint or the midpoint plus (or minus) some margin of error. However, neither this method, nor its combination with the rank-ordering method described above, can defend against the problem posed by item-level response bias, which inhibits the ability to make direct comparisons across measured items or attributes based on their raw numeric values, such as mean scores. The presence of response bias means that items present differing thresholds, corresponding to how easy or difficult it is to agree—for example, in the case of an agree–disagree scale—and which can vary widely based on the nuances of the wording used (Church & Waclawski, 1998; Zickar, Barger, Guidroz, & Yankelevich, 2007). As a result, direct interpretation and comparison is difficult without additional context to make sense of the raw item scores.

Behaviorally anchored rating scale formats (BARS) and benchmarking are two approaches that can be applied to a variety of assessment types and help to mitigate the problems associated with item-level response bias. BARS attempts to standardize use of the measurement scale across respondents by more explicitly defining each response option (Schwab, Heneman, & DeCotiis, 1975). This also increases the interpretability of raw scores by clarifying the inherent meaning associated with particular scale points, such as by offering direct definitions for varying levels of leader or cultural attributes. Alternatively, benchmarking provides a scoring solution by converting raw data to norm scores in comparison to a normative database, such as a global normative database of leaders and organizations. The logic of benchmarking is in a data transformation that provides a new scale midpoint that better reflects the typical response to items than the arbitrary midpoint of a Likert-type scale (Rogelberg, Church, Waclawski, & Stanton, 2002; Zickar et al., 2007).

Due to the extensive time, effort, and cost associated with their development and validation, we suspect that most coaches will wish to consider BARS and benchmarking as key factors when choosing among existing instruments. On the other hand, developers of new measures might also wish to use item–response theory (IRT) as a methodology to analyze and revise items, taking factors like response bias more directly into account (e.g., Carter, et al., 2012).

Administering a core set of instruments that produce valid and actionable data is at the core of the LCFF. However, we caution that quantitative assessment data need not be the sole basis for judgments of fit and corresponding actions. Owing to the fluid nature of the interpretation and the sense-making phases, we think it would be unwise to advance a set of universal and formulaic rules for translating leader and culture assessment results directly into corresponding fit inferences. Instead, we view the assessment results as an important first step. Beyond this, the use of qualitative, observational, and ethnographic methods can add deeper meaning to the quantitative results and provide opportunities for triangulation across data sources. Talking with key stakeholders can help to further contextualize the data, by for example, honing the focus of the interpretation on current and future business needs. Beyond gathering the multiple data points, it is anticipated that the coach will play a pivotal role in integrating the data across sources and facilitating a sense-making process with the leader. Ideally, this should lead to a clearer understanding of relevant leader–culture dynamics and an agreed upon set of follow-up actions for the coach and leader.

Discussion

Though there is growing recognition of the general importance of leader–culture fit, we are aware of no research investigating the fit concept in the domain of coaching and leader development (Burns et al., 2013). This is an unfortunate gap in the evidence base for practitioners, who conduct leader-development activities in and around the cultural context of organizations and whose clients' success depends in part on effective leader–culture dynamics (Hartnell & Walumbwa, 2011; Schein, 1983, 1985). To address this limitation, this article introduced a conceptual framework for coaching based on different types of leader–culture fit and discussed relevant methodologies for its application, illustrating one such approach. The intent of the framework is to help make more explicit the interplay between leader and cultural attributes, and to link these dynamics to a set of unique perspectives and strategies for coaching. Though we believe there is strong potential in the LCFF as a practical model, it is important to recognize the challenges that coaches may face when attempting to use this approach in coaching, as well as a set of corresponding limitations.

Challenges

Perhaps the biggest challenge has to do with linking the coaching intervention to broader organizational development issues and imperatives. Though this challenge can be a daunting one, there is growing recognition that the advantages of aligning leader and organizational development outweigh the associated costs (e.g., Barriere, Anson, Ording, & Rogers, 2002; Guidroz et al., 2010; Hostetler, 2007). Likewise, we believe the LCFF will be most effective as a coaching technique when close ties can be made with the stakeholders and objectives of ongoing organizational

development and least effective when coaching occurs in isolation or as a purely individual development activity (Feldman & Lankau, 2005; Kilburg, 1996; Peterson, 2009; Saporito, 1996).

Creating these individual and organizational synergies requires that coaches not only possess a unique blend of skill sets, but also that they interact with a greater number of stakeholders than is typical of coaching engagements. The importance of these partnerships is evident at numerous stages of the coaching process. Prior to implementing the assessments, stakeholder input can be useful toward understanding the current OD objectives, the key issues and challenges surrounding the business context, and when defining the scope and methodology of the leader and culture assessments. Ideally these same stakeholders could support the assessment process and be involved in the interpretation of the culture results. Engaging others in the sense-making process can ensure that cultural highs and lows are understood in relation to key business and operational issues. These collective insights can also help to prioritize the focus and form of the leader's follow-up actions, bolster support for the leader's development, and even create momentum for change around particular aspects of the culture. Finally, continuous feedback from key stakeholders in the organization is an integral part of monitoring development progress over time and gaining support for follow-up assessments.

A more specific challenge has to do with the addition of an organizational culture assessment to the more typical set of tools and interventions that coaches use with leaders. Though some coaches may not have direct experience facilitating and interpreting organizational assessments (which can present a challenge), we think that the bigger hurdle will involve gaining the organizational support necessary to manage a data collection process at scale. In light of this challenge, two scenarios in particular set a favorable stage for applying the LCFF: when the coaching intervention is tied explicitly to a culture change process as we have already described, or alternatively, when the coaching is conducted as part of a large-scale leadership development program with many leaders. Once again, we recognize that it may be more difficult to gain support in the case of stand-alone coaching engagements.

This raises an important question about the appropriate scope of the culture assessment. Is it necessary to survey everyone in the organization or just a key subset? An organization-wide assessment or census provides the greatest confidence level and the most flexibility (e.g., leader–culture fit could be examined in reference to multiple subcultures within the organization). Given practical constraints, however, alternative strategies may be needed. First, it might be possible to use a sampling strategy. In lieu of a full census, one could ensure the generalizability of the results by surveying a representative sample from each of the key segments of organizational demography (e.g., functional units, levels in the organization, etc.). A second possibility could involve matching the scope of the culture assessment with the leader's level or role in the organization. For the leaders within a particular business unit, for example, this could mean focusing the culture assessment on the business unit rather than the total organization. This strategy could be less appropriate when coaching senior leaders and executives, whose cultural context encompasses numerous business units and their interaction. Finding the appropriate scope is particularly important from an agentic leadership perspective, in which the culture data should ideally reflect the span of the leader's influence in the organization, that is, in a change context, the parts of the organization for which he or she is accountable. A third strategy would be to use preexisting data rather than orchestrating a new, stand-alone data collection. Obviously, this approach is contingent on the organization having already conducted a culture survey that meets the requirements of the LCFF.

Limitations

In addition to overcoming these practical challenges, there are a few more fundamental limitations of the proposed methodology that bear pointing out. One limitation follows from the fact that the LCFF is a new model. Consequently, we are unable to point to empirical studies that have evaluated the proposed approach compared with alternative coaching strategies, although this certainly represents an important future direction. Unfortunately, a similar observation applies in general within the coaching domain, as the impact of different coaching strategies is generally not well understood (e.g., Feldman & Lankau, 2005).

Along similar lines, the specific effects of the four types of leader–culture fit on various development and effectiveness outcomes are mainly untested at this time (Burns et al., 2013). In addition to testing predictive relationships, future research should also attempt to disentangle the set of attributes within a multiattribute framework that appear most important to consider, as well as potential contingency factors. Rather than attempting to codify all of these nuances and translate them into prescriptive actions here, our purpose was to develop a manageable set of theoretical considerations, which reflect the basic variations of leader–culture fit and which might serve as a useful guide within coaching. Thus, as with our contextualized view of the proposed methodology, we recommend that coaches use the four perspectives as a flexible starting point and tailor their specific techniques accordingly. We anticipate that the results of future studies will help to refine the model in its application.

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