

Patterns of leadership behaviour: Implications for successful executive coaching outcomes

Karol M. Wasylyshyn, Hal S. Shorey & Jason S. Chaffin

An analysis of 300 business executive coaching cases resulted in the identification of three leadership behaviour patterns. These patterns were conceptualised on a continuum of remarkable, perilous, and toxic behaviour. It is suggested that the ability to recognise where their clients are on this behavioural continuum may aid executive coaches in sustaining coaching traction and achieving successful outcomes. This article presents several factors in a coach/boss partnership approach that helped discern where these executives fell on this continuum, as well as preliminary psychometric data that indicate the empirical validity of these leadership behaviour patterns. Further, based on using this behaviour patterns information in hundreds of positive coaching outcomes, specific coaching guidance is also provided. This guidance is based on an insight-oriented coaching model focused on promoting behaviour change most often in the area of emotional intelligence (EQ). Helping remarkable executives to leverage their reciprocal engagement with others can accelerate coaching success with these leaders. Minimising executives' deep-seated feelings of 'unrequited work' is key for the effective coaching of those with a perilous behaviour pattern. Leaders with predominately toxic behaviours warrant particular scrutiny at the needs assessment stage for they may or may not be viable coaching candidates.

Keywords: Business executives; leadership behaviour; executive coaching; coaching psychology.

AS THE FIELD of executive coaching continues to grow (Sherpa Coaching, 2012), new models for conceptualising leaders and implementing successful coaching engagements are needed to augment best practices in this burgeoning area of consultation.¹ Wasylyshyn (2008) proposed a leader conceptualisation, based on three leadership behaviour patterns she identified through the analysis of 300 executive coaching cases. She named these behaviour patterns *remarkable*, *perilous* and *toxic*² emphasising that the behaviour of business leaders will necessarily shift along this continuum depending on the confluence of work and personal factors. Further, recognis-

ing these behavioural shifts and helping leaders deal with them effectively has implications for maintaining traction in coaching and for achieving positive outcomes.

It is important to note that there are many effective approaches to coaching business executives (Saporito, 1996; Ducharme, 2004; Sherin & Cagier, 2004; Kilburg, 2004). There are also differing roles that coaches can play in their work with business leaders (Witherspoon & White, 1996). This paper is based on an insight-oriented approach focused on behavioural change particularly in the area of emotional intelligence (EQ) (Wasylyshyn, 2003).

¹ In this article executive coaching is distinguished from other coaching work. Stern (2007) stated this distinction well by highlighting its focus on working one-on-one to develop executives as leaders who help organisations to achieve positive business results.

² In her original conceptualisation, these behaviour patterns were named unusual, unrequited and uninterested. In an effort to establish a more accessible semantic, Wasylyshyn (2011) renamed them remarkable, perilous and toxic respectively.

The scope of this paper is threefold. First, to describe the three leadership patterns as observed in the aforementioned coaching cases. Second, to present the factors in a coach/boss partnership and the additional data (e.g. life history, psychometrics, and organisational interviews) that informed the identification of these leadership behaviour patterns. And third, to extrapolate from this insight-oriented model potentially useful coaching guidance – especially for coaches who are focused on helping business executives change behaviour. In this sample, executives focused primarily on either leveraging or increasing their emotional intelligence to become more effective leaders.

Three patterns of leadership behaviour

Remarkable behaviour pattern

Business leaders in this sample who behaved in a *remarkable* manner were gifted in both the ‘what’ (innate I.Q.) and ‘how’ (motivational EQ) dimensions of leadership. Wasylshyn (2011) refers to this as *total brain leadership* (TBL). In a business context, TBL involves the integration of and fluid moving between left brain analytical strengths and right brain relational capabilities. These remarkable leaders were also strong on essential leadership competencies that included setting strategic direction, driving results, and managing people. Further, she found them to possess what Maccoby (2002) described as productive narcissism. Specifically, they were confident about their capabilities and invariably applied them in the best interests of the organisations and people they lead. This is in contrast to unproductive narcissists who are driven primarily by the urge to satisfy highly self-centered needs. According to Maccoby, ‘Productive narcissists have the audacity to push through the massive transformations that society periodically undertakes’ (p.70).

While Bill Gates and the late Steve Jobs might be considered ‘productive narcissists,’ they are both illustrative of the behavioural continuum posited in this paper. Jobs, in particular, moved on this continuum between

remarkable and toxic behaviour. Wasylshyn (2012) wrote, ‘Like other visionary pioneers Steve Jobs also had his limitations – and *how* he led Apple employees – was surely one of them. His legendary impatience, relentless quest for perfection, domineering presence, and obsessive need to control (he had over 100 direct reports) fostered as much fear within the Apple culture as it did reverence and respect for his genius.’

Wasylshyn (2008) also suggested that it was the strong emotional intelligence (EQ) of these remarkable leaders that most differentiated them from their peers and hence, this was a significant development focus in this sample of coaching engagements. Emotional intelligence is defined as the ability to discern one’s own emotions as well as those of others and to be able to use that emotional awareness to achieve key personal or work-related objectives. Goleman (1998) identified the five components of emotional intelligence at work as self awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skill. In a study explained below, remarkable leaders were found to be strong on all these EQ dimensions.

Perilous behaviour pattern

Based on this sample, leaders with a primarily *perilous* behaviour pattern were often just as talented as those in remarkable mode, however, their behaviour could be inconsistent and erratic. An underlying psychological issue that Wasylshyn (2008) termed ‘unrequited work,’ that is, a chronic sense of unfulfilled career aspirations, could erode their overall effectiveness. This sense of unrequited work was manifested by their tendency to project their frustrations and critical self-perceptions onto those reporting to them. This could take the form of unduly harsh judgments of others’ work, a failure to acknowledge work well done, insufficient delegation, and/or performance evaluations skewed to the negative. In organisation-based data, these perilous leaders were often described as perpetually dissatisfied, impossible to please, and de-motivating.

Although there is nothing to suggest their intellectual functioning was any less developed than that of remarkable leaders, perilous leaders were observed as not always making full use of their cognitive abilities. They could get distracted by organisational politics, be mired in procrastination, and/or become paralysed by the demands of complex decision-making. For this reason, their effectiveness in terms of strategy, driving results, and managing people could vary. Procrastination, distractibility, and labile mood were other indicators of leaders in a perilous behaviour pattern.

From an EQ perspective, these perilous leaders were also erratic in their ability to tap into positive emotions or to use them as a motivational resource. Despite obvious career success, they tended to minimise accomplishments, were preoccupied by exaggerated worries about the future, and resented the accomplishments of peers. Generally, they were short on self-awareness, did not modulate emotions well, lacked empathy, and their relationships were more cool, distant and transactional.

Despite their strengths and real potential, Wasylshyn chose the more negative descriptor 'perilous' for this behaviour pattern. She wrote, 'Perilous leaders... were perhaps even more dangerous to themselves... they endangered their futures by diminishing their accomplishments, resisting constructive feedback, misleading people who try to work collaboratively with them, continuing to seethe in competitive envy, failing to develop talented others, and getting stuck in their dark, self-imposed destinies of 'unrequited work'' (Wasylshyn, 2011, p.50).

Toxic behaviour pattern

A hallmark of toxic executives in this sample was a fundamental disinterest in their development. Wasylshyn found them to be highly defensive, arrogant, and/or dismissive. Their overall attitude was that as long as they were producing good results their leadership behaviour just didn't matter.

Leaders at the toxic end of this behaviour continuum experienced significant interpersonal difficulties. Their inability to tolerate frustration, domination, arrogance and self-absorption impaired their abilities to be present or truly supportive of others. Further, the combination of hostile competitiveness and defensiveness contributed to a strong fear dynamic in their teams. Often impulsive and unpredictable, these leaders had little awareness of their impact on others – and some state overtly that they didn't care about or value emotional intelligence as a leadership asset. Their lack of empathy and need for instant gratification often influenced blatant misbehaviour (e.g. inappropriate outbursts, public insults to innocent others, predatory flirtation) that negated respect for them throughout their organisations.

For these toxic leaders, the overall picture in terms of leadership competencies was spotty – considerably more so than for leaders in the perilous position on the continuum. The aforementioned psychological issues – including suspiciousness of others that could border on paranoia – seriously compromised their ability to form strategy, achieve results, and manage people.

Identification of leadership behaviour patterns

The identification of these three leadership behaviour patterns was based on the integration of seven factors as represented in 300 executive coaching engagements (Wasylshyn, 2008). It is suggested that these factors – or some version of them as present in other coaches' models – may be useful in understanding a leader's behaviour and using that understanding to ensure gains in coaching. Four of these factors involved the specifics of a coaching model based on a close working partnership between the coach and an executive's boss. In many engagements, the executive's human resources team member was also a collaborative partner. These factors were: (1) content of the initial executive coaching referral; (2) coach notes from the introductory

meeting with a referred executive; (3) coaching issues identified in an agenda setting meeting; and (4) the outcome of coaching. The other three factors involved data from: (1) the executive's life history; (2) the results of a battery of psychological measures; and (3) interviews conducted with organisation members. Themes from each of these seven factors as they influenced the identification of the three leader behaviour patterns – *remarkable*, *perilous*, and *toxic* – can be found in Table 1. It is important to note that not all coaching approaches include these steps. However, for those coaches who are interested in the potential applicability of this remarkable, perilous, and toxic behaviour continuum in their coaching, the consideration and integration of the information from these factors could prove helpful.

Factors 5 to 7

The data secured from Factors 5, 6, and 7 warrant attention beyond Table 1. In this insight-oriented coaching approach, Factor 5 – the full life history – proved especially valuable. Specifically, the details of how an executive navigated through each life stage provided clues about possible fixations or regressive tendencies that had potential adverse implications for effective leadership. The life history also provided clues about how executives might move on the continuum of remarkable, perilous and toxic behaviours. For example, executives who did not accomplish the psychosocial task of *establishing trust* in life stage one inevitably experienced work and personal relationship issues.

Wasylyshyn wrote an interview protocol influenced by the development psychologist, Erik Erikson (1950). In his model there are eight stages of development with specific psychosocial tasks to be accomplished at each stage (see Table 2).

For the most part, executives who behaved in primarily remarkable ways, had moved through stages 1 to 6 quite well. They were distinctive in their abilities to: (1) form trusting relationships both at work and in their personal lives; (2) act independently; (3) pursue demanding objectives with confidence; (4) apply their considerable cognitive capabilities; (5) establish a clear and compelling career identity; and (6) remain steady in the pursuit of their work and personal relationship goals.

Leaders with a perilous behaviour pattern had varying degrees of difficulty in accomplishing necessary psychosocial tasks through the lifespan. Their major life themes involved: (1) problems with trust; (2) variability in acting independently; (3) fluctuating confidence; (4) leadership inconsistency; and (5) relationship problems – especially in their private lives. By late adolescence, the psychological injuries suffered in previous life stages often influenced problems in their forming a strong sense of identity. By the time they reached mid-career, there was often not enough self-confidence in and/or enthusiasm about their work pursuits to minimise underlying feelings of unrequited work. Further, given the combination of disappointments in both love and work, these leaders were less effective in mentoring and/or developing others at work.

Leaders with primarily toxic behaviour, universally had issues in achieving the psycho/social tasks in most of Erikson's development stages.³ Their parents and/or other care givers were emotionally cold, distant or absent. They were not encouraged to explore or discover their areas of competence and their early school and social lives were more troubled than rewarding. Thus, their abilities to trust, to experience comfortable feelings of independence, and to feel a

³ These executives comprised 20 per cent of the 300 cases used to identify the three behaviour patterns – remarkable, perilous and toxic. They were among the primary author's initial coaching cases in the early 1980s. Based on lessons learned from these engagements, she ceased coaching those with a primary toxic behaviour pattern.

Table 1: Seven factors for the identification of leadership behaviour patterns.

Factors	Behaviour Patterns		
	Remarkable	Perilous	Toxic *
Factor 1 Content of initial coaching referral	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● No performance problems ● Executive's desire to leverage strengths 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Some performance issue(s) ● Executive may question value of coaching 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Serious performance issues ● Executive has no interest in coaching but company wants to try to 'fix' him/her
Factor 2 Introductory meeting with prospective coachee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Motivated to become a better leader ● Positive chemistry with coach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Underlying sense of 'unrequited work' can block full engagement in coaching ● Chemistry with coach varies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Disinterest in coaching prevails ● Good chemistry with coach unlikely
Factor 3 Content of agenda-setting meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Overt enthusiasm for potential of coaching ● Clarity about coaching foci ● Trust with coach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Moderate enthusiasm for coaching ● Variable clarity regarding coaching foci ● Variable level of trust with coach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● No enthusiasm for coaching ● No clarity regarding coaching needs(s) ● No capacity to form trusting relationship with coach
Factor 4 Coaching outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Best outcomes ● Increased Total Brain Leadership (TBL) and EQ ● Greater leveraging of experience and capabilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Moderately successful outcomes – especially if progress is made in minimising executive's sense of 'unrequited work' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Not successful generally. CAVEAT: Certain life events (e.g. health scare, divorce) can influence true engagement in coaching – good progress may then transpire
Factor 5 Life history – key themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Have achieved psycho-social tasks of each life stage (E. Erikson) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mixed picture of early life stage issues complicating success in later stages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Significant issues in all life stages
Factor 6 Results of psychological measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Most well-adjusted psychologically ● High emotional intelligence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Moderately well-adjusted psychologically ● Average emotional intelligence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Least well-adjusted psychologically ● Low emotional intelligence
Factor 7 Company interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Strong on key leadership competencies (strategy, driving results, managing people) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Strong – moderate on strategy and driving results; less effective on managing people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Highly erratic on strategy and results; seriously deficient in managing people

* Overall, are not seen as viable candidates for coaching.

Table 2: Three leadership behaviour patterns: Distinguishing life history factors.

Factor	Remarkable Leader	Perilous Leader	Toxic Leader
Life History – Erikson Life Stages	All psycho/social tasks achieved	Variability in achievement of psycho/social tasks	Significant problems in achieving psycho/social tasks
Stage and Psycho/Social Tasks			
Stage 1 (birth to 1 year) Establishing trust	Readily trusts others	Erratic ability to trust others	Significant trust issues
Stage 2 (1 to 3 years) Individuation	Independent; pursues goals easily	Harbors doubts about achieving goals	Can flounder aimlessly
Stage 3 (3 to 5 years) Taking initiative	Strong, unwavering sense of purpose	Wavering sense of purpose	Lacks sufficient drive to achieve and/or chaotic pursuit of objectives
Stage 4 (5 to 11 years) Cognitive competence	Strong confidence in ability to do well	Questions ability to do well	Strong feelings of inadequacy that can be masked by hyper-aggression
Stage 5 (11 to 18 years) Sense of identity	Clear sense of identity and belief in ability to do well	Shaky sense of identity	Can experience significant identity crisis
Stage 6 (18 to 35 years) Capacity for intimacy	Settles into strong work and love relationships	Unrequitedness in both love and work	Serious work and personal relationship issues
Stage 7 (35 to 55 years) Guiding the next generation	Readily mentors and guides next generation	Can stagnate and harbor personal resentments therefore disinclined to develop others	Narcissistic pre-occupations – getting own needs met trumps mentoring of others
Stage 8 (55 to death) Integrated sense of self	Strong work and personal life contentment	Variable degree of contentment. Can be haunted by thoughts about what-could-have-been	Lacks life integration -- serious existential depression may occur

true sense of connection with their work pursuits and intimacy in their personal relationships were impaired. This set the stage for a tumultuous adolescence in which most either acted out or withdrew. For the more fortunate among them, college was the turning point when they happened into a compelling interest and/or began to discover a particular area of competence that ultimately influenced their establishing business careers. However, the early narrative of their lives did not bode well for effective leadership – hence the toxic behaviour pattern that was influenced most by a drive to get their own needs met. In explaining the terminology for this behaviour pattern Wasylshyn wrote, ‘Given the serious behavioural issues represented by these business executives and their intensely de-moralising effects on others, this leadership type was named toxic’ (Wasylshyn, 2011, p.54).

The stage 7 psychosocial task of *generativity* (ages 35 to 55), that is, finding ways to guide the next generation, unfolded quite well for the remarkable executives in this sample. Their instincts for mentoring and developing others were internalised deeply so their organisations tended to have good bench strength as well as viable succession candidates for top jobs. Perilous leaders were less effective as mentors given their ongoing conflicts about career success. Executives whose behaviour was more toxic than not, were seriously flawed in the ability to guide the growth and development of others. They had little ability to tolerate frustration so their actions were driven primarily by a need for instant gratification.

Very few of the executives in the original sample of 300 were in stage 8 (late adulthood ages 55 to death).

The data secured from Factor 6 – the psychological measures – were particularly helpful in discerning the three leadership patterns. These measures may be useful to coaches who are interested in behavioural

patterns of leadership. The results from two psychological measures were statistically analysed among a subset of 95 of Wasylshyn’s executive coaching cases in order to see if they discriminated between the aforementioned leadership types.⁴ These measures were the NEO Personality Inventory-Revised (NEO-PI-R) and the BarOn Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQi). These 95 respondents were primarily male (76 per cent) and ranged in age from 37 to 69 with 87.4 per cent White, non-Hispanic; 3.2 per cent African-American; 2.1 per cent Hispanic; and 4.1 per cent other. Only one participant did not have a college degree, 3.2 per cent had two years of college, 33.7 per cent had Bachelor degrees, 32.6 per cent had Masters degrees, and 29.5 per cent had Doctorates. The average years of executive experience (Vice President level and above) was 14. The mean duration of coaching was 12 months.

Results from these analyses provided preliminary empirical validation of Wasylshyn’s (2008) leadership behaviour patterns – particularly in terms of the ‘soft’ (behavioural) leadership factors. Specifically, leaders who manifested a remarkable behaviour pattern scored higher on the: (1) NEO-PI-R dimension of conscientiousness; (2) overall emotional intelligence (EQ); and (3) the EQ factors of general mood and stress management. They also scored lower on the NEO-PI-R neuroticism scale relative to those who displayed primarily perilous or toxic behaviour patterns.

Further, those with a perilous behaviour pattern were distinguished from those with toxic behaviour by higher EQ overall as well as on the EQ factor of general mood. Those with a primarily toxic pattern of behaviour evidenced the poorest outcomes. In addition to those findings mentioned above, and in contrast to those with a perilous behaviour pattern, they scored lower on overall EQ and the EQ dimensions of interpersonal aware-

⁴ The full battery of psychological measures consisted of: (1) Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal; (2) Myers-Briggs Type Indicator; (3) Life Styles Inventory, LSI 1; (4) Revised NEO Personality Inventory; and (5) BarOn Emotional Quotient Inventory – the EQ-I.

ness and general mood. In other words, of the three behaviour patterns, those in the toxic position on this behavioural continuum had the lowest awareness of their own emotions as well as the ability to accurately read others' emotions. Further, those with a toxic behaviour pattern were more pessimistic, had more negative affect, and were the most stressed as compared to those with primarily remarkable or perilous behaviour patterns.

In short, based on preliminary data from this limited population, those with a remarkable behaviour pattern appeared to be the most well-adjusted psychologically and those with a toxic pattern the least well-adjusted. More research is warranted in this area of leadership behavioural patterns and potential psychometric indicators. Further, it is important to emphasise that these leadership styles are conceptualised not as distinct types of leaders – but as behavioural patterns on a continuum observed by the authors in a specific sample of business executives.

Factor 7 – targeted interviews within the company – was also helpful in the identification of the three leadership behaviour patterns. While the interview protocols for each of the 300 coaching engagements were customised in order to draw the most germane information from the organisation for each coachee, three specific leadership competencies were always included. As mentioned earlier in this paper these competencies were: (1) strategic thinking; (2) driving results; and (3) managing people.⁵

To summarise, executives with behaviour that was primarily remarkable received positive feedback on all three leadership competencies. The executives who manifested frequent perilous behaviour typically showed strength in the strategy and driving results competencies but were usually perceived as less gifted in managing others. Given their underlying sense of 'unrequited work', they

were often unduly self-critical and/or harsh toward others, and their relentless drive to achieve results could occur at the expense of key relationships. Executives with a toxic behaviour pattern – or at least a tendency toward toxicity especially when under stress – received negative feedback from the organisation. These executives were criticised for their: (1) absence of and/or misguided strategic direction; (2) inability to deliver consistently positive results; and (3) serious limitations in managing people effectively.

Going back to Factor 4 – the outcome of coaching – also revealed information that contributed to the identification of the three leadership behaviour patterns. Based on this sample, executives with a *remarkable* behaviour pattern, invariably achieved benefit from coaching. They became better able to integrate their left brain analytical strengths with right brain relationship-building capabilities. They were also better able to leverage emotional intelligence. Specifically, they achieved greater awareness of their own and others' emotions, increased their ability to regulate the expression of both positive and negative feelings, and became more attuned to others' needs and concerns. Many also reported that they formed deeper relationships with key stakeholders – relationships that were more connective versus transactional.

Executives whose behaviour pattern was more *perilous*, had mixed success in coaching. The most successful of these leaders had internalised important insights about themselves, especially as related to their sense of unrequited work. These insights helped them increase remarkable behaviour and avoid sudden regressions toward *toxic* behaviour. Many stated that the coach's effort to maintain and reinforce a perspective that emphasised their real talents and accomplishments was especially helpful.

As has already been indicated, leaders with a pronounced pattern of toxic behav-

⁵ Based on the primary author's consulting experiences in numerous business organisations, these are among the most frequently occurring competencies used in organisation-based leadership development initiatives.

our are not good candidates for coaching – and that was borne out among those in this sample.

Implications for coaching

While there are many effective approaches to coaching business leaders, this paper has focused on an insight-oriented model used in engagements where behaviour change – particularly increased emotional intelligence – was the desired outcome. The recognition of remarkable, perilous, and toxic leader behaviour patterns helped accelerate high impact executive coaching for this sample of leaders. We suggest that coaches who are attuned to where their clients fall on this behaviour continuum may be helped to make the in-the-moment coaching adjustments that ensure successful coaching. See Table 3 for specific examples of the author using this behaviour pattern information to meet clients where they needed to be met.

Given the relentless pressure of current business and economic challenges, executives are necessarily going to move along this behavioural continuum. In other words, they will have good days and bad therefore, we suggest that they will benefit from having trusted advisors (coaches) to signal them about where they are on this continuum – and, the behavioural adjustments they can make to be effective leaders.

Coaching remarkable leaders

Executive coaches working with leaders who are mostly remarkable, can help them leverage this behaviour pattern by urging them to remain in *reciprocal engagement* with all stakeholders – both inside and outside the company. This can be accomplished by: (1) decreasing any inclination toward an inner *What's in it for me?* question; and (2) increasing their focus on promoting the *What's in it for us?* question. In supporting this orientation to their leadership responsibilities, the coach can reinforce *reciprocal engagement* in at least three critical ways. Specifically, they help ensure that their clients are: (1) making strategy decisions that involve all key stake-

holders and that rapid adjustments in strategy are made when necessary; (2) monitoring and scrutinising business results with their leadership team in ways that are open, honest and objective with necessary changes being made in a timely manner; and (3) reviewing people issues in team-based and transparent discussions that are focused on both individuals' current performance and development needs, as well as ways to accelerate bench strength.

Further, these leaders are great candidates for leveraging their emotional intelligence. To this end, the coach can stay alert for opportunities to increase a leader's: (1) awareness of his/her emotions and those of others; (2) effective use of both positive and negative emotions; (3) attunement to others' issues/concerns; (4) ongoing efforts to motivate team members; and (5) forming of meaningful relationships with all key stakeholders.

Coaching perilous leaders

Coaching perilous leaders is more of a roller coaster ride given their behavioural variability. However, the key here is in coaches recognising when potentially damaging self-doubts strike their clients and then acting quickly to diminish or at least neutralise clients' sense of 'unrequited work.' Coaches can do this in myriad ways including: (1) giving leaders ample doses of affirmation; (2) providing positive organisational feedback; and (3) at least neutralising their clients' irrational thoughts and negative self-talk. Other coaching interventions focused on increasing EQ would include promoting a leader's: (1) behavioural consistency; (2) commitment to acknowledging others' best efforts; (3) greater attunement to others' issues/concerns; and (4) forming relationships that are not just transactional.

Coaching toxic leaders

As has already been emphasised, leaders with a toxic behaviour pattern are rarely interested in being coached. Further, their potential volatility and suspiciousness make them

Table 3: The use of leadership behaviour pattern recognition in coaching.

Leadership Behaviour Pattern	Coaching Meeting – Behaviour Pattern Observation	Coaching Intervention
<p><i>Remarkable</i> – talented executive being groomed to become CEO. Total brain leader with high EQ, strong leadership competencies, great track record of success.</p>	<p>In the wake of his father's death, he appeared distracted, less attuned to others, and 'off his game' drifting toward <i>perilous</i> as he grappled with this loss.</p>	<p>Coach brought in a bereavement counselor to support the executive's mourning. Coach continued to provide feedback that influenced the executive's return to <i>remarkable</i> leadership behaviour.</p>
<p><i>Perilous</i> – brilliant General Manager running a global business favoured a leadership combination of his analytical problem-solving and 'gut' instincts – at the expense of empowering others and, of being well-attuned to critical people factors in the business.</p>	<p>A significant role in his leadership team had to be filled quickly. The GM was not listening to anyone. He was veering toward <i>toxic</i> insistence that the hiring be done his way. His way was impetuous and, he had a history of making bad hires.</p>	<p>The coach engaged the GM in a conversation about how to ensure a good hire. She suggested using EQ to screen the behaviour 'fit' of candidates for this role. She invited him to co-create the approach with her, and later involved other team members on a recruitment panel. A good hire was made.</p>
<p><i>Toxic</i> – a senior scientist/leader projected a façade of concern for and focus on the development of others when, in fact, he was obsessed by the trappings of his station and relationships with top corporate executives. His micromanagement, projection of blame onto others, and frequent rants in team meetings eroded the performance of his group.</p>	<p>In a difficult 360 feedback meeting the coach was fully candid. Her client's face turned crimson, his voice became a shriek, and he rejected the feedback maintaining that the coach had not understood what his team members really meant to say.</p>	<p>Knowing that this executive was wounded by the feedback, the coach used empathic resonance to help calm him. She then set a subsequent meeting in which they discussed the strengths he could leverage and how he could have a constructive discussion of the feedback with his team. Recognising his narcissism, she urged that she facilitate this team meeting but he would not agree. She heard later that he began that meeting with, <i>I received some 360 feedback recently and I know you could not have said those things about me.</i> Behind closed doors his HR Manager (and a member of this team) confirmed the veracity of the feedback and warned the executive that his retirement would be accelerated if he didn't adjust his behaviour. His defenses were so thick, he could not adjust, and he retired soon thereafter.</p>

challenging coaching candidates at best. Rather than coaching these executives, the consultative effort might be better spent with their bosses and HR partners on identifying other roles for the toxic leader – either inside or outside the company.

This is not to say that truly toxic leaders can never be helped by a coaching intervention – even when they appear to lack the intention to participate fully. Sudden personal events (e.g. health crisis, divorce, death of a child) or work-related crises can create windows of opportunity. The lead author once worked with a gifted CFO in a Fortune 500 company whose swing between laudatory hyperbole and profane outbursts had reached near legendary status in his company. After one especially egregious and public outburst, his arrogant veneer cracked and he asked her if he needed psychiatric help. She facilitated an immediate referral that resulted in the diagnosis of bipolar illness – and a treatment plan that helped stabilise his behaviour. This stabilisation was key to his continued success in the company.

Conclusion

Three leadership behaviour patterns – *remarkable*, *perilous*, and *toxic* – have been described and offered as a possible aid to executive coaches working with business leaders. Conceptualised on a behavioural continuum, these leadership behaviour patterns may be especially helpful to coaches who are handling engagements in which behaviour change – including increased emotional intelligence – is the desired outcome. Several factors have been presented to help identify where an executive coaching client may fall on this continuum of remarkable, perilous and toxic leadership behaviour. A number of these factors are related to an insight-oriented coaching model that is heavily nuanced to ensure the coach forms a close partnership with an executive's boss and possibly his/her Human Resources professional as well. Other data-based factors specifically an executive's life history, organisation-based inter-

views and the results of psychological surveys further inform the identification of a leader's behaviour pattern.

Regarding the psychological survey results, preliminary research has indicated that the remarkable, perilous, and toxic leader behaviour patterns may be empirically distinct on two robust psychological measures – the NEO-PI-R and the BarOn EQi. A robust framework for assessing leadership behaviour and co-ordinated coaching interventions warrants further research especially in relationship to personality or other psychological constructs including character. Such research could contribute to the ROI of coaching, as well as inform coaching methodologies.

Further, it is suggested that an understanding of these three leadership behaviour patterns may yield specific coaching guidance. Executive coaches working with remarkable leaders may help them leverage their many behavioural assets, emotional intelligence, and leadership competencies through the concept of reciprocal engagement. Perilous leaders may be helped to find ways to tame the destructive aspects of their underlying sense of 'unrequited work.' And while coaches are forewarned of the serious limitations in working with toxic leaders, they may arrive in the lives of these people at an opportune time in which something constructive could happen – especially if they are attuned to the underlying psychological issues at play in these cases.

Executive coaches – especially those with a background in the behavioural sciences – have urgent and myriad opportunities to influence how 21st century business executives are selected, developed, and supported as they grapple with the magnitude of the leadership issues before them. This paper has attempted to highlight the importance of the behavioural 'how' dimension of leadership, presents a useful semantic (remarkable, perilous, and toxic) for conceptualising leadership behaviour, and provides applicable guidance for coaching executives who represent these patterns of behaviour.

The Authors

Karol M. Wasylshyn

Leadership Development Forum

Hal S. Shorey & Jason S. Chaffin

Widener University,

Institute for Graduate Clinical Psychology.

Correspondence

Karol M. Wasylshyn

Leadership Development Forum,

431 Chestnut Street,

Philadelphia PA 19106.

E-mail: kwasylyshyn@erols.com

References

- Bar-On, R. (2002). *EQ-i: BarOn emotional quotient inventory: A measure of emotional intelligence: Technical manual*. Toronto, ON: Multi-Health Systems Inc.
- Brunning, H., & Perini, M. (2010). *Psychoanalytic perspectives on a turbulent world*. London: Karnac Books Ltd.
- Costa, P.T., Jr. & McCrae, R.R. (1992). *Revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI-R)*. Odessa, FL: Psychological Assessment Resources, Inc.
- Ducharme, M.J. (2004). The cognitive-behavioural approach to executive coaching. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 56, 214–224.
- Erikson, E.H. (1950). *Childhood and society*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Goleman, D. (1998). What makes a leader? *Harvard Business Review*, 93–102.
- Kilburg, R. (2004). When shadows fall: Using psychodynamic approaches in executives coaching. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 46, 246–268.
- Lafferty, J.C. (1989). *Life Styles Inventory, LSI 1*. Plymouth, MI: Human Synergistics International.
- Maccoby, M. (2000, January–February). Narcissistic leaders: The incredible pros, the inevitable cons. *Harvard Business Review*, 69–77.
- Myers-Briggs, I. (1989). *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, Form G*. Palo Alto, CA: CPP Inc.
- Saporito, T.J. (1996). Business-linked executive development: Coaching senior executives. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 48, 96–103.
- Sherin, J. & Caiger, L. (2004). Rational-emotive behaviour therapy: A behavioural change model for executive coaching? *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 56, 225–233.
- Sherpa Coaching (2012). *Sherpa Coaching Seventh Annual Executive Coaching Summary*. Cincinnati, OH. Retrieved from: <http://sherpacoaching.com/survey.html>.
- Stern, L.R. (2007). Chapter 2: Executive coaching: A working definition. In R.R. Kilburg & R.C. Diedrich (Eds.), *The wisdom of coaching: Essential papers in consulting psychology for a world of change*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Wasylshyn, K.M. (2003). Chapter 29: Coaching the superkeepers. In L.A. Berger & D.R. Berger D. R. (Eds.), *The talent management handbook: Creating organisational excellence through identifying developing and positioning your best people*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Wasylshyn, K.M. (2008). Behind the door: Keeping business leaders focused on how they lead. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 60, 314–330.
- Wasylshyn, K.M. (2011). *Behind the executive door: Unexpected lessons for managing your boss and career*. New York: Springer.
- Watson, G.B. & Glaser, E.M. (1980). *Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal (WGCTA) Forms A*. San Antonio, TX: Psychological Corporation.
- Witherspoon, R. & White, R.P. (1996). Executive coaching: A continuum of roles. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 48, 124–133.

The successful executive was generally pictured as possessing intelligence, imagination, initiative, the capacity to make rapid (and generally wise) decisions, and the ability to inspire subordinates. People tended to think of the world as being divided into "leaders" and "followers." New focus: Gradually, however, from the social sciences emerged the concept of "group dynamics" with its focus on members of the group rather than solely on the leader. The true symbol of democratic leadership to some was the meeting—and the less directed from the top, the more democratic it was. Some of the more enthusiastic alumni of these training laboratories began to get the habit of categorizing leader behavior as "democratic" or "authoritarian."