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"Self-Awareness": At the Interface of Executive Development and Psychoanalytic Therapy

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In the field of leadership development, increased self-awareness is strongly tied to executive effectiveness. With its emphasis on increased self-knowledge, executive consultation would seem to share important common ground with psychoanalytic treatment. This apparent commonality is the focus of detailed exploration in this article, using concepts and experiences derived from both executive coaching and psychoanalytic treatment to add to the understanding of self-awareness in action.

A consideration of the related concepts of *self-observation*, *self-reflection*, and *self-awareness* provides a springboard for describing how a psychoanalytic approach can enrich typical coaching activities to increase executive self-awareness. The critical role of emotional awareness in working with executives is emphasized, and the special role of a psychoanalytic perspective in guiding interventions in this realm is highlighted. Several examples from an executive consultation practice are used to illustrate how a psychoanalyst approaches self-awareness (and emotional awareness in particular) to foster a leader's development.

The final section of this article is devoted to the contrasting contexts and modes of self-awareness in psychoanalytic treatment and executive consultation. Although both coaching clients and therapy patients participate in a journey of self-discovery that requires rigorous self-scrutiny, there are important differences in the two enterprises.

Some concluding thoughts are offered on how interventions to develop executive self-awareness can broaden our perspective on the kinds of insight and self-understanding that are at the core of the clinical enterprise.

The critical importance of executive self-awareness for organizational effectiveness has been frequently noted by a wide array of modern leadership development experts (Bennis, 1989; Drucker, 1999; Goleman, 1998a; Kaplan, 2007). In their work with coaches and consultants, senior executives often remark on the value derived from time taken for self-reflection in the swirl of organizational activity. And their constituents are often palpably relieved that the executive will have the needed opportunity to "take a good look in the mirror." Indeed, self-awareness and self-reflective activity seem to be frequently mentioned and highly valued in certain realms of organizational life.

As both psychoanalyst and executive coach, I have been intrigued by this fact. I've wondered what it means for the field of psychoanalytic therapy that self-reflection and self-awareness are viewed as contributing to the organizational bottom line. Have our aims, values, and activities

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as analysts gained a wider acceptance outside the realm of mental health therapy? Should we be looking at the application of psychoanalytic ideas and practices to executive development as an indicator of the health and viability of our profession? And if so, what are the parameters of this applicability—how much do our practices need to be modified to be relevant in the action-oriented world of the executive?

The result of an initial search of the psychoanalytic literature was rather surprising. Very few articles appeared with the word *self-awareness* in the title. *Self-observation* has received more attention in psychoanalysis, but *self-observation* is a term that has been used in a variety of ways that are perhaps somewhat similar but often quite different from *self-awareness*. After the initial search, I could only hope that a systematic exploration of these seemingly related concepts would provide a basis for more integrative thinking about psychoanalytic therapy and executive development.

In this article, I explore the ways in which we think about and use *self-awareness* in these two areas of endeavor. In the broadest sense, our efforts in both psychoanalytic therapy and executive development fit within the humanistic tradition that values self-knowledge as a primary human virtue. Although I believe that increased self-awareness is either an implicit or explicit goal in both executive development and psychoanalytic therapy, there are important differences in the focal characteristics of that self-awareness, as well as the methodology by which it is achieved. There are many aspects of the self that an individual might profitably become aware of, and a good portion of this article is devoted to delineating these objects of self-awareness. Likewise, different methods for promoting self-awareness are most appropriate for the different goals of the two endeavors, and these different approaches will be contrasted. I will suggest that although the importance of self-awareness is commonly affirmed within an organizational setting, even experts in leadership development have little to say on how to promote self-awareness. It is exactly in this area of the *how* that I think the psychoanalytic method can make the greatest contribution. By using a number of examples from my consulting work with executives, I hope to illustrate how one can work with the parameters of self-awareness in the organizational setting.

SELF-AWARENESS, SELF-REFLECTION, AND SELF-OBSERVATION

Merriam-Webster has defined self-awareness as the "awareness of one's own personality or individuality." Within the psychoanalytic tradition, self-awareness tracks the relative neglect of any theorizing related to the self, in contrast to the ego. When used at all, the term would typically refer to the developing awareness of the bodily self in early childhood, as in the Mahler group's discussion of the significance of the young child's mirror reactions (Mahler, Pine, and Bergman, 1975). Even in Kohut's writings, the emphasis was on the more experiential notion of self-cohesion than on the more cognitive phenomenon of self-awareness.

In the psychoanalytic literature, the term "self-observation" has had a fairly narrow, specific meaning, in contrast to the broader concepts of self-reflection and self-awareness. Self-observation has been viewed through the lens of what is unique about the psychoanalytic process. Freud and the early psychoanalysts, with their stake in showing how psychoanalytic therapy was a radical departure from other therapies, drew the distinction between self-reflection and self-observation. Freud (1900) put it this way in *The Interpretation of Dreams:*

> I have noticed in my psycho-analytical work that the whole frame of mind of a man who is reflecting is totally different from that of a man who is observing his own psychical processes. . . . In both cases attention must be concentrated, but the man who is reflecting is also exercising his critical faculty; this leads him to reject some of the ideas that occur to him after perceiving them, to cut short others without following the trains of thought which they would open up to him, and to behave in such a way towards still others that they never become conscious at all and are accordingly suppressed before being perceived. The self-observer on the other hand need only take the trouble to suppress his critical faculty. If he succeeds in doing that, innumerable ideas come into his consciousness of which he could otherwise never have got hold. (pp. 101–102)

Thus, Freud identified self-observation with the central role of free association in psychoanalytic therapy. What makes self-observation unique (and different from the more popularly understood activity of self-reflection) is the relaxation of superego injunctions. In his earliest theorizing (i.e., pre-structural theory), Freud suggested that instituting a free-associative kind of self-observation would give analyst and patient access to the unconscious.

In his classic 1934 paper, "The fate of the ego in analytic therapy," Sterba described an early ego-psychological understanding of what would later be termed *self-observation*. Sterba's focus was not on the free associative process but on the "therapeutic dissociation of the ego" that takes place in psychoanalytic therapy. Like Freud, who distinguished self-observation (or free association) from the more generic self-reflection, Sterba stated that "the therapeutic dissociation of the ego in analysis is merely an extension, into new fields, of that self-contemplation which from all time has been regarded as the most essential trait of man in distinction to other living beings" (p. 125).

According to Sterba (1934), a split occurs in the patient's ego in response to the analyst's interpretation of transference resistance. The analyst's neutral attitude toward the emotion-charged experiences of transference resistance makes a corresponding demand on the patient's ego for "a balancing contemplation, kept steadily free of affect, whatever change may take place in the contents of the instinct-cathexes and the defensive reactions" (p. 122). Friedman (1992) in explicating Sterba's contribution, put it this way:

> He [Sterba] suggests that analytic technique is designed not so much to change standards [the superego] as to suspend their force long enough to allow the patient to grasp his internal situation; and the outcome of analysis is not a new set of standards but a new disposition achieved by *progressive, naturalistic glimpses of oneself* (p. 7, emphasis mine).

Although Sterba (1934) viewed the capacity for *self-confrontation* as originating in superego formation ("the capacity to reflect on ourselves as if we were somebody else"), the therapeutic dissociation of the ego in analysis means that self-reflection is freed from the superego. Under very specific circumstances—the experience and analysis of transference resistance—there is growth in the ability to observe oneself in progressively less restrictive ways. Friedman's (1992) reexamination of Sterba's contribution suggests that the hallmark of psychoanalytic self-scrutiny is the freedom from fear and the sense of safety that occurs as the patient acquires different perspectives on himself or herself.

Hatcher (1973) and Busch (2007) have also added to our understanding of the role of self-observation in the psychoanalytic process, and have suggested that a developing capacity for self-observation is, itself, an important goal of psychoanalytic therapy. Hatcher brought together the two meanings of self-observation in the early psychoanalytic literature, describing two *modes*

of self-observation—experiential and reflective. Experiential self-observation is the kind of self-observation Freud considered so distinctive—"a report of whatever is noticed about the self at a given moment, when the person simply lets his thoughts flow. It is the work of a passive, free-associative, observing ego" (Hatcher, p. 388). Reflective self-observation "is the more detached (cf. Sterba), reflective form of self-observation, which occurs when the ego is taking an active, organizing view of the functioning of the mind" (p. 388). Furthermore, Hatcher (1973) noted that reflective self-observation could be classified according to the degree of intrapsychic focus:

> The simplest self-observations are relatively global, unsophisticated forms in which the role of intrapsychic factors is little recognized. . . . The most complex forms show an increasing appreciation of the contribution of the self to experience, so that the locus of explanation shifts from the outside to the inside of the self. It is clear that the differentiation of the intrapsychic dimension allows a subtler and more complex understanding of the contribution of external as well as internal factors in experience—especially the motives and limitations of others. (p. 391)

Hatcher suggested that over the course of psychoanalytic therapy, as part of the analytic cure, the patient gains increasing access to the more complex, intrapsychic modes of self-observation.

Busch (2007) defined self-observation in the psychoanalytic context as "the capacity to consider a thought as a mental event."[1] He suggested that in the process of resistance analysis, the analyst specifically focuses on the ebb and flow of the self-observational capacity as it tracks the conflicts and anxieties that are mobilized in the moment-to-moment interaction in analysis. Thus, the analyst incorporates into his or her interventions the patient's relationship to self-observation within the analytic session.

Busch (2007) linked an increased capacity for self-observation to the process of psychoanalytic therapy:

> in the beginning of treatment most patients experience their thoughts and feelings as momentary real events. . . . At a later time in treatment, the patient can experience such a statement as an experience that can be viewed through various lenses. It can be thought about, talked about, and played with in a variety of ways to understand what this feeling is about, and what telling it to the analyst might mean. (p. 426)

With the change in the capacity for self-observation, in being able to consider his thoughts and feelings as mental events, the patient in psychoanalytic therapy can gain access to his thoughts as unconsciously motivated. In doing so, there is a diminution in the immutability of thought and feeling and the corresponding tendency toward repetitive, neurotic action. The capacity to consider multiple possibilities in any mental event is the cornerstone of an expanded scope of choice in the patient's behavior.

Thus, Busch (2007) explicitly described self-observation as a focus of psychoanalytic work and as an outcome of the psychoanalytic process: "The patient's increasing freedom to use his mind in a self-observational manner becomes both a beacon for interventions and a necessary part of the change process" (p. 437).

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[1] This concept of self-observation is closely aligned with Fonagy et al.'s (2005) concept of mentalization and reflective function. Fonagy et al. took a developmental approach to the "understanding of the self as a mental agent," linking it to the quality of the attachment between the young child and the caregiver. Fonagy et al. used the concept of mentalization, the capacity to understand mental states in others and in oneself, as a broad indicator of mature development and as a goal of the psychoanalytic process, especially with borderline patients.

In summary, psychoanalysts have articulated a concept of self-observation that represents a special subset of the quintessentially human capacity for self-reflection. Initially linked by Freud to the free associative process, self-observation came to signify much more—the capacity that develops in analysis to view elements of intrapsychic conflict in a relatively dispassionate way that is not dominated by superego injunctions. The patient in analysis learns to shift his or her focus inward, using increasingly complex, intrapsychically based modes of self-observation.

The psychoanalytic concept of self-observation is quite specific in comparison to the generic, humanistic idea of self-reflection. The self-observation that occurs in psychoanalytic therapy implies a deep but narrow expansion of self-awareness based on an understanding and acceptance of one's unconscious conflicts. The incorporation of formerly disavowed impulses and the relative freedom from constraining influences of superego censure should give the analysand a greater freedom to act in a wider array of contexts.

EXECUTIVE SELF-AWARENESS

Self-awareness has become recognized as a critical component of executive leadership over the past 25 years because of changes in the nature of organizational life. Whether the term used is *postcapitalist* (Drucker, 1993), *postindustrial* (Hirschhorn, 1988), or *postentrepreneurial* (Kanter, 1989), there is widespread agreement that the organization of work in modern societies has changed significantly. Peter Drucker, perhaps the preeminent management theorist of the past 50 years, argued that the basic economic resource is no longer either capital or labor, but knowledge—value created by the application of knowledge to work (Drucker, 1993). In the *knowledge economy*, organizations have to be capable of faster action, greater flexibility, and innovation. Thus, they have to be less bureaucratic, less hierarchical, and more decentralized. Tasks are less routine and the boundaries between different parts of the organization are more fluid. Hirschhorn (1988) pointed out that in the postindustrial economy, authority relationships are less contained in fixed roles and structures and more subject to negotiation. As authority relationships are dictated less by fixed command and control structures, they take on a more contingent, matrixed, and networked quality.

Fundamental changes in organizational life have shaped the exigencies of modern leadership. The modern organization permits, even requires, a kind of creative dissonance in which competing initiatives and directions vie for attention and resources. A model that emphasizes intrapreneurship (developing new enterprises within the organization) and ad hoc teams requires *distributed leadership*—leadership exerted at many different levels and in many different contexts. Leadership no longer perfectly corresponds to formal managerial authority.

Hirschhorn (1997) has observed that there is more vulnerability on either side of the authority pair in the postindustrial milieu, compared with traditional hierarchical organizations. The dependency relationship between leader and follower is now more of a two-way street. Exerting influence over others, which requires high-level communication and interpersonal skills, has become a critical component of leadership.

Lee and King (2001, p. 72) have noted that great leaders "use their whole selves, infusing their work with their own multifaceted, complex character and personality. . . . Strong leaders are the ones who are being themselves and acting in character as they fulfill their leadership roles."

Avolio and Hannah (2008) have directly linked the evolution of modern organizations to the importance of leaders' self-awareness:

> Self clarity and/or awareness represent central themes in many models of effective leadership. . . . This may be the case because the ongoing challenges of dynamic and multifaceted modern organizations prompt leaders to search for a greater understanding of the situation with which they are confronted and who they are in terms of their capabilities and motivation to handle the situation. (p. 338)

A closer identification of self-awareness with the leadership role has important implications for executive development. First, processes that foster self-integration and self-alignment contribute to leadership growth. Increasing the degree of harmony and decreasing the amount of internal conflict among the executive's interpersonal style, values, and goals becomes a means of increasing leadership effectiveness. This internal alignment becomes evident in the capacity to articulate and pursue a direction with energy, commitment, purpose, and integrity. Second, the more the executive self is seen as a powerful tool of social influence, the more critical it is for the executive to understand how his or her behavior and personality impact others both positively and negatively. Viewed from this perspective, self-awareness has two dynamically interrelated dimensions:

- An accurate understanding of one's strengths and weaknesses, and
- Knowledge of how one's behavior is likely to impact others.

Bob Lee (personal communication, October 1, 2008) has observed that this link between self and social awareness is a critical component of leadership effectiveness

Daniel Goleman (1998b) has been a major proponent of the connection between self-awareness and effectiveness at work. For Goleman, self-awareness is the "vital foundational skill" for three emotional intelligence competencies—accurate self-assessment, emotional awareness, and self-confidence.[2] Goleman made the point that accurate self-assessment is an important ingredient of executive success in that a willingness to acknowledge one's weaknesses and shortcomings makes it much more likely that he or she can change and improve to better meet organizational challenges.

For Goleman, the awareness of how our emotions affect what we are doing is the fundamental emotional competency. He stated:

> Emotional awareness starts with attunement to the stream of feeling that is a constant presence in all of us and with a recognition of how these emotions shape what we perceive, think, and do. From that awareness comes another: that our feelings affect those we deal with (p. 55).

Emotional awareness gives the executive important tools for reading highly complex situations in the organization, and for being able to influence (not just be influenced by) others. Emotional awareness is essential for the self-control that is so challenging in a fast-paced, highly stressful

[2]Although Goleman suggested that self-confidence is a separate emotional intelligence competency, I view it, instead, as a critical by-product of the internal alignment or integration described previously. Rather than approaching self-confidence as a given, this dynamic approach to self-confidence is more consistent with Kohut's perspective on self-experience, and suggests an avenue for intervention—helping an executive become more aware of the unique gestalt of his or her strengths, values, and goals. Increased self-awareness should correlate with increased self-confidence, as better internal alignment releases inner energy that fosters a greater commitment to action.

organizational role—knowing your feelings and making productive use of them makes it less likely that you'll be ruled by them.

COACHING FOR EXECUTIVE SELF-AWARENESS

Ask any executive coach, and he or she will probably assert that fostering executive self-awareness is central to their work. However, coaches tend to be better at claiming that increased self-awareness is an outcome of their intervention than in describing how it is part of their process. In practice, executive consultants[3] have a relatively limited armamentarium for their efforts to develop executive self-awareness. In the following, I will review what I see as the key methodologies that consultants use in this regard—self-reflection, career coaching, and feedback. I will try to show how the richness of the psychoanalytic approach can add an important ingredient to each of these consulting methodologies. I will then describe in more detail how the psychoanalytically oriented consultant focuses on an executive's emotional awareness as a key to growth and increased effectiveness.

Self-Reflection

The executive consultant typically exhorts his or her client to engage in vigorous self-reflection as a path toward increased self-awareness. The reason this passes for wisdom rather than being dismissed as tautology is related to the *context* of the consulting engagement—in the action-oriented world of the executive, time out for reflection or contemplation is, itself, an opportunity to regain equilibrium and pursue growth. The emphasis on speed and action, on getting results quickly, and indeed the sheer number of interactions that comprise an executive's daily life all compromise the executive's ability to sort out thoughts and feelings. A critical nonspecific effect of executive consultation is to correct this imbalance by insisting on time out for reflection. If the consultant can help the executive shift into a mode of self-reflection, that, in itself, can reduce impulsive action and improve the quality of decision-making.

In the way he or she approaches the work with an executive, the consultant offers a model for self-reflective activity. The executive consultant can be a credible model if he or she can demonstrate an understanding of both the exigencies of executive action and the value of self-reflection. At the nexus of action and self-reflection, improved decision-making begins to convince the executive of the value of taking time out for reflection.

Although executive self-reflection may be conceived as a solo activity, in reality it develops as the coach encourages a more disciplined approach to self-reflection, either by providing a protocol to guide self-reflection or by following up to insure the exercise has occurred. The psychoanalytically informed consultant takes a more dynamic approach to the executive's self-reflective activity than the nonpsychoanalytic coach, who is in a more static take-it-or-leave-it position vis-à-vis the products of the client's self-reflection. For example, the psychoanalytic

[3]Throughout this article, I use the terms *executive coach* and *executive consultant* interchangeably, although there are some differences in connotation. The term *coach* has a stronger connotation of 1:1 work with the executive to enhance his or her effectiveness. However, especially to psychoanalytically oriented practitioners, it can also connote a more superficial intervention that does not encompass unconscious motivation, resistance and defense, etc.

consultant can evaluate the degree of threat for the executive in looking inward, and the degree to which defensiveness enters into the activity. The consultant might see that the executive's attempts at self-reflection are in the service of a grandiose self or take on the cast of a harsh, censorious superego. Through informed and tactful feedback to the executive, the psychoanalytically oriented consultant can guide the client to the kind of self-reflective activity that results in growth of the executive self.

Career Coaching

The career counseling tradition has furnished a set of tools for focusing on the executive's internal alignment. The career coaching aspect of executive consultation encourages the client to turn inward and reflect on the alignment between the current role and his or her skills, talents, values, interests, and goals. It is a rare executive who feels no conflict or doubt in this regard. Primarily through the career history interview, but also through values and goal clarification exercises, the consultant helps sharpen the executive's focus on these aspects of his or her experience. The consultant provides the executive with a richer language and the opportunity to think more deeply and systematically about *self in career*. At its best, the executive comes away with more clarity and more direction: "Yes, this is who I am. This is what I really want. This is the course I want to pursue." Optimally, this focus on self-alignment frees up energy for action, for a deeper commitment to an organizational role that is a key component of effective leadership.

The psychoanalytic consultant can facilitate growth in self-awareness by applying a self-psychological framework to the executive client's career narrative and role analysis. An appreciation of the centrality of subjective experience and the motivating force of self-cohesion enables the psychoanalytically informed consultant to identify the gaps, tensions, and conflicts that exist between a client and his or her work role identity. By focusing on affective markers such as shame and vulnerability, the consultant deepens the client's self-awareness and opens up more options to correct the experience of internal misalignment.[4] Furthermore, as the consultant guides the executive through a career narrative and role analysis, he or she might listen for and further inquire about

- Variations in self-esteem and self-confidence, especially feelings of grandiosity and inferiority;
- The degree of empathy for the needs of others in the organization, especially subordinates and peers;
- The capacity for unconflicted initiative and self-expression; and
- Subjective experiences of joy and aliveness in exerting power, reaching goals, etc.

For example, Scott had achieved senior partner status and significant success in his segment of the financial services industry. However, he sought executive consultation because he was uneasy with some aspects of his role. Scott valued good management, but although he informally carried the major burden of management at his firm, he felt that these skills were not highly valued

[4]Laura Huggler, Ph.D. (personal communication, January 14, 2010) has suggested that the psychoanalytic consultant, via the breadth of his or her experience, can help "normalize" for the executive episodes of intense feeling (e.g., internal conflict, doubt, fear, etc.). Huggler has found that this function plays a critical supportive and reassuring role for executives who otherwise don't have someone to talk to about these feelings.

either by his partners or generally by his segment of the industry. He wanted to assume more of a leadership role in the firm and felt that he was probably most qualified to do so, but worried about threatening an older partner and alienating another partner who was the firm's top producer.

Executive consultation provided Scott with the opportunity to better understand the internal barriers he felt in exercising authority within the firm and defining a role he was comfortable with. His fluctuations in self-esteem, complex feelings of inferiority and superiority vis-à-vis the other partners, and a high degree of sensitivity to generational issues contributed to internal tension and constraints on action. Although Scott would be able to grow the management side of his role gradually over time, he became clearer that he would have to first stake out a unique and powerful producer role that drew on his unique skills and talents.

Feedback

As boundaries in the postindustrial organization have become more fluid, executive effectiveness hinges more than ever on building synergistic, collaborative relationships. As enterprise leaders try to build high-performance senior teams, they have come to see accurate self-assessment as one key to establishing strong working relationships among their driven, results-oriented executives. According to this model, feedback to obtain a more accurate picture of one's strengths and weaknesses should enable members of the executive team to better understand their impact on each other. Accurate self-awareness is seen as a foundation for prosocial power and influence.

For example, the president of a division of a large financial services firm was concerned about the effectiveness of one of his senior executives. Matt was innovative and strategic in his approach, and had led his business to outstanding results and a world-class reputation. He was eager to create an enterprise-wide role that would require him to build strong relationships across different areas of the firm. But although he was masterful at articulating vision and strategy, he had left a trail of mistrustful and unsupportive colleagues in his years at the firm. The division president questioned whether Matt could take on a broader, relationship-intensive role if he had not been successful in building strong, trusting relationship on the president's senior team.

Committed to building a team whose members "make each other better," and to making Matt a more integral part of it, the division president spent almost an hour with the consultant trying to interpret his and others' impressions of Matt. Matt had received some of this feedback in the past, but his position on the team was still shaky. The president and the consultant worked to "connect the dots," filtering the feedback through their understanding of his personality style, needs, and motives. At the end of the hour, they had generated several hypotheses to guide the consultant's efforts to help Matt integrate and make full use of the feedback he had been given.

Over the past 10 to 20 years, the 360 survey has emerged as the primary tool in the consultant's efforts to foster executive self-awareness. The 360 survey is a systematic approach to obtaining feedback from an executive's subordinates, peers, and managers. Whether by means of paper-and-pencil structured questionnaires or semistructured interviews, the 360 survey provides the executive with systematic feedback about his or her management skills and leadership competencies. In the process, perceptions of the executive's interpersonal style and core aspects of character (honesty, trustworthiness, commitment) also get reflected back to the executive. The sensitive consultant will get valuable information regarding perceptions of the executive's needs, affects, and defenses and their impact on others in the organization.

A psychoanalytic perspective is invaluable in using 360 feedback data to foster executive self-awareness. Semistructured interviews give the psychoanalytic consultant the opportunity to take into account the motives for the respondents' reactions to the executive client; motives that are shaped not only by the respondent's personality style and structure, but by his or her organizational role and the nature of the interface with the executive client. The psychoanalytically oriented consultant is also likely to steer clear of one of the most common pitfalls of the 360 survey approach—using the data as a blunt instrument to confront the client with his or her weaknesses. Knowing a client's needs, motives, and defenses, as well as style, puts the consultant in a position to evaluate what the client really needs to know and is capable of using constructively. The consultant can help the executive achieve a more dynamic understanding of himself or herself by filtering the 360 feedback through the lens of the executive's personality dynamics. This becomes especially important vis-à-vis executives with marked ego weaknesses and/or narcissistic personality structures who are quite vulnerable to feedback.

360 feedback can confront the executive with strengths that have been taken for granted, as well as weaknesses that have been disavowed. An accurate assessment of one's strengths can be just as important for growth in an executive role as an awareness of one's limitations, helping the executive develop his or her leadership brand and galvanizing a commitment to action.

Giving 360 feedback to an executive should be just one method, albeit a very important one, for promoting his or her self-awareness. If the consultant can help the executive integrate a dynamic picture of the self in action (not just a collection of traits), it can serve as a template for continuing growth in self-awareness. A dynamic picture of the self obtained through feedback is invaluable in helping the executive identify new opportunities for change and increased impact.

Emotional Awareness

The psychoanalytic consultant is particularly well suited to help the executive develop meaningful and directly applicable emotional awareness. Goleman has made a valuable contribution by highlighting the key contribution of emotional awareness to executive effectiveness. However, like many consultants, his approach tends to be a combination of abstract and "cookbook," short on methodology that a clinically trained consultant would find valid.

Emotional awareness is best developed not in a vacuum of artificial exercises but in the day-to-day work of the executive. A background in the psychoanalytic method enables the consultant to know where to look for opportunities to develop emotional awareness. Focused listening that pays special attention to affective experience enables the consultant to meaningfully conceptualize the executive's presenting problem. The psychoanalytic consultant can then work at the nexus of intrapsychic experience and organizational knowledge to develop executive self-awareness.

Executive coaching is commonly used with a wide range of executives to help accelerate the growth of a leadership identity. But at the more senior levels, an executive often seeks consultation with a strong and troubling feeling of conflict around an important relationship (or relationships) with key people in the organization—boss, peer, or member of his or her senior team. At the senior executive level, the web of relationships is intense, complex, and critical for business results. What keeps the executive up at night is often his or her concern about one or a few key relationships. As the consultant begins to explore these key relationships with the executive, it becomes clear that the executive is having difficulty metabolizing some form of affective

experience. These relationship dilemmas and their associated *affective markers* constitute a barrier to the executive's development as a leader and define the sphere within which executive awareness needs to develop.

One of the most common affective markers for executive consultation is anger. Organizational life requires executives to promote a high degree of coordinated action while also driving for results. The psychological challenge is profound: to establish and refine strong interpersonal bonds while directing (and sublimating) the aggressive drive. In this sense, the organization is the stage on which the vicissitudes of Freud's dual instinct theory are continually played out. Effective leaders establish a *context of safety* in which threats associated with the aggressive drive are handled productively.

The executive's anger and its derivatives may present as an inner struggle or a behavioral outburst. Other important affective markers such as shame, guilt, and anxiety also define the focus for developing self-awareness.

In the case illustrations that follow, I show how key relationships and affective markers focus the consultant's efforts to develop the executive's emotional awareness. The psychoanalytic consultant integrates the assessment of the executive's relationship dilemmas with an understanding of the parameters of role and organizational culture to define an approach to developing self-awareness. The executive's degree of psychological mindedness will also help define the consultant's approach.[5]

Case Example #1: Conflict on the Senior Team

Joe was the CFO of a large nonprofit organization that was characterized by antagonism and conflict between different functions and employee groups. After some tumultuous change in leadership, a new CEO had been appointed. Although Joe fully supported the choice, he was uncertain whether the CEO fully supported the way he was executing his role. As he understood it, his role was to help lead change, especially in the areas of management and fiscal efficiency. Although he felt that he had strong relationships with the organization's board, his ability to get things done depended on close collaboration with his counterpart on the service-delivery side of the organization. His feelings of frustration and anger with this colleague, Susan, had led him to seek executive consultation. Joe had become discouraged about being able to carry out his (self-defined) mission, and had begun to accept calls from headhunters in spite of the sacrifice he would make to his future income and security.

In the initial consultation, Joe was himself surprised by the degree of anger he expressed toward Susan, dismissing her as unqualified for the job and incapable of working across the boundaries of their respective organizations. After giving Joe the opportunity to "blow off steam," the consultant reminded him of one of the key points from the consultant's previous

[5]Elsewhere (Axelrod, 2007), I have used the term *psychological saturation* to describe a dimension of executive coaching cases that combines characteristics of the focal problem with the degree of executive psychological-mindedness. Assignments with high psychological saturation lend themselves to the psychoanalytic consultant's approach to developing executive self-awareness. Consulting assignments are subject to at least an implicit matching process, the more so as one's career progresses. Thus, executives who engage a psychoanalytic consultant may not be perfectly representative of the executive population. Although the cases described in this article are relatively high in "psychological saturation," I believe the approach I am describing is valid across the spectrum of psychological saturation.

team-building work with Joe and his colleagues—namely, that Joe had a tendency to come on strong with people, giving them the impression that he was not really open to their concerns. Perhaps this was a factor in Susan's seeming inability to be a full partner with him on the issues he was concerned about. This intervention helped Joe regain his emotional equilibrium and to acknowledge that his fear of failing in the eyes of the organization's board members led him to "steamroller" Susan as an obstacle, rather than try to engage her collaboratively.

Joe defined the key issue with Susan as one of trust, and proposed a series of meetings with her to get feedback on aspects of his role functioning and identify ways to improve their relationship. Susan was very receptive, and they began to air their differences, revisit some of the previously unspoken disagreements, and express some of their vulnerabilities. Joe was initially taken aback when Susan expressed some honest criticism of his behavior, but was able to regain his emotional balance when the consultant reminded him that this was exactly the kind of honesty he needed.

In this assignment, as is often the case, increased emotional awareness is strongly linked to advances in empathy and organizational awareness. As Joe worked with the feedback from his consultant and his colleague, he learned more about the impact of his tension and aggressiveness on others and gained an increased appreciation of their motives, needs, and constraints. His ability to reduce conflict and find a collaborative path forward set the stage for a subsequent discussion with the CEO to clarify his organizational role and direction.

Case Example #2: An Executive Behaving Badly

The executive consultant with a clinical background is more likely than most to get the difficult assignment where an episode or pattern of angry outbursts tears at the social fabric of the organization and presents some kind of liability to the enterprise. The breakthrough of aggression frequently points to some threat to the executive self based either in organizational factors (e.g., changes in role, structure, or culture) or personal difficulties. In these cases of executives behaving badly, the challenge for the consultant is to turn a mandated intervention into a developmental opportunity. To do so, the consultant must neutralize the punitive organizational superego. By recognizing and trying to mitigate the high potential for destructive shaming, the consultant helps the executive achieve "balancing contemplation" (Sterba, 1934) vis-à-vis his behavior. Especially in cases where there is a long-standing pattern of aggressive behavior, the intervention has the potential to model more broadly for the organization the balancing of aggression and relatedness.

Bill had been in an important leadership role in a financial services firm and was nearing the end of his career. Generally well-thought-of and well-connected in the firm, Bill had a long history of episodic harsh, demeaning behavior. He saw himself as hard-driving and committed to the enterprise, a hands-on leader who inspired loyalty in his troops. He acknowledged, but tended to minimize the importance of, some of his aggressive behavior. Bill didn't suffer fools gladly, and could get frustrated, impatient, and angry when he perceived himself being questioned or delayed by someone in a junior position.

Although Bill had a long-standing propensity toward this behavior, it appeared to have increased over the past year. A survey of current life circumstances indicated that Bill had recently been subject to a number of stressors, which could be conceptualized in a psychoanalytic framework as threats to the executive self. These included:

- An operation to treat the symptoms of an early stage serious illness similar to the one that had killed his father relatively early in life;
- The departure of his youngest child for college, concerns about his oldest child's adaptation, and the need to redefine his perhaps less-than-optimal marriage; and
- The recent hiring of a senior executive from the outside who would be interposed between Bill and his long-term boss, and who had a reputation for being very demanding.

These stressors occurred in the context of, and also helped precipitate, the decision to "shift gears." Bill had turned 50 and wanted to work less and devote himself more to the health and fitness that loomed even more important after his brush with death. But he was unsure how he would spend his time, and was apprehensive about losing the power and influence that came with the executive role. He had come to define himself largely through his work and accomplishments, and was unsure how he would cope without those "props."

A review of Bill's life history suggested some longstanding threats to self-integration (e.g., feelings of insecurity and intellectual inferiority, a conflict-filled relationship with a father who died early). Although these factors were acknowledged, they were not part of the highly focused intervention. The consultant worked on the more immediate issue of Bill's uncertainty about the future, and his anxiety about financial issues and finding meaningful, self-defining activity. The consultant also worked very directly on developing emotional awareness in this relatively unaware executive. Bill responded well to a detailed inquiry into events, both at work and outside it, that triggered his inner experience of impatience, frustration, and anger.

As Bill became more conversant with the experiences of inner tension that preceded his aggressive behavior, he began to transform initial feelings of shame and resentment about the intervention into pride in developing self-awareness. In a way characteristic of the hard-charging executive, he became so enthusiastic about developing the tools for emotional awareness that he started to enlist family and colleagues in meetings with the consultant that would help them "take a look in the mirror."

Case Example #3: Developing a More Assertive Leadership Style

Jeff was the much-admired CEO of a cultural institution. He had originally sought coaching for one of his subordinates after conflict over the subordinate's wish for a promotion had led to a blow-up, with threats and recrimination. With the coach's help, the subordinate had made some changes in his managerial approach, and, in view of his significant contribution to the institution, now merited the promotion.

Jeff had been a hands-off manager who expected his senior team to take care of most issues so that he could focus on the external component of the CEO role. His tendency to avoid conflict and shy away from making his expectations clear had contributed to the initial blow-up with his subordinate. Now, in planning to promote him, Jeff was worried about how other members of his senior team would react. They had been disapproving of the idea in the past, and Jeff half-expected a palace revolt when he stopped procrastinating and told them what he was going to do.

Although Jeff had shown interest in executive consultation from the beginning, he had been more comfortable getting help for his people than for himself. Now, with increased anxiety about how to assert the direction he wanted the senior team to take, he engaged the consultant to help resolve some of his dilemmas with these key people.

Jeff had established a very collegial leadership style that was consistent with his personality and with the needs of the institution at an earlier stage of its development. As he brought more outside talent into the organization, and as he himself became more concerned with his legacy, Jeff became more committed to setting a direction and doing the hard work of addressing disagreements to get the necessary buy-in for what he wanted to do. As he put it jokingly to the consultant in one of their early meetings: "I've gotten the feedback that everybody loves me. I guess I'm going to have to risk some not-so-positive feelings."

Jeff used the executive consultation to work through his discomfort with conflict and his anxiety about taking a more assertive approach to his role. He showed an increased willingness to look at the motives and behaviors (not all of them benign) of the members of his senior team. This helped him script a series of discussions with them, in which he melded his characteristic tact and willingness to listen with a clear explanation of why he was taking the steps he was. He was also able to convey to his senior team his expectations of how they could support the direction he was staking out.

In this case, the consultant knew very little about Jeff's early history, although he was familiar with some of the executive's current life concerns. He was able to work to increase Jeff's self-awareness via key relationship dilemmas and affective markers (viz., his anxiety around assertiveness). This helped Jeff grow into the leadership role that the institution would need to develop to the next level.

CONTRASTING CONTEXTS AND MODES OF SELF-AWARENESS

Although there are marked contrasts in the contexts and modes of self-awareness in the psychoanalytic and executive consultation settings, I first want to underscore a strong link between the two. The approach to executive emotional awareness described earlier borrows heavily from the psychoanalytic method in its use of focused listening and a relaxation of superego strictures to facilitate the executive's report of the inner experience of his or her role. With a focus on emotional markers and key relationship dilemmas, the consultant encourages the executive to attend to important dimensions of role experience. The effective consultant helps bring about an analogue of what Sterba (1934) described as the "balancing contemplation kept steadily free of affect" (p. 122). The executive in a leadership role is subject to unrelenting scrutiny and criticism and may be vulnerable to a harsh self-censoriousness. The consultant helps relax superego injunctions to promote broader and more inclusive self-reflection. Just as the analyst promotes safety and objectivity in the face of internal danger, the effective consultant resists the pulls of constituent criticism and a more immediate results orientation to promote unconstrained (i.e., nonsuperego-dominated) self-reflection.

Differences in the context and aims of executive consultation and psychoanalytic therapy are quite obvious, but deserve initial mention. First, the focus of consultation with executives is their work life, particularly their current organizational environment. Coaches vary in how much they cross the boundary from work life to personal life—this is a matter of tact and professional integrity rather than a hard and fast rule. But typically, intensive focus on work life is a defining characteristic of the intervention and the basis of its effectiveness. At least in theory, psychoanalytic treatment does not privilege any particular sphere of life. In practice, though, many clinicians demonstrate a relative neglect of work and organizational life

(Axelrod, 1999). Perhaps this has helped leave the door open for the growth of executive coaching.

A second distinction between psychoanalytic treatment and executive consultation is the temporal sphere in which self-awareness develops. There is a prominent retrospective dimension to psychoanalytic treatment—self-reflection has a strong pull to the past. The analyst offers the patient the opportunity to develop an autobiographical framework—the lasting formative impact of the family of origin is the touchstone of psychoanalytic treatment. In contrast, executive consultation has a very strong here and now orientation. Although the consultant typically anchors his or her understanding of the executive in the basics of the executive's personal and career history, the focus is on present-day motives and forces. This lends the executive's experience of self-awareness immediacy and utility. By contrast, the patient's experience of self-awareness has an intensity and comprehensiveness that derives from access to a wider sphere of personal life experience.

Third, the time frames for psychoanalytic treatment and executive consultation are very different. There is a relaxation of time constraints linked to the developmental process that occurs in psychoanalytic therapy. Executive consultation typically occurs in a more urgent and goal-directed context. Thus, although the duration of psychoanalytic treatment is usually measured in years, the modal executive consultation assignment lasts between 6 and 12 months.

Fourth, the roles of analyst and consultant have different salience for the development of self-awareness. For the patient in analysis, the capacity for self-observation develops in relation to the experiences of threat and safety in the transference. Although some (Kilburg, 2000) would emphasize the role of transference and resistance in the executive–consultant dyad, I believe that the consultant should be more a model and guide than the primary object/context for the development of self-awareness.[6] If the interplay of threat and safety "fuels" the development of executive self-awareness, it is typically the experienced threat to survival from competitive peers and potentially disapproving bosses that animates the inner life of the executive.

Both psychoanalysis and executive consultation aim to foster self-knowledge as part of their contribution to adult growth and development. Each, though, bears the imprint of a unique dialectic of aim and process. The aims of psychoanalytic treatment have traditionally been defined in terms of symptoms and illness. However, as the patient becomes more engaged in a psychoanalytic process, symptoms recede and increased self-observation becomes not only a key to the process, but a goal in itself. The aims of executive consultation pertain not to symptoms but to increased effectiveness and growth. Increased self-awareness is an important part of the process of executive growth, but is typically not a goal in itself. To be successful with executives, the consultant needs to use increased self-awareness as the best vehicle for fostering a blend of non-illness-based growth and practical effectiveness. The consultant who doesn't know how to blend this emphasis on non-illness-based growth with practical effectiveness is unlikely to be successful with executives.

Self-observation in the analytic sense is defined by the analysand's developing capacity to observe thoughts and feelings as mental events. This occurs through the growing recognition of the ways in which unconscious conflict, often in the form of transference resistance, shapes

[6]However, the consultant working with an executive is aware of, and frequently makes use of, the organization as a transference field onto which archaic relationship themes are projected (Laura Huggler, Ph.D., personal communication, Feb. 2, 2010.)

perception, thought, and feeling. Executive consultation may well aim to expand the client's awareness of his or her motives and needs, but it does not typically emphasize unconscious conflict related to the drives. The consultant's attention to affective markers in fostering emotional awareness occurs in the service of the interpersonal mastery component of leadership effectiveness. The focus is not intrapsychic per se.

The goals of executive consultation are typically in the realm of what Hatcher (1973) would call "trait-based" reflective self-observation. Most consultants working with an executive on 360 feedback aim for a more comprehensive understanding of the traits or descriptors that characterize an executive's behavior. They may take a more dynamic approach by focusing on how the executive's traits and behaviors impact and influence others in the organization. In their focus on the affective markers of the executive's key relationship dilemmas, psychoanalytic consultants focus on the more dynamic dimensions of reflective self-observation.

The consultant's and the analyst's approaches to self-awareness are powerful and successful because they each represent a shift in experiential mode for the participant. For the executive, self-awareness develops in the context of action. The focus inward is powerful because of all the self-experience that gets lost or disavowed in the press for action and results.[7] Consultation offers the opportunity to regain or reconnect to these aspects of the self, thus strengthening the executive self and promoting greater energy and commitment to the leadership role. For the patient in psychoanalytic therapy, self-observation represents a further shift inward. The patient in therapy is, of course, in action, whether outside the consulting room or in relationship to the analyst. But from the baseline of relative repose and free-ranging self-report, the capacity to consider thoughts and feelings as mental events, as subject to the shaping influences of unconscious needs and conflicts, represents an expansion or strengthening of the self.

I believe that one of the most important, though potentially debatable, differences between psychoanalytic therapy and executive consultation pertains to the role of accurate self-awareness. The intensity of interaction that is an integral part of the executive role means that the stakes are very high for the executive getting it right in relation to key constituents. There is much more direct pressure for the executive client than for the therapy patient to see himself or herself accurately (the way others do) and to be able to anticipate how others will respond to one's traits, style, and behavior. Although the effective consultant keeps in mind the relativity of social perception, the fact that how one is viewed depends in part on the organizational culture, role, and personalities of one's constituents, there is an assumption that knowing more about how one is seen by others will improve an executive's effectiveness.

(The psychoanalytically oriented executive consultant bears in mind what other consultants frequently do not know—that the executive's level of ego strength will shape efforts to integrate feedback and achieve accurate self-awareness. Work with executives on leadership effectiveness, including efforts to foster self-awareness, presumes a relatively intact ego. The resilient, self-confident executive can be challenged to integrate threatening 360 feedback. But the more an executive client lacks ego strength, the more he or she will have difficulty integrating negative

[7]Although there is certainly more need than ever before for leaders to be aware of their emotions to effectively influence their followers, there are also strong countervailing forces that can lead to a drive for results at the expense of people and their feelings. Thus, it is all too common to encounter executive leaders who are borderline alexithymic, significantly out of touch with their feelings. For these executives, the chronic experience of high levels of stress in their drive for results and pursuit of personal reward constitute significant barriers to achieving emotional awareness.

feedback "without parameters" and making change.[8] The art of consulting in these cases is to find the right mix of challenge and support to enable the executive to develop more accurate self-awareness.)

Psychoanalytic therapy bears a more conflicted relationship to the phenomenon of accurate self-awareness. Psychoanalytic therapy gives the patient an increased understanding of his or her needs, motives, and defenses, and the opportunity to reform the self with fewer internal constraints. This may or may not clear the way for more accurate socially based self-knowledge. The fact that the culture of psychoanalytic therapy is so strongly defined by freedom from social constraint is frequently not understood by those who work in the area of organizational effectiveness. Consultants and executive colleagues can be puzzled when they find out a particular executive has been in therapy: "If Joe Jones is in therapy, why is he so unaware of how he comes across to others?"

Ultimately, though, I'm not sure that psychoanalytic therapists have fully thought through this issue of accurate self-awareness. Their ideology of freedom from social constraint may sometimes conflict with their strong sense that a particular patient needs to be less oblivious to his or her impact on others. But if so, what is the therapist's role in bringing about that particular kind of self-knowledge? I believe that, especially in this area of accurate self-awareness, more dialogue needs to occur between consultants with their 360 methodology, and psychoanalytic therapists.

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[8] In my experience, a lack of the prerequisite ego strength undermines a wide range of organizational interventions, from executive coaching to conflict resolution and team-building exercises.

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