



# THE AXES OF CHANGE

Introducing a New Generative  
*Change Model*

## Part I

*“You can’t change anything by fighting or resisting it.  
You change something by making it obsolete through superior methods.”*  
Buckminster Fuller

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If coaching is about anything, it is about change. And if coaching is first and foremost about facilitating the dynamic process of change or transformation in the lives of people, then ultimately a coach is *a change-agent par excellence*. That’s why we coach, is it not? We coach to make a highly desired change in an area of life or personality that will allow us to maximize our talents, unleash our potentials, and take our skills to a new level of development. That’s also why we hire a personal coach, is it not? We want to make changes to take our talents and skills to a new and higher level for peak or optimal performance.

- Yet, what is this thing that we call *change*?
- Does change have a good or bad reputation to you?
- Is change easy or hard, fun or traumatic?

### **Kinds of Change**

When we think about change, we often first think about the change that’s connected to therapy. Therapy is also about change, but it is about *remedial* change—fixing things, repairing what’s broken, getting a person through or over hurts and traumas, altering significant distortions in personality, thinking patterns, emotional distresses. In this context, most people find change challenging, difficult, and even hard. In this context, therapists and clients have to deal with a wide range of subjects connected to that kind of change, namely *resistance*, defense mechanisms, fighting change, fearing change, and relapse.

By way of contrast, coaching is about *generative* change. It's about taking talent, knowledge, and skills to a new level of excellence. It's about facilitating the highest *development* in a well-functioning person and about enabling new *transformations* to occur that empowers a person to excel his or her own visions and dreams about what's possible. In this context, the people sign up for coaching embrace change, desire change, and are ready for change. And when you have change-embracers asking for change, this makes much of the therapeutic understandings, premises, and model of change completely inappropriate.

### **The Need for a New Change Model**

So what's a coach to do? Most, if not nearly all, of the *change models* available today were developed by psychologists and psychotherapists who were working with people who needed change but who resisted it. In those change models we find a major emphasis on resistance, relapse, that "change is hard and painful," and that people will actually fight you about change.

For the field of coaching and for leading coaches, the problem is that many of these change models have been adopted wholesale from therapy. "Change is difficult" is the first line of the third chapter of *Coach Yourself*, an excellent book on coaching. Yet by adopting the old trans-theoretical model by Prochaska, Norcross, and DiClemente, the authors have failed to see and utilize the difference between therapeutic change and coaching change. They also developed their model from how alcoholics and other addicts went through the process of self-change.

I have another complaint about the trans-theoretical model. In presenting the stages of change, it offers the following steps or stages in the experience of change: 1) pre-contemplation, 2) contemplation, 3) commitment, 4) action or change, 5) maintenance, 6) relapse. Now, how about that fourth step? Don't you love it? *Change!*

That reminds me of the cartoon drawing of a wild-hair professor working on the formula for "life." He's standing facing a chalk board that he has absolutely filled it up with a complex mathematical and scientific formula. Then at the end, near the bottom of the blackboard, he writes, "Then the miracle happens" then next comes an arrow that points to the end result, "Life!"

*Change* is what a change model is suppose to detail out. It really doesn't do any good to put "change" as one of the steps in a model designed to sort out the steps of change. As a model for describing how to bring about change, a change model needs to identify all of the mechanisms, processes, and variables and then present that variables in a step-by-step fashion so that we can move through the process and experience a change. Doesn't that make sense?

If coaching is truly about generative and transformative change, then what model or template informs and guides us in facilitating the change process? In Neuro-Semantics, the *Axes of Change model* is our answer. In designing it, we have started with the difference between remedial and generative change so that it reflects the variables and contexts how healthy, sane, and well-functioning people bring about desired change in the way they think, feel, respond, relate, and perform.

### ***What is the Axes of Change model?***

As a model or template for working with *the change process* The Axis of Change model uses the key mechanisms or variables that are involved in change. These include:

- 1) The negative and positive emotions that move us away from one thing and toward another.
- 2) The reflective understanding of what needs to change and the decision or commitment to make it happen.
- 3) The constructive planning and designing of what to change to and the beginning experimentation of the action plan to see how it works. ‘
- 4) The reinforcement of what works well to reward it and the ongoing testing, monitoring, and accountability that enables the change to solidify.

When we distinguish the two meta-programs in each of these processes, we have eight change factors or variables.

- 1) *Aversions*: fear, anger, stress, frustration, distress, pain, unpleasantness, intolerance, having had “enough,” threshold, necessity, negative emotional tension, etc.
- 2) *Attractions*: hope, dreams, values, visions, anticipation, pleasure, inspiration, possibilities, growth, development, positive emotional tension, etc.
- 3) *Reflective understanding*: knowledge, heightened awareness, insight, discovery, the Ah-Ha! recognition.
- 4) *Decision*: the saying *no* to the old and *yes* to the new possibilities, the courage to break free to make a change, commitment, willingness, etc.
- 5) *Creative design*: the planning for change, the know-how about what to do now, an action plan with time table and schedule for change, the strategy for how to do it.
- 6) *Action*: performance, practice, experimentation, trying something out, trial and error learning, implementation, feed-forward.
- 7) *Reinforcement*: support, celebration, championing a new practice, reward, partners, etc.
- 8) *Testing*: monitoring, feedback, renewed practice, accountability, performance review, re-designing the action or performance plan, etc.

And for a change-embracer, someone who is already a healthy high performer, these are the variables that make change possible and that create change. In fact, there will be times when a single one of these factors may be completely sufficient to create change. We may have experienced it or we have seen it work in the life of another when sufficient *pain* drove a person to change overnight. Perhaps a friend got a diagnosis of lung cancer and from that moment totally quit smoking. Sometimes a great vision wakes a person up to new possibilities, and they are transformed. Saul on the Damascus was like that. A vision awakened him to a whole new world. Sometimes it is the *Ah ha!* experience that creates an immediate and complete change, or a *ferocious resolve of a decision*, or a plan—a specific and compelling plan that sets forth an exciting strategy. It could be the experience of having a little piece of doing something different or right reinforced that makes the change. Or it could be receiving some performance feedback that suddenly gives us a mirror that leads to transformation.

Typically, however, it is the working of all of these factors together that brings about solid and

lasting change. In this, we also usually need the different change mechanisms to work together in a coordinated way. If we create a wonderful plan for change but don't have the emotional energy, we will *intelligently know* what we should do without doing it—a typical problem many people have with change.

Or we may know what we want to change *to*, but not be all that clear on what we have to move away from to make that happen. We may have a great plan and begin to act on it, but if we don't have sufficient reinforcements or feedback, we may find the change doesn't last and that we revert back to our old habits.

This is where we need a model that ties the change mechanisms and variables together and provides an understanding of how they relate to each other. Considering the need to see the inter-relationships between the eight change variables, we find that we can classify them into four change processes or stages.

1) *The Energy stage*: creating sufficient emotional energy, motivation, and creative tension to feel both the need and the desire for the change. This gives us a propulsion for change: away from the aversions and pains and toward the attractions and pleasures.

2) *The Decision stage*: creating sufficient understanding and knowledge about what to change, why it doesn't work, and generating enough decision power to create a readiness for change. This gives us the prod to say *no* to the current way of thinking, feeling, and acting and *yes* to the possibilities of a generative change.

3) *The Creation stage*: creating a specific action plan that describes the change, giving us a step-by-step plan that we can then begin acting on and experimenting with. This gives us the plan to implement and actualize in real life.

4) *The Solidifying stage*: creating specific rewards and support for the new actions that we celebrate and champion all the while testing, monitoring, and using feedback to make richer, fuller, and more integrated into our new habit and way of responding. This gives us a way to keep solidifying the change so that it becomes part of who we are and so that it fits ecologically into our life style.

As we step back from these four stages or processes of change, we can easily see the role that anyone who plays the facilitator or change agent will play in promoting life-enhancing change:

1) *Challenger* of current reality and of the aversive consequences if things don't change.

2) *Awakener* to a new vision of possibilities and all of the attractive opportunities if we do change.

3) *Prober* of one's current understandings and meaning frames that describe one's current behaviors and feelings thereby creating a leverage for what to change.

4) *Provoker* to making a decision to say *no* to the current and *yes* to the new possibilities, thereby creating a readiness for making the change.

5) *Co-creator* to design the new strategy and action plan.

6) *Actualizer* to begin the experimenting, trials, and new fledging performances.

7) *Reinforcer* to provide support, nurture, and celebration of the new behaviors and responses.

8) *Tester* to monitor, give feedback, hold accountable, and refine the new changes.

Yet there is more. Not only do we now have four stages or processes of change, but these four processes correspond to four key meta-programs or perceptual filters that we use in paying attention to things and sorting out what's important.

1) *The Energy stage* relates to the meta-programs of *toward* and *away from* —toward the attractions that we want and away from the aversions that we don't.

2) *The Decision stage* relates to the meta-programs of *reflective* and *action* in how we respond to information, events, and people. First we *reflect* on what's currently going on and then we take *action* as we make a decision to do something.

3) *The Creation stage* relates to the meta-programs of *internal reference* and *external reference*. First we internally reference our matrix structure of meaning frames and create a plan using our know-how knowledge of what to do, then we externally reference the outside world that we live and move in for where and how the action plan will be implemented.

4) *The Solidifying stage* relates to the meta-programs of *matcher* and *mis-matcher*. First we perceive by matching for what is similar to the game plan that we designed and noticing and acknowledging what's working even if in the tiniest bit as we nurture, support, and validate the person who has taken action. Then we mis-match by sorting for differences, what's not fully congruent with the game plan as we test it out, give feedback, offer ideas for further refinements.

This now gives us four axis that relate to four meta-program continua. Each axis is one of these four core meta-program continua which governs how we think-feel-and-respond when we encounter new information or challenging events. Each axis offers a continuum on which two polar perceptual filters exist which informs *how* we think about and code the trigger that invites a change. In terms of *change*, these deal with

Our motivational energy for change: toward and away from.

Our decision readiness for change: reflective and active.

Our creating and implementing a new change map: internal and external referencing.

Our solidifying and maintaining the change in the real world: matching and mis-matching.

As we have modeled how *change* and *transformation* actually occurs in the four stages, we have designed these axes of change so that a coach (or anyone working with transformation processes) can *dance* with the client in following the client's energy through his or her unique Matrix of frames. This enables the coach to find and use the most effective *leverage points* in that client's mind-body (or neuro-semantic matrix system). The axes of change not only apply at the individual level, but also for organizations and groups and so provides a dynamically practical tool for Coaches as change-agents.

## Summary

- The process of *change*, like any and every subjective experience has a structure, and as such, can be modeled. For years, therapists have studied change. Yet their studies have focused on how hurting people change—how traumatized, limited, wounded, and stuck people change. It makes sense that those models of change see change as painful, difficult, a struggle, and something clients will resist and relapse from.

- But how do peak performers change? How do self-actualizing people change? What is the structure to that experience? *The Axes of Change model* is the first non-therapeutic change model in the world, a model based on how top performers, well-functioning people, people who are not hurting and who do not *need* to change, but who want to change, how change-embracers *change*.

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# THE AXES OF CHANGE

Introducing the first purely Coaching  
Change Model in the world  
**Part II**

*Coaching is about change and a coach is a change-agent par excellence.*

In the first part, we describe the need for a new *change* model in the field of coaching, one that is *not* based upon the premises and techniques of psychotherapy. We also described in some detail the component variables that we have designed into the Axes of Change model. We based this upon eight meta-programs as well as the natural change/ transformation process that well-adjusted and self-actualizing people experience. In this second part, we will detail out the facets of *the Axes of Change model* (for more about this see *Coaching Conversations*, 2004).

How does *change* work for change-embracers, that is for self-actualizing people who are not afraid of change and who do not resist it, but on the contrary, embrace it? Having modeled it in people who easily and enjoyably *change*, and who change without a lot of fanfare or emotional struggle, we discovered the key components that we mentioned in the first article in this series. These differ from psychotherapy-based models which start from the assumption that people will resist change and relapse back to old patterns, that people are coming from need rather than want, deficiency motivation rather than growth motivation (Maslow).

## **The Axes of Change Model**

What are the specific meta-program continua which make up the Axes of Change? In brief there they are as follows.

### **1<sup>st</sup> — The energy, emotional, or motivation meta-programs of *Toward / Away From*.**

Questions:

What do you want?

What have you had enough of?

What values or experiences are you motivated toward and what are you motivated to move away from?

This creates the push-pull energy, the propulsion system that plays off of attraction / aversion and pleasure / pain. The poles on the continuum between *away from* and *toward* relate to how much energy we have in feeling pulled or pushed and what's our favorite or dominate focus of attention.

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Valued Experiences

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**Away From**

Pains— Aversions  
The Push away from

**Toward**

Pleasures — Attractions  
The Pull Toward

**2<sup>nd</sup> — The response meta-programs of *Reflective, Inactive, Active*.**

Questions:

- How do you respond or act when faced with information or a request?
- Do you first reflect upon things?
- Is your first response to take action and then ask questions?

The poles on the continuum between *active* and *reflective* provide the oscillation between thinking something through to have a well-formed plan or idea in our heads to just acting on something and seeing what happens.

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Response Preference and Style

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**Reflective**

Thinking, Feeling, Imagining, Analyzing  
Inwardly focused in responding to data or challenge

**Active**

Acting, Doing, Taking Action  
Outwardly focused in responding

**3<sup>rd</sup> — The frame of reference meta-programs of *Internal / External*.**

Questions:

- Where do you focus most of your attention, on your internal frames or on external frames?
- Are you more or less aware of your internal frames, understandings, thoughts?
- Are you more or less aware of the outside world and what's going on there?

The poles of the continuum between internal and external lies at the source of our oscillation between being mentally-and-emotionally inside or outside. It governs where we go first and where we feel most comfortable.

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Reference Focus

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**Internal**

Internal maps and frames of the Game  
Ideas, Thoughts, Words,  
Representations in the Movie in our mind  
Strategy for how to do something

**External**

External actions of the Game  
Sensory Awareness and Calibration  
Present on the outside

#### 4<sup>th</sup> — The relationship meta-programs of matching and mis-matching.

##### Relationship Style

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###### **Matching for Sameness**

Witnessing and noticing what fits,  
Looking for matches between  
new Game Plan and external actions

###### **Mis-Matching for Difference**

Mis-matching for what differs,  
determining strengths and weaknesses  
Monitoring and identifying what needs  
to be brought up to standard.

###### **Coaching States or Roles within the Axes of Change**

What are the coaching states that a coach is called upon to access and use as he or she moves through the change stages and processes with a client? What states do we dance in and out of as we follow the energy and facilitate the desired transformations for the client in each Axis?

###### **Axis I: The Push-Pull Dance**

This dance stirs up energy as it exposes consequences, awakens dreams and visions, and loosens the current frames. It covers the pre-contemplation and contemplation stages of change. For this we dance between the poles of *Awakener* and *Challenger*.

- **Awakener:** This is the role of inspiring, standing in awe of the magnificence of our clients, inviting new possibilities, seducing to what's possible, evoking dreams and wild imaginations.
- **Challenger:** This is the role of evoking current reality and highlighting its pain and distress and where it will take one if continued. In this role we confront, get in the client's face and challenge to create a felt gap.

When do we shift from the Push-Pull dance and axis as Awakener and Challenge? When there is enough energy to explore one's Matrix to understand the current box within which the client is embedded. To that we ask:

- Is the person energized to explore?
- How's the motivation level to face reality as it is?

###### **Axis II: The Decision Dance between Readiness and Leverage**

This dance seeks to find and/or create the leverage point for change that leads to the decision to do it. Here we seek to facilitate the client to identify the highest frames of intention, the key to his or her Matrix, and the structure of transformation for this client at this time. Does he or she have permission to change? Does he believe that change is a possibility for him? Does he believe he deserves it? It is to evoke the beginning of an attractor frame in the system.

- **Provoker:** This is the role for teasing, provoking, and playing to get the client to turn up the push—pull energies to see just how ready the client is and if there's sufficient energy to actually make something happen. We provoke the commitment. As provoker we challenge as in the first axis, yet the push is different. We are pushing now for probing inside for the frames of mind that will make the difference, and that will lead us to commitment. Before, we pushed and challenge for motivational energy around our Vision.
- **Prober:** This is the role of exploring like a detective with total curiosity and persistence and tenacity until we find or create a frame of reference that will completely transform life. First we probe the

existing Matrix to understand what it is, how it works, its structure, processes, and leverage point. This invites blinding awareness of current reality. Oftentimes a painful awareness of *how* we have created a non-productive pattern in our lives. As we do we will be wondering about what frame of mind would bring about a complete transformation? In the role of Prober we search and research, we put the spotlight on the unstored features of our experiences, and we tease out the higher frames of mind.

*When* do we shift from the Readiness—Leverage axis to the next axis? When there is an awareness of the problematic frame, when there's the discovery of the possibility of the leverage frame, and when there's a readiness to do the Inner Game Work. Ask:

Do we know the frame that has created your current situation and state?

Is the client ready to change those frames?

Is the client committed?

### **Axis III: The Dance of the Inner and Outer Games**

In this dance we move with the client to create the Inner Game and then translate it into the performance of the Outer Game. This dance helps the client to close the Knowing-Doing Gap and to put into practice the know-how of the new game that the client wants to play. Here we dance to co-generate with the client a self-organizing energy that will become self-generative in the client. This is the experimenting stage for change.

- **Co-Creator:** This is the role of co-creating with the client the actual meanings of belief frames, decision frames, identity frames, etc. that make up a new Game—the Inner Game. In this role we are co-developer with the client, we nurture and support the client, perhaps challenge the ideas and frames to make them realistic and tough and practical. In this role we work to solidify the frames that will map a new reality.
- **Actualizer:** This is the role of coaching to bring the Inner Game out in terms of *actions* in the outside world. It's the role of making the actions real (i.e., actualizing) and experimenting to see how the actions work in real life. This is the Action stage of change.

*When* is the Inner—Outer Game over? When the client has created a new game—has a new map with new resources and rules for how to play that game and has specific actions to do in the outside world, and when the client has successfully translated the actions to the outside world. Ask:

Does the client have a new game plan?

Does the client have an action plan?

Is the client motivated and aligned with the new game?

Is the client willing to be held accountable?

Has the change occurred?

### **Axis IV: The Dance of Solidification through Reinforcement and ongoing Testing**

In this final dance, we move with the client to solidify the new Inner and Outer Game so that it not only is implemented in everyday life, but that it becomes more and more integrated in every aspect of the client's life. We do that by setting up a recursive process that facilitates continual improvement through continual learning and continual feedback for more and more refinement of the new actions. This describes the Maintenance stages of change.

- **Reinforcer:** This is the role of providing reinforcements or rewards to the actions through supporting, celebrating, nurturing, validating, cheer-leading, acknowledging, etc. This role can be gentle and nurture or racy and “partying on.” The reinforcing can occur through one's person, through a supportive community, through accountability structures, or through the person's own acknowledgments. In doing so, the behaviors become anchored and more solid.



- **Tester:** This is the role of testing to see how strong, robust, real, workable, and ecological the new behavior is. In testing, we feedback the changes and the results, we evaluate what's working well and how to make it work even better, we set up accountability structures, we look for problems, we trouble-shoot, and we cycle back to the co-creating stage.

When is the solidifying dance over? It's over when the client has so well integrated the new game that it has become a part of his or her way of being in the world. Now the client has the change and feels totally confident to keep the change. Ask:

- Does the client have access to the new behaviors and game at all times?
- Is the client continually learning and improving?
- Are there accountability structures in place?
- Does the client know how to reinforce, support, and nurture the change?
- Does the client feel confident of keeping the change?

### Summary

The Axes of Change model describes change-embracers and presents an eight-step process of change. Yet it is not a linear process at all, but a non-linear one, a systemic process, a process that's more like a dance than how we think about a "strategy" in NLP.

The Axes of Change model is derived from the premises and principles that arose in the Human Potential Movement. Many of these principles were incorporated into NLP as the NLP presuppositions, especially the idea that people have all the resources they need and people are basically oriented to doing things from a positive intention of adding value to their lives.

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# THE AXES OF CHANGE

## Part III

### *The Art of Measuring Skill Competency*

- What is the *Axes of Change*?
- How does the model work as a cutting-edge change model for self-actualizing people?
- How did we model the change process to create this model?
- What are the four meta-programs that make up the four axes?
- How are these meta-programs involved in the process of change?
- What coaching skills do these eight meta-programs initiate?

These are among the most common questions asked of us about this new Change Model and in the previous articles we have presented what it is, how we designed it, and its relationship to NLP and Neuro-Semantics. With this foundation we are now ready to explore some practical questions about the model in terms of using it for facilitating change and transformation. After all, if coaching is foremost a domain of change, and the coach a change agent, then it's critical that coaches have two things: first, a clear and comprehensive understanding about change as a process and second, the ability to translate that knowledge into practical and effective change skills.\*<sup>1</sup>

This is where *benchmarking* comes in. Once we have translated the theoretical understandings of a model (any model) into practical and learnable skills that we can train, we then need to have some way to *measure* the actual competency of someone who claims to have the skill. Claiming the ability to facilitate change and actually having that ability are two different things. P.R. and image management does not reality make. Talent, training, passion, commitment, and practice are needed to make it so. So in this article, we will first describe the Coaching Change skills in the Axes of Change and then we will describe how we have and can benchmark those skills to test their actuality.

#### **The Competency of Facilitating Change Skills**

In the Axes of Change, the four axes of motivation, decision, creation, and solidification lead to eight distinct coaching roles for coaching a client through the process of change. These make up the *dance of change* and the coach's skill lies first in stepping into the eight states and then being able to skillfully facilitate the accessing of the experience in the client. What are these eight states, roles, and positions?

- 1) *Awakener* to a vision
- 2) *Challenger* to current reality
- 3) *Prober* into the matrix of frames that hold the current inner game

- 4) *Provoker* to the decision for change from the present state to the desired state
- 5) *Co-creator* of the new inner game
- 6) *Actualizer* for the client to translate to a new outer game
- 7) *Reinforcer* of the client's successes
- 8) *Tester* of the results for further refinements and continual improvement

The ninth role in all of this is that of being a *Facilitator*—the heart of coaching. It is from this central position that the coach facilitates or makes easier the client's movement through the change process. In the Axes of Change we have specified many different things which are involved that demonstrate each of these nine coaching skills. Doing this provides an operational definition of what it means to facilitate, awaken, challenge, probe, provoke, co-create, actualize, reinforce, and test. It provides an understand of what it takes to fully express these skills.

Positioning these skills on four meta-program continua or axes awakens us to the fact that every coach will have a preference and natural aptitude in these skills. As we have a favored representation system, we also have favored poles regarding most meta-programs. For example, if you are more *Towards* oriented rather than *Away From* in your motivation meta-program, you will find *Awakening* easier and more natural than *Challenging*. So with *Probing* versus *Provoking*, *Co-Creating* versus *Actualizing*, *Reinforcing* versus *Testing*.

In Meta-Coaching, we use this insight to enable coaches-in-training to first play to their strength and to then develop the flexibility of consciousness to learn how to move to the other polar end of each axis. By using a Changing Meta-Programs pattern, we facilitate the developing of that flexibility so that the coach can more fluidly move through the dance of change with a client.

### **The Measuring or Benchmarking of the Skill Competency**

- Yet *how do we know* that any person is truly skilled?
- What lets us know that one is truly competent to coach through these roles?
- Once we have adequately described the skills involved in effectively coaching change, and especially the nine Coaching Change Skills in the Axes of Change, how can we *measure* these skills and determine any given coach's actual competency in them?
- How can a coach measure his or her own competency level?

The answer lies in setting a benchmark for the levels of degree of competency for the skill. If a skill is a process and can be distinguished at different stages of development, then we can identify the behaviors at each stage and plot a developmental pathway. We can specify the behaviors that give evidence of the degree of skill development from incompetent to competent and then on to the level of mastery. For that we use benchmarking.

Benchmarking has been around for three decades as a process for capturing the structure and essence of best practices in business. It began with the Xerox Corporation in 1979. Motorola then introduced benchmarking into its processes in 1985 as a way for bringing measurement into the learning, training, and development process.

What does benchmarking refer to in the context of business? It means taking a “best practice” and specifying its critical elements or components. As such, benchmarking is the continuous process of *measuring* products, services, and practices against the best competitors or industry leaders in order to close the performance gap and leapfrog over the competition. In this, Benchmarking is used to close the gap between what we are currently doing and to becoming the best-in-a-class.

If this reminds you of *modeling*, you’re right. Benchmarking describes a simple way to model the expertise of someone masterful in the performance of a high level skill. And while we can fairly easily benchmark tangible things like how to set up an assembly line and get the most proficiency and productivity from people, all of this becomes much more challenging when we turn our attention to benchmarking something less tangible or even intangible. So, how do we do *that*?\*<sup>2</sup>

### **The Art of Measuring the Intangible**

Measurements are comparisons. When we measure something we contrast and compare one thing with another. In benchmarking we take a skill, break it down into key behavioral components which we can actually see, hear, and feel. After we identify a development scale from simple to more complex to expert level, we give numerical values to the critical components to distinguish the degree of skill development as a skill moves from low to high competence. This sequence of numbers from low to high then enable us to see where a person is on the developmental scale.

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0                      1                      2                      3                      4                      5

By themselves, the raw numbers are of no value. To be meaningful and significant, we attach the numbers to a baseline or scale of some sort. Doing this enables us to then compare them against each other. By measuring we can know where we are, where we want to go, and identify the pathway for greater quality and improvement.

In scaling, we establish a sequence of marks at regular intervals which we use as a reference for making measurements. This allows us to rank attributes or characteristics. Every scale will have thresholds or boundaries at each end. The scaling that we have used in Meta-States for years (“From 0 to 10, how much are you in that state right now? How much more would you want to experience? What do you have to do to increase that state?”) now becomes more precise as we give each number on the numerical scale a specific meaning and attach to each specific behavior.

In doing this, our measurements become actionable, linked to the highest levels of a critical skill, and made as *objective* as possible. *Actionable* means that we can act on the measurement, we can do something about the scaled information. The measure informs us about two factors: first, where we are and second, what we can do to move to the next level. *Objective* is a relative term that calls upon us to make the measurements based on as few *subjective* feelings and opinions as possible. We do that by identifying sensory-based or behavioral indicators that give evidence of the experience. When we have a set of behaviors, then we have the *behavioral equivalences*.

This is where we use benchmarking to identify the behavioral equivalence of whatever state, skill,

or experience that you want to improve. Essentially we are asking:

- How would I know you are accomplishing X?
- What would I see or hear that would indicate such?
- What are the critical factors for success with X?
- What behaviors are critical in this experience?

In Benchmarking the coaching skills (and we have benchmarked 26 of them along with 41 training skills), we use the basic scaling that measures how a skill moves through the competency stages. Using a 0 to 5 scale, we arrange things as follows. Zero (**0**) on the scale stands for the absence of the skill and even for manifestations of opposite behaviors. The range goes from **0** indicating that there is no evidence of the desired behavior to **5** indicating the highest standard for the skill. At **3** we have a good expression of the skill. That means **4** and **5** will be indicating the highest levels of the skills, the levels of elegance and mastery.

Scaling the Levels of Competence in a Skill	
5 —	<i>Mastery</i> , level of expertise in the skill.
4 —	<i>Elegant</i> : smooth, seamless.
3 —	<i>Competence</i> : Skill present and working.
2 —	<i>Awkward</i> and clumsy stage, low level skill.
1 —	<i>First signs</i> of the skill emerging in fragmented ways.
0 —	<i>Incompetence</i> , no presence of the skill.

Once we have established a scale of the critical behaviors that reflect the developmental growth of a skill, we are then able to do something truly magical. We are able to *give feedback to that criteria*. That is, we can use our sensory awareness to identify the behavioral equivalents of the criteria and skill and feed this back as a mirror to the coach-in-training. This is what we do in *benchmarking* the coaching core skills and the coaching change skills which allows us to run a training that is truly competency based.

In the Axes of Change model, not only have we modeled and identified the stages that a self-actualizing person goes through in the process of *change*, but we have also detailed actual the signs and cues that give evidence of the skills necessary to navigate each of those change stages. This fulfills the dream of operationalizing our terms, specifying the procedures, and de-nominalizing what otherwise would be vague and abstract terms.<sup>2</sup>

## Summary

- While we can engage in long debates about how *real* something is if we can't measure it, what senior management in business wants is some way to verify skill development and competency. That's why we benchmark. We model the structure of a skill, set up behavioral equivalents, and then give feedback to that criteria.
- This is the art of measuring skill competency and expressions what we have described in NLP for three decades, the de-nominalizing of abstract concepts. As such, this puts a powerful tool in the hands of anyone who wants to be on the cutting-edge of business, training, and coaching.
- This is what we have done with the nine coaching change skills in the Axes of Change model to be able to thereby determine and document the presence of actual competency as a change agent.

### **End Notes:**

1. The reader can find this in the two previous articles in *Anchor Point* and also in the book, *Coaching Conversations for Transformational Change* (2004). The next book is the first in a series, as a cutting-edge change model for self-actualizing people (in press, due November, 2004).

2. In *Meta-Coaching, Volume I, Changing Change* we have an entire chapter on benchmarking and two chapters on specific behavioral benchmarks that we have set for the seven core coaching skills and the nine coaching change skills in the Axes of Change.

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You can find the Axes of Change model in the newly published book, *Coaching Conversations* (2004) by Hall and Duval. The central emphasis in *Meta-Coaching, Vol. I, Coaching Change* (in press, due November, 2004) is on the Axes of Change. For more about Meta-Coaching and the Meta-Coaching system, see [www.neurosemantics.com](http://www.neurosemantics.com) and click on Meta-Coaching. Meta-Coaching certification is now being presented in the UK, Australia, South Africa, Geneva, Paris, and in the USA in 2005.