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HOW TO INTEGRATE NATURE & NURTURE IN COACHING?

Philippe Rosinski, Executive Coach MCC-MD,
Rosinski & Company, Brussels, Belgium,
E-mail: philippe@philrosinski.com

INTRODUCTION

How can we take into account both what relates to *nature*, the personality type we are born with, and what pertains to *nurture*, the characteristics we have acquired along the way?

In this article, I will use a case study based on an executive I have coached to illustrate how we can go about doing that. I will provide some context by sharing a few words about a dynamic conception of culture, about the Cultural Orientations Framework (COF) assessment, as well as about Robert Kegan's Immunity to Change concept. As you will find out, the COF assessment can be used to uncover hidden and limiting cultural assumptions and to help coachees replace these with more effective versions.

I will explore the interplay between the psychological and cultural perspectives, suggesting how to leverage the combination in coaching, making the most of diversity in personality as well as culture.

To this end, I will also refer to a research project conducted by OPP with over 1,000 respondents using the MBTI and the COF in a large international sample.¹

FIRST ROUND OF COACHING WITH JACQUES - TYPE DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS

The HR director of an international company called me. She asked me to coach Jacques², one of their senior executives. She explained that this was a difficult situation.

Jacques was a technically competent and dedicated manager. But he sometimes lacked self-control. He often got worked up and shouted at employees. He had recently received two official complaints by employees.

Despite his valuable contribution, the company made clear to Jacques that he would have to change his behaviours or they would have to let him go. To help him change, they offered him an executive coaching programme with me. I met with Jacques. He was apparently shocked by the feedback he had received and seemed genuinely eager to change. He revealed to me that he did care about people. His engagement was critical. I explained that I could only facilitate the process but that he was the one who would need to muster the courage and discipline to make the changes happen.

WE AGREED ON THREE MAIN GOALS FOR OUR COACHING:

¹ This article builds upon an OPP webcast on 18 September 2015 co-presented by the author of this article together with Betsy Kendall, COO and Head of Professional Services at OPP Ltd The webcast's recording is available at

https://www.opp.com/webinars?commid=158723&utm_campaign=communication_missed_you&utm_medium=email&utm_source=brighttalk-transact&utm_content=webcast The case study builds upon a story shared in *Global Coaching* (Rosinski, 2010). This initial coaching was followed by a second round of coaching that took place after the book was published.

² To preserve my client's anonymity, I have changed his name, won't mention the name of his company nor the industry. I have slightly adapted the story. I will nevertheless stay true to the essence of what happened.

- Replace destructive and ineffective communications with productive and enriching ones
- Show his caring side while retaining his emphasis on business results
- Manage his emotions

In the initial assessment phase, we used two psychometric tools as part of the psychological investigation: the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI®) and the Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation–Behaviour™ (FIRO-B®).³

Concerning the MBTI, Jacques clearly identified ENTJ (Extraverted, iNtuitive, Thinking, Judging) as the type best describing him. Jacques underlined the following 'potential areas for growth' passage in the MBTI booklet because it felt spot on:

- If ENTJs do not find a place where they can use their gifts and be appreciated for their contributions, they usually feel frustrated and may
 - Become too impersonal and critical
 - Be intrusive and directive
 - Become abrasive and verbally aggressive.
- It is natural for ENTJs to give less attention to Feeling and Sensing parts. If neglected too much, however, they may
 - Fail to notice or value another's need for personal rapport, appreciation, and praise
 - Fail to factor into their plans the needs of others for support.⁴

Jacques was appreciated for his contributions and well regarded, but that is not to say that he felt fully appreciated by his superiors, let alone by his direct reports. Moreover, he was clearly neglecting his Feeling part.

I shared Carl Jung's model of lifelong development, the journey towards what Jung calls individuation.⁵ The message is essentially that what got you here is not going to get you there. For example, Jacques became successful relying on his Thinking function, but to get to the next level – or in his case to simply keep his job - he would need to develop the other side.

When the ego (the conscious part of our personality, the 'container' for our life)⁶ meets the shadow (our untapped potential), the self can emerge as a more complete form of the ego. The person becomes more whole, more integrated. In Jacques' case, Feeling was his least developed function and the key area for his growth.

This simple explanation, which I shared with Jacques, gave him a sense of direction and some permission. As humans, we cannot expect to master it all but we do have an opportunity to continue to develop as adults and throughout our lives.

The practical questions remained though: How to replace destructive communications with something more productive? How could Jacques unfold his caring side?

Using Transactional Analysis (and especially Franklin Ernst's OK Corral model) (TA)⁷, I helped him shift from aggressiveness to assertiveness, and develop a calm and serene presence.

Ernst's model refers to how we view ourselves, how we see others, and the resulting impact. 'OK (self)–OK (others)' is a mindset all coaches need to develop. It is also a tool to replace destructive or ineffective communications with productive and enriching ones.

We can choose, regardless of the situation, to adopt an OK-OK mindset. This means we

³ See (Waterman and Rogers, 2007).

⁴ See (Briggs Myers 2000, 25)

⁵ See (Jung 1923/1971)

⁶ See (Rosinski 2003, 206) and (Rosinski 2010, 206)

⁷⁷ See Global Coaching chapter 5 and Coaching Across Cultures (Rosinski 2003) appendix 1 for more information and references about Eric Berne's Transactional Analysis as well as its application in coaching and leadership.

For an explanation of how games are negative exchanges of energy - see Rosinski, 2003 (260-261).

will tend to trust ourselves and others. OK means worthy of respect, having positive intentions, and able to make a difference. OK does not mean perfect or faultless. This mental outlook will naturally lead us to engage in constructive communications and action and develop richer and more productive relationships.

The important point is that OK-OK is a subjective choice, independent of 'objective' reality. It doesn't matter that we can make a rational case for the other mental combinations (OK-not OK, not OK-OK, not OK-not OK). For example, if we distrust people, our attitude will typically alienate them or lower their self-confidence. We foster vicious circles when we interpret their lack of commitment and poor results as a validation of our initial beliefs. Coaches prefer the OK-OK perspective, because self-fulfilling prophecies also work positively: when we trust ourselves and others, we enable virtuous circles of respect, productive behaviours, and creativity.

Jacques was trapped in 'playing games', adopting the OK-not OK position and playing the Persecutor role, inviting others to respond as Victims (submissive or rebellious). When Jacques recognised this simple dynamic and realised he had the power to change his position to OK-OK, he was on his way to quick and amazing progress. Coaches can help coachees recognise that they most probably adopt the OK-OK position already. Knowing that they are capable should help build coachees' confidence. The challenge is to maintain the OK-OK position under stressful circumstances.

Jacques took several routes to move from OK-not OK under stress to OK-OK. One was to reduce his overall stress level through regular meditation sessions during the day: simply breathing in, breathing out, and focusing on the here and now. By stepping back from the frenzy, albeit momentarily, Jacques could remember his intention to stay in an OK-OK mode.

Jacques also started to build relationships, talking to people not only for business but also to find out about them. In meetings, he began paying closer attention to his own feelings, to others' feelings, and to non-verbal manifestations. In other words, he stopped simply focusing on the content and became conscious of the process. He developed a mindful presence. When he noticed he was becoming angry and impatient, he got into the habit of taking a deep breath. Initially, he chose not to speak to avoid making a hostile remark he would later regret. Gradually, as he felt more at ease with listening and maintaining his composure, he started to speak up again, assertively rather than aggressively. He learned to ask questions in a calm yet determined way, rather than judging and telling people what to do.

Another useful step was for Jacques to keep a journal, using this to capture his successful interactions and the remaining challenges. We acknowledged the former and explored the latter together. I typically asked, 'What prevented you from ...?'; he identified new obstacles. Then I asked, 'What can you do about this?' Or 'How could you overcome this difficulty?' I offered suggestions if he could not figure out what to do differently. I also reminded him of insights he had gained earlier. I shared tools along the way. This included a more detailed description of transactional analysis's centres of resources (ego states): he learned to speak more often with his Adult (e.g., asking genuine questions) and avoid overusing his normative Parent (e.g., proffering judgments). It also included NLP's meta-model.⁸ Role plays with me during our sessions gave him a chance to practise and leave each coaching session with concrete new tactics for handling the remaining challenges.

Eventually, Jacques was able to manage his emotions, avoid counterproductive behaviours, and show his caring side while retaining his emphasis on business results. His manager later confided in me that he hadn't believed such drastic positive change was possible.

⁸ I have described how to use these two tools in appendixes 1 and 2 of *Coaching Across Cultures*.

SECOND ROUND OF COACHING WITH JACQUES – IMMUNITY TO CHANGE AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

Eight years later, the same HR director contacted me again. This time Jacques was the one who had asked for a second round of executive coaching with me and his company had agreed.

Jacques was still seen as a valuable executive, highly dedicated, knowledgeable and reliable. However, new circumstances at the company, particularly the departure of close colleagues and a reorganisation, had created unprecedented tension for Jacques. He was afraid this stressful context would prompt him to revert to negative old habits. Jacques was courageous and savvy enough to ask for help and the HR director proved once again very supportive.

Both his company and he saw the need to further develop his empathy, to bring lightness and fluidity in his relationships. They also agreed on a goal to better know people with whom he was working, to better discern their cognitive and emotional patterns, and to better adapt to different people's profiles.

The HR senior executive highlighted the fact that Jacques frequently came across as competitive, eager to win by proving he was right and others were wrong. This tended to alienate people who sometimes felt they had lost face. Jacques needed to become warmer, friendlier. He also needed to adopt a coaching style more often, rather than telling people what to do.

From the beginning of this second series of coaching sessions, it was clear that a classical coaching approach of setting goals and devising actions to reach these was not going to do the trick. An 'immunity to change' phenomenon was at play here: Jacques was genuinely committed to achieve these targets but, at the same time, he could not help but be competitive at times, tell people what to do, and so on.

Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey⁹ argue that we have something at the psychological level that resembles our physical immune system. Our psychological immune system is there to protect us, by preserving our current meaning-making system (which I will simply refer to as 'worldview'), and thus keeping us in a safe and familiar place. Kegan remarks that the physical immune system is a beautiful thing, acting to protect us, to save our lives but that sometimes it can threaten our continued our good health. 'When it rejects new material that the body needs to heal itself, the immune system can put us in danger.' It does not protect us then. It just makes a mistake and puts us at risk. Kegan's point is that there is a similar phenomenon at the psychological level, which he calls 'immunity to change.'

We need to distinguish between 'technical changes' that can be achieved within our current worldview and 'adaptive changes' that require a change in our worldview itself, an expansion of it. For example, consider an obese person eager to lose significant weight. For some people I have known, it has been a matter of technical change. They knew what they needed to do (e.g., healthier nutrition, physical activity), they did it, and they succeeded. It was still hard, it was still a big challenge, but technical change was all that was required. I have met others who also knew what they had to do to wipe out the extra kilos but who always managed to sabotage their efforts in some ways. Adaptive change is necessary then to get out of the rut.

In this case, the issue is that we place one foot on the gas pedal (to achieve our stated goals) but the other on the brakes (to unconsciously preserve our worldview). This way, we sabotage our efforts despite our best intentions.

⁹ (Kegan and Lahey 2009, 36-37)

To make adaptive changes, we need to uncover our hidden competing commitments related to worries as well as the associated limiting assumptions. We then need to replace these ingrained assumptions with more effective ones, thus enlarging our worldview. Of course, this cannot be a mere intellectual exercise.

This process implies real-life experimenting and testing, so that new evidence-based assumptions can be formed and integrated.

In the case of Jacques, the immunity to change phenomenon appeared as follows:

GENUINELY COMMITTED TO ACHIEVING HIS TARGETS GAS PEDAL

- Further develop my empathy, bring lightness and fluidity in my relationships
- Become warmer, friendlier
- Adopt a coaching style rather than telling people what to do

FALLING PREY TO HIDDEN COMPETING COMMITMENTS RELATED TO WORRIES BRAKES

- I worry we will not deliver on time
- I worry I will let unnecessary problems happen
- Ultimately, I worry I will lose my job

Jacques was pressing both the gas pedal and the brakes. For example, he had taken some steps to improve his relationships with direct reports while at the same time undermining his own efforts by sometimes 'making people crazy' with his task focus and perfectionism. He became aware of this dynamic and his veiled worries came out during our conversations.

This is when the Cultural Orientations Framework (COF) assessment¹⁰ came into the picture.

The COF includes seven cultural categories of crucial importance to managers and coaches:

- sense of power and responsibility
- time management approaches
- definitions of identity and purpose*
- organisational arrangements
- notions of territory and boundaries
- communication patterns
- modes of thinking

It comprises seventeen standard cultural dimensions in those categories and the COF assessment allows certified users to create additional customised dimensions.

Each dimension is made up of two or three orientations, defined as inclinations to think, feel or act in a way that is culturally determined, or at least influenced by culture. Control and Humility are examples of cultural orientations making up a cultural dimension.

The COF assessment can be used to establish individual as well as group profiles. It is complementary to the MBTI: the MBTI assesses our psychological preferences, our nature, whereas the COF deciphers our cultural orientations, our nurture, which is what we have learned along the way by interacting with others (starting with our families, countries, schools, etc.). Our behaviours are expressions of both personality and culture.

The COF served as a roadmap to help Jacques uncover and describe his worldview, as well as discover how to specifically broaden it and enlarge his perspective.

¹⁰ See www.COFassessment.com The underling COF model is described in (Rosinski, Coaching Across Cultures 2003). The methodology and applications of the COF assessment are presented in (Rosinski, Global Coaching 2010).

Let me say a few words about culture in general before we return to Jacques. I have defined a group's culture as the set of unique characteristics that distinguishes its members from another group.¹¹ We typically have multiple cultures as we belong to several groups at the same time: country, profession, generation, organisation, and so on. Our behaviours tend to vary depending on the cultural context.

The cultural characteristics include visible behaviours as well as underlying norms, values and basic assumptions. The role of the coach is not to judge these but rather to ask how effective they are for the coachee (and those he can affect). For example, laziness may not sound appealing as a value to many professionals, but I would argue that it could be beneficial for those on the verge of burnout. Basic assumptions refer to how we address universal challenges that we face. For example, do we believe that we are in charge of our destiny, that we can achieve anything if we work hard and persevere? The merit of a Control orientation is that it may lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy: we put everything in place and may end up achieving success against all odds. However, in my experience, we don't have all the power: fate and luck come into play as well. Humility is about recognizing that not everything is in our hands, about appreciating our limitations and those of the people and the planet around us. The idea is not to replace Control with Humility but rather to synthesise, to leverage the two orientations. Coaching across cultures involves thinking 'and' versus 'or', thriving on paradoxes such as the notion that greater control in the form of sustainable high performance can best be achieved by embracing humility, by acting with determination while learning to let go of what is beyond our control.

This dynamic and inclusive view of culture presented in (Rosinski 2003) contrasts with the traditional static and binary concept of culture. It is crucial to be able to expand our worldview by embracing more complexity, and to allow us to somehow reconcile seemingly contradictory motives (gas and brakes) by moving to a higher level of consciousness.

Let us return to Jacques. The COF assessment allowed him to uncover several unconscious assumptions as well as specific ways to replace his limiting beliefs with more effective ones.

The COF exploration enabled him to enrich his worldview by leveraging perspectives, by achieving a synthesis between his current cultural orientations (which he did not need to give up) and alternative polarities. This was the key to reconciling seemingly contradictory motives in order to move forward. Jacques realised that he could not go very far by accelerating while braking at the same time.

Jacques was overusing certain COF orientations while underusing others, which constituted his developmental opportunities, as depicted in the table below.

OVERUSED COF ORIENTATIONS	UNDERUSED COF ORIENTATIONS, CONSTITUTING DEVELOPMENTAL OPPORTUNITIES
Control	Humility
Scarce time	Plentiful time
Polychronic time	Monochronic time
Doing	Being
Hierarchy	Equality
Competition	Collaboration
Protective	Sharing

¹¹ (Rosinski 2003, Chapter 2)

Direct	Indirect
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The path forward involved replacing Control with Control and Humility, Scarce time with Scarce and Plentiful time, and so on.

• **CONTROL – HUMILITY**

The description of this polarity helped Jacques appreciate the limitations of a Control orientation.

We actually don't have all the power. We need to accept our inevitable limitations, to accept what we cannot change. Jacques articulated his current beliefs: he said for example 'I cannot let a problem happen if there is any way I can prevent its occurrence through my involvement.' During our coaching, Jacques gave himself permission to manage by objectives: agreeing on specific targets with his direct reports and holding them accountable. By coaching them more systematically rather than telling them precisely what to do or doing it in their place altogether, he empowered his direct reports to prevent the occurrence of problems. However, the breakthrough for Jacques was that beyond this, he accepted he had to let some problems happen. These would be chances for his direct reports to learn and become able to share the responsibility of success. Jacques took limited risks and experienced that it was not the end of the world. He could live and in fact eliminate some of his stress by resisting the urge to intervene.

It took Jacques some practice – trying it all out - to integrate the new belief by actually experimenting the synthesis of Control and Humility and noticing that it worked better for everyone.

• **SCARCE – PLENTIFUL TIME**

Jacques questioned his belief that 'I should always deliver on time.' On one hand, he remained convinced of the necessity to honour his commitments, to keep his promises. On the other hand, he saw an opportunity to negotiate more reasonable timeframes, so time could feel more plentiful. The Humility orientation helped him in this endeavour by reminding him of his limitations and of the trap of taking on too much.

• **POLYCHRONIC – MONOCHRONIC TIME**

Jacques also recognised his tendency to take on too many projects and tasks simultaneously. He was also good at multi-tasking but this was coming at the price of unnecessary pressure. By setting priorities, Jacques was able to focus on fewer activities, which also helped 'delivering on time.'

• **DOING – BEING**

By empowering more his direct reports, by giving himself and his team more time (both by negotiating more realistic timeframes with his management and by focusing on fewer projects), Jacques was able to feel more serene, which naturally allowed him gradually to build more fluid relationships with his team members. He had always cared about people but his micro- management and impatience had created a different perception: people believed that Jacques only cared about the tasks *per se*.

• **HIERARCHY – EQUALITY**

To move from a directive to a delegating style, Jacques learned about situational leadership¹². He learned how to choose the most appropriate leadership style given the

¹² See (Rosinski 2010, 81-87)

readiness level of his direct report for a particular task. Jacques also noticed that he was underusing the coaching style. He practised coaching during our sessions, which gave him confidence that he could use this style more often. He practised asking powerful open questions, listening and reformulating rather than telling. He actually prepared a list of standard questions (e.g., what is your recommendation?), which he glanced at during meetings to remember to question rather than tell.

• **COMPETITION- COLLABORATION**

Jacques thrived on competition: wanting to be the best in his professional domain but even also playing sports. That had led him to reach a senior leadership position and achieve professional success. However, Jacques realised that what led him here was not going to get him to the next level. People had the wrong impression about Jacques. He wanted to be the best he could be. Beating others was not what motivated him, even if some had felt that way. Through our coaching, Jacques worked more resolutely at promoting collaboration, at making his team members succeed and share the limelight. He experimented step by step with new behaviours, gradually gaining confidence that when his team members improved he benefited as well through an enhanced team performance and reputation as team leader. His job security actually increased.

• **PROTECTIVE – SHARING**

By mustering the courage to share his own vulnerabilities, Jacques was able to come across as more humane and authentic. This allowed people in turn to self-disclose and establish a more personal connection with Jacques. A virtuous circle ensued: by knowing his direct reports better, in particular their motives and working styles preferences, Jacques was better able to tailor his leadership style to their needs, boosting well-being as well as productivity.

• **DIRECT – INDIRECT**

Jacques realised that his directness sometimes still came across as aggressiveness, which triggered others' playing the Victim role. His direct reports would usually become submissive but some would rebel. In all cases, negative energy would be produced while unconsciously playing these psychological games. Through practice during the coaching sessions first and then at work, Jacques learned to weave more harmony into his communications, combining clarity characteristic of directness with sensitivity inherent in indirectness.

After six coaching sessions over a six-month period, Jacques was able to report his success: fluid relationships, better delegation and a regained sense of confidence.

INTERPLAY BETWEEN THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES

In many instances, Jacques had moved from 'conscious incompetence' to 'conscious competence'¹³. With the help of select colleagues in the form of on-going feedback, he was determined to anchor his revised assumptions and keep up these new habits so that eventually they would become automatic, 'unconscious competence.'

However, the MBTI and the underlying Carl Jung's theory suggest that the new habits may never fully become second nature. 'Feeling' will remain Jacques' least preferred function. Under severe stress, 'Feeling' could erupt in a volcanic fashion as the inferior function. What Jacques learned to do though was to be aware of conditions that could trigger

¹³ The Learning Stages model was developed at GTI by Noel Burch in the 1970s.

his inferior function and to mindfully avoid falling into its grip.¹⁴

Remember Carl Jung's individuation principle as the ego, the conscious part of the personality, needing to meet the shadow, its unconscious centre, in order to become whole and let the self emerge. While a person cannot hope to render conscious everything that is unconscious, that person can at least become aware of his least preferred functions and make an effort to access and develop that potential.¹⁵

Here comes an interesting interplay between the psychological and the cultural perspectives.

Whilst the shadow can never be eliminated and nature is what it is, what has been learned (nurture) on the other hand can also be unlearned. In other words, culture provides an avenue to promote lasting change. Jacques' new behaviours may never become *second nature* but they could become *second nurture*. This is good enough in practice but it implies remaining self-conscious, maintaining some vigilance (particularly under stress) and being ready to step back if necessary, to avoid falling into natural traps.

This detour via the cultural perspective and use of the COF is in practice an effective way to promote individuation and hasten the emergence of the self. Indeed, the psychological and cultural origins of behaviours can often not be separated. It is all connected. When Jacques becomes verbally aggressive, is it a manifestation of his ENTJ type whose contribution is not appreciated? Or is a manifestation of his Doing, Hierarchy and Direct cultural orientations? We may never know for sure but we can guess that it is a combination of both, that in this instance personality and culture reinforce each other. Approaching Jacques' situation from a cultural perspective allowed us to uncover unconscious assumptions and to gradually help him replace those with more productive ones. In other words, coaching using the COF can allow us to act upon the MBTI information and to promote change that is likely to stick.

Incidentally, OPP has also explored the connections between the MBTI and the COF. John Hackston, Head of R&D, conducted the research with over 1,000 respondents using the MBTI and the COF assessment in a large international sample.¹⁶ The research notably highlights interesting correlations between certain MBTI and COF dimensions.

This information can guide us, for example by pointing to out-of-pattern characteristics that could prompt additional questioning (e.g., somebody with an ENTJ preference who views time in a more plentiful fashion than the 'average' ENTJ). However, we need to tread carefully. First, correlations do not necessarily imply causation¹⁷. People attracted by a given profession may have certain MBTI preferences as well as cultural orientations. In this case, the MBTI and COF are not directly causally linked but instead connected via the particular professional context that is more prevalent in the sample. Secondly, the variation in individuals' cultural orientations may be accounted for by a range of factors including country of origin, current home, occupation, gender and personality (among others). In the OPP sample, individual type differences accounted for more of the variation in cultural orientation than other variables. However, in other COF projects with different samples, other factors such as nationality or gender took precedence.¹⁸ Culture is a multi-faceted reality and the cultural aspects that come to the fore vary. For example, I have seen many US coaches who prefer Particularism (tailored solutions) over Universalism (overall consistency - all cases should be treated in the same manner), contrary to the US

¹⁴ See (Quenk 1996, 9)

¹⁵ See (Rosinski 2003, 206)

¹⁶ The report can be downloaded via the following link <https://www.opp.com/download/item/1d69356b8c23492db2e060660d7f44be>

¹⁷ See notably (Kahneman 2011 (2012, Penguin Books) , 183)

¹⁸ See (Rosinski 2010, 131-132)

general preference for Universalism¹⁹. As informative as research can be, it is crucial to meet each coachee with an open mind and as a unique person.

Instruments are often useful in executive coaching and among the assessment tools, I have found the combination of the MBTI and COF to be particularly powerful. By integrating psychological and cultural perspectives and leveraging the complementarity nature and nurture, we can unleash the potential that resides in personality differences as well as cultural diversity.

Still, effective executive coaching is an art that transcends technique. The quality of the human relationship between the coach and his coachee is essential. Finally, to address today's complexity, coaching requires an integrated approach that calls upon multiple perspectives, which range beyond psychology and culture, from the physical to the spiritual²⁰. But this is another story ...

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¹⁹ According to (Trompenaars 1997)

²⁰ See (Rosinski, Global Coaching 2010)