

Power of Collective vs Individual Action

The Kenyan AoEC graduation event was launched with a powerful, rhythmic African traditional dance; the energy of that group engaged in unison with a clear collective purpose was exciting and dramatic.

This is the sort of teamwork that works exceedingly well when all are committed to a clearly defined task; where there is conformity, uniformity and confluence. The structure may be complex but it's stable and the process is predictable. In organisations this collective approach works well through standardisation and well planned routines. Training, teaching, rehearsing and effort in learning how to do the process well are the development routes that lead to efficiency and effectiveness.

But what about individuality, autonomy, choice, responsibility, innovation – these are not possible or even desirable in this type of dance. Yet in a world where there is growing complexity, uncertainty and unpredictability requiring quick responses these qualities are the most needed. Coaching is the development methodology that answers this need.

Coaching is about drawing out the inherent wisdom and knowledge of the coachee, supporting creativity and innovative solutions. Leaders and managers have to be accountable, take responsibility for difficult decisions and coaching can help enormously with that process.

On the theme of dancing, one form that is so opposite to the collective style and reflects more of those coaching qualities is the Argentinean Tango. Here there is a strong structure but within it the couple are engaged in a physical dialogue, improvising moves that reflect their relationship and the conditions of the music. *The leader creates a space where the follower wants to step into* - is an attitude that easily translates into a coaching style of leadership. The skills required involve intense awareness of the other and the environmental conditions so that creative decisions can be made using the resources available to the maximum.

In reality organisations need their people to be able to metaphorically do the African tribal dance when collective action necessary but also to be able to dance the Tango when the music calls for adaptability and change.