Unlocking success:
The power of critical thinking in the group facilitation, coaching and team meetings

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Abstract: The absence of a unique and coordinated effort to adapt the promoting of the old philosophical principle to the present need of the people has inspired me to come up with a possible viable solution that I present for your further consideration. I propose two main ideas as the objectives of the paper that, later on, the reader can evaluate which is the best approach to maximize the usage of philosophical services and consulting for the general public. The first idea is to present the impact of mixt approaches between critical thinking and group coaching or group facilitating and the second idea is to target the companies as priority clients and their providers as secondary clients. I present three conflicts, five perspectives and two instruments that can be enhanced by elements of critical thinking in order to achieve the objectives above.

What is the utility of philosophical skills in other fields and how should we promote philosophical practice so that philosophy can return to the people in the *agora*. What I propose is to focus on a bigger market - the profitable companies around us that could provide a big steady source of income - and to look at the other suppliers of services as therapy, coaching, training as partners and not as competitors. These suppliers could and should also become our paying clients and we should work with all of them and not compete against them for some individual residual clients. The practical applications from using philosophical skills in other fields are: controlling emotions using elements of critical thinking, facilitating or

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managing groups using philosophical counseling principles, increasing communication skills using elements of critical thinking skills, increasing coaching methods using elements of critical thinking skills and facilitating better meetings using elements of critical thinking. It doesn't matter who was first - Philosophical Practice, critical thinking or coaching, mentoring, therapy or any other. We all know that philosophy was the root of all scientific branches that exist in our days. What really matters is whether all of these approaches can help each other grow and change people's lives and the way they think about themselves and the world.

Key-words: philosophical practice; critical thinking; facilitation; group facilitation; coaching; group coaching;

Introduction

There are a lot of different opinions about the position of the philosophical approach in the modern and VUCA world (Volatility Uncertainty Complexity and Ambiguity), its big potential to help and how better to revive it and adapt it to the new requirements of the public. People don't get together in city square to philosophize anymore - the internet with his online social networks is the new "agora". Some of them meet in bars, in cafe shops but we have that part covered by the growing café-philosophic initiatives that usually are free of charge. Most of the paying potential customers have regular meetings in the companies they work and that is a sector worth our effort to invest time to educate, that latter could become the bigger sponsor for our skills and knowledge. The first separation is between the academic philosophy and all of the new branches of practical philosophy or philosophical counseling. Because I could be biased, belonging to the second category, I propose this subject should be developed by someone with more knowledge, which I possess, from the two similar but different fields. The second separation from Plato dialogues is between those who believed that they should be paid and those who believed philosophical practice should be free of charge. I will not go further into this subject and suggest it be also studied and discussed in another paper.

The third separation is still active, to some degree, between the new philosophical practice and the other type of interventions people use when in need of help such as religion, psychotherapy, psychoanalysis, coaching, training, and mentoring. Unfortunately religion is, nowadays, almost out of the picture but this raises a bigger need for a philosophical based intervention to fill that gap. There are multiple perspectives for these issues and each one supports its own opinion using multiple arguments. I had the pleasure to meet in person and learn from most of the contemporary international representatives for these new waves of philosophers that encourage philosophical practice or philosophical counseling and consultancy.

The first perspective belongs to The Supporters of Traditional Therapy and Psychiatry and it does not have many supporters in the philosophical community. The second perspective is composed by The Advocates of Alternative Approaches (including the Philosophical Counseling), but they support mostly the philosophy-direct related to psychotherapy approaches as the logo therapy of Viktor Frankl and the Logic-Based Therapy of Elliot D. Cohen. In the third perspective there are The Critics of Traditional Approaches that are against the overuse of pharmaceutical based interventions from the psychoanalysis and argue that traditional therapy models sometimes pathologies' normal variations in human behavior. The focus is put on alternative methods, such as philosophical counseling or other holistic approaches and bring critics of psychiatry and may express concerns about overreliance on medication and potential side effects. The fourth perspective is The Cultural and Philosophical Perspectives in which the main pillars are the philosophical beliefs, such as existentialism or stoicism, that are able to shape one's approach to dealing with challenges and emotional well-being. This perspective is supported by the majority of the classic old school philosophers. The fifth perspective is the one that includes the Individual Preferences based on people's personalities, values, and past experiences. Some of them may prefer a more structured therapeutic approach, while others might resonate with less conventional methods. The opinions on therapy and psychiatry can vary based on philosophical, cultural, and personal beliefs. It's important to recognize that mental health is complex, and what works for one person may not work for another. The variety of opinions reflects the ongoing dialogue about the most effective and

meaningful ways to support mental well-being. Generally individuals should choose approaches based on personal beliefs, experiences, and the specific nature of their concerns.

Methods

The method I have used is a practical workshop to prove the utility of enhancing a group coaching method (Points of You™), an icebreaker tool (*Question Card Game*) for enhancing the team meetings connectedness of the members and the results of a report and a survey to show the potential best directions, all of the above are brought together to have the arguments to reach the two objectives and present the impact of mixt approaches and to target the companies as priority clients. The encouraging news for all Career Philosopher, Professors of Philosophy, Practitioners of Philosophy or Philosophical Counselors and Consultants are that there are some big companies, from the international corporate world, that already have Company Philosophers like Apple and Google, although these are exceptions is a promising start, and some world renowned authors bring more attention towards philosophy by successfully reviving old philosophical concepts in their lives, but more importantly, in their books that reach millions of people around the world bringing to the attention of the consumers the ancient philosophy concepts and way of life.

These concepts have penetrated the results driven corporate world and there is a slowly growing interest for the classic mainly stoic philosophers. With this favorable setting for us as professionals (opinions may vary here) I would like to check if our offer (what we can do to change the people's lives) meets the needs of the market that we want to enter into and even grow it. I will invite you all to check what are the skills required by the future workplace and what are the challenges that the companies predict that they will face in the near future. To do this we will take a quick look at a report and at a survey.

The report has a list of the top skills of the future, from the *The Future of Jobs Report,* and it was released for the year 2023 in 2024 by the World Economic Forum, and from that list there are some skills that stand out and increase the importance of the philosophical approach, in any of its forms, like the skills of *Creative and Analytical thinking, teaching and mentoring,* (www.weforum.org)*.* These skills are crucial in the evolving landscape of work and technology in the VUCA world we are all supposed

to be operating in the future. From all twenty six skills nine of them can easily be guided to be achieved using the philosophical approach with the values driven life like: Creative thinking, Analytical thinking, Curiosity and lifelong learning, Resilience, flexibility and agility, Motivation and self-awareness, Leadership and social influence, Empathy and active listening, Dependability and attention to detail and Teaching and mentoring. We can help solve, through philosophical practice, those nine of them from which five are between the first ten enlisted in the report, as being the most important. The survey shows us which external factors will have the greatest impact on the business we should target as our main clients over the next twelve months? According to the results published by Forbes a Exclusive C-Suite And Middle Manager Survey one of these factors is *Social justice* that can offer a solution in the philosophical debate and value driven way of life, regardless of the laws against discrimination in general or racism in particular (www.forbes.com).

If we analyze at the first eight an existent company philosopher or consultant could prepare these companies from the potential devastating impact of at least four of these external factors Technology Shifts. One of them and a really pressing issue is the Al/digital disruption with the problem of AI and Autonomous Cars which, in essence, is a philosophical and a legal problem - Who assumes the responsibility if something goes wrong?. Political disruption is another current problem of the local and global political landscape together with the unseen impact of the Big Data companies and the public policies that should be created in order to prevent such problems. The last two areas that a philosophical approach could be used to bring a possible solution are Climate Change and Social justice.

During the workshop that I have facilitated with the occasion of the *17th International Conference on Philosophical Practice* in Timisoara in June 2023 I have incorporated the concepts and practice learned from the Master's Degree in Philosophical Counseling and Consultancy together with the methodology of a coaching instrument called *Points of You*™, which is suitable for individual and group coaching, and together with the questions from a Questions Card Game, that I developed at my job.

The Points of You™ coaching methodology is the first tool that I have used, and it has four stages or steps that are used to solve a personal or professional problem that is formulated as an objective in the form of a

question for both individual and group coaching. Most coaching approaches are solution focused ones. The first step is Pause in which the participants can reframe their state of mind or just take a mindful break to be open to new experiences. The second one is Expand in which the purpose is to generate as many ideas as possible from a single stimulus (usually a image that for some instruments has a word printed on it) or at least three of them to force their imagination to come up with more interpretations and/or perspectives for the same image they have in front of them. The third step is Focus that requires the participant or the participants to switch their attention to the most revealing or powerful idea they had in the previous step and attempt to explain why is that perspective so relevant to them and then going to the final step Doing in with they must take responsibility for implementing something in order to achieve their initial objective from witch the discussion started and thus create for themselves a new reality (www.points-of-you.com).

At my job we are encouraged to start every team meeting with an icebreaker. Why do we use these icebreakers? The benefits are improving communication, reframing the experience for a more creative and productive discussion, bringing closer the team members by creating a psychological safety environment in which they can be vulnerable - including the manager of the team, finding solutions to their personal problems or objectives or to the shared challenges of the team, helping them move from good ideas to concrete actions. We use multiple options as an icebreaker but next I will give more details about only one of them.

The second tool, that I have used in the workshop facilitated with the occasion of the *17th International Conference on Philosophical Practice* from June 2023, was *The Questions Card Game* - an instrument developed under my supervision and with my main input that brings together the power of questions taken from philosophy, psychotherapy, coaching, relationships building and the Big Talk concept. The game is recommended for all ages and ideal for groups of 8 to 10 players. The five categories with questions are about Me: Life & Dreams, Personal Growth, Professional, Relationships and Values. About the game: The Game setup: The moderator should use this resource in a space in which this activity can take place without interruptions. The game can start with a short meditation exercise, in which everybody concentrates on his/hers breathing with the eyes closed. There are two game roles as follows: the

moderator – this person will have the role of facilitator for this game. This person will answer the question first and will set the tone of the conversation. And the second role the time-master – this person will have the responsibility of keeping the time for the cases in which the activity should fit in a time frame. The game Instructions that I helped develop are: the moderator will make the first step: he/she will answer first the question to set the tone of the activity. Everybody draws a question card. Participants can swap questions if they agree to this. Everybody has 3 minutes to answer the question. The other participants are encouraged to actively listen, not to judge or to begin heated discussions. Trust and respect are two values very important in the unfolding of this game. If a participant gets very emotional, everybody is encouraged to act naturally without exaggerating the moment, but also without ignoring it completely (www.autonom.com). My work experience using philosophical and several coaching tools allows me to use an integrative approach between all the different way of working with people but also have a good insight about the practices of acquiring philosophical counseling, training, coaching or therapy by the companies and the way all of the providers of HR services best sell their knowhow to the corporate world.

Results

In the workshop I have encouraged the participants to experience the integrative approach and explained the methodology after each exercise using the *Train the Trainers method*. This hands-on approach revealed how the coaching method, developed by *Points of You*™, can be enhanced by the philosophical tools of conceptualization, summarizing, self-reflection, and personal value definition and reframing. Although, in the thirty minute interaction, we did not have the time to get to go deeper into the participant's ideas, they could see the usefulness of the approach and how it overlaps with the philosophical one. We could say that what we did was a mix between an icebreaker, Train the Trainers method and a short philosophical discussion. The rules of these "game", like some rules from philosophical discussions, are, first of all very similar, as follows: the first is to give at least three ideas starting from one stimulus/ image which enhances imagination and creativity, the second is to encourage people to listen intently to one another teaching practically what active listening is,

the third is to give a concept for every idea, before or after the idea was stated teaching practically conceptualization, helping others remember the ideas and main concepts and reducing the emotions that comes with every personal answer and thus enhancing communication and connectedness between the participants, the fourth is that there is no wrong answer - encouraging people to speak up and creating a safe psychological space for people to express themselves, and the fifth one is don't say you have no ideas that prevents the self-sabotage of people.

The final result and benefits are a much shorter time of interaction and a greater impact for the people who attended the workshop by focusing on the conceptualization, clarification and summarizing of the ideas that were put forth by the participants. Using Philosophical Counseling during the *Points of You™* workshops had another obvious benefit and allowed the participants a better control of their emotions because conceptualization, reframing, summarizing and, in general, the use of the thinking brain switches the focus from the feeling brain thus reducing the power of the emotion over the thinking process. This ability that is practiced in the workshops, in the format described above, gives participants also better public speaking skills. The purpose of using The Questions Card Game with the participants was that they can experience themselves and see without any doubt the big similarities between this corporate icebreaker and the Socratic Dialog inspired discussions that are used by the philosophical practitioners. The utility and benefits of using methods from philosophical practice or critical thinking in this type of icebreaker are similar to the first instrument and they are: a better skill of active listening, learn how to discipline your mind by using conceptualization, reducing the emotions and thus enhancing communication and connectedness between the participants and creating a safe psychological space where participants can allow themselves to be vulnerable without the fear of being judged by others. Using hard questions as icebreakers is the easiest way to connect people at the beginning of the team meetings.

Conclusions

It is more beneficial for everyone to expand and maximize the benefits of critical thinking and philosophical practice by targeting the

companies who have a need for our services and have budgets to allocate for external help. In order to get there we need first referrals from other companies. A recommended course of action would be to educate the general public and target big companies where we could do free of charge interventions. Before asking for money we should do pro bono sessions about the usefulness of our approach that saves time, teaches people to think for themselves and maximizes interactions within teams or groups. As a marketing tool, to promote critical thinking and philosophical practice in the companies, we should do charitable work within the communities those companies operate in and give our philosophical services free of charge to those who need them and don't have money to pay. The practice and recommendation of offering different groups a glimpse into the philosophical world is an ongoing effort and it has proven effective until now. I have worked with hundreds of employees from at least two dozen companies, middle school and high-school professors, children between the ages of 6 and 21 years old, senior citizens, prisoners from penitentiaries and volunteers from different NGOs. This time and knowledge investment has brought me a few paying contracts in the past three years. Though it's ideal to work with the owners of business or CEOs it's hard to get to them so it is easier to start with the people from their teams this way we could be recommended to other teams or team managers. If we just want to work with individuals it would take more time for us to be seen and appreciated by more people. Targeting bigger groups will enhance our efforts.

Because all the approaches we have mentioned (group facilitation, coaching, training, mentoring, psychotherapy, psychoanalysis and team meetings) have roots directly or indirectly in philosophy it is not so hard to find a common ground to work on. The downside for the ones with The Critics of Traditional Approaches Perspective is that they miss out opportunities of working with more clients. They lose money and diverse experiences. Philosophy should teach people to ask good and hard questions and stand out by the way they think and question everything as a tool for continuous learning. By opposing the philosophical practice or critical thinking to therapy and coaching we are contributing to the same conflict all major approaches have done when they came to being. We are limiting our reach and potential clients. We are targeting only some clients that are unsatisfied by therapy or coaching instead of targeting all the

professionals from these areas. The integrative approach that I propose sets the first goal to work with companies followed by the second goal to work with all of their suppliers and then the third one with their clients. It would be in our interests to look at the other providers of complementary or similar services for the companies as future possible clients and partners and not as competitors.

It would be advised to abandon the philosophical ego by using more popular terms such as critical thinking, that attract more people, instead of only using terms as philosophical practice, even though they are by far not the same thing. We all know that there is a difference between Philosophy and Critical Thinking but the people who could benefit from our knowledge don't necessarily know it and are afraid of anything philosophical. Instead they are attracted to Critical Thinking and would like to know more about and are willing to pay for it. By doing a quick Google search for "philosophical practice" it shows approximately 10 times less number of results as a search for "critical thinking". This shows that the interest of the public is obvious for critical thinking and it would be unwise to ignore it. To bring more followers for any philosophical endeavor we should not get stuck in labels but focus on getting the right message to as many people as possible. So please be open minded and abandon the theoretical rigidity of academic philosophy and may all of us facilitate the future towards critical thinking and by doing that change people's lives and the way they think about themselves and the world.

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