

# Case Study: Iterative Executive Coaching & Strategy Facilitation in Construction Leadership

## A Research & Development Feedback Document

### Introduction

I began working with Ian Burford as an Executive Search recruiter during 2021, which led to my becoming a performance coach and strategy facilitator in November 2022. We pioneered a number of techniques that we believe are a unique and fresh approach to coaching senior executives that focuses on values, vision, and strategy facilitation.

I asked Ian for feedback to a curated set of questions. This document sets out those questions and Ian's responses.

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From: Ian Burford <[ian.burford@buckinghamgroup.co.uk](mailto:ian.burford@buckinghamgroup.co.uk)>

Sent: 31 July 2023 10:14

To: Richard Dobson <[richard@brownleecale.com](mailto:richard@brownleecale.com)>

Subject: RE: Your feedback

Hi Richard,

I finally finished the R&D feedback you requested.

Cheers,

Ian

Ian Burford

Group Director – Build & Pre-Construction

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### Document Structure

- Questions: Richard Dobson – Coach & Facilitator
- Responses: Ian Burford – Group Director, Build & Pre-Construction

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### Feedback: An Overview in Your Words

#### Research & Development Methods

**RD:** The methods of R&D we have implemented to overcome uncertainties and improve. Your impression of my systematic study, observations of Buckingham Build leadership behaviour, as well as the material, social and organisational environment that they work in.

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**IB:** Without doubt the approach we have taken has been both iterative and experimental. The political landscape within BGCL has at times been overpowering, and it has made the use of psychological assessment and emotional intelligence analysis invaluable in navigating a transition to the current structure.

The observation, analysis, reflection, and implementation of micro strategies has been relentless to fully understand the team dynamics but also manage where possible the expectations of team members and the wider Build Team. Managing the Main Board's expectations in their own political context has also been necessary to ensure that progress has been maintained.

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## Consulting Method & Strategic Facilitation

**RD:** How you have viewed our method of consulting, active observation to support high-level executives explore the future to make strategic choices.

**IB:** The consulting methods used have been constantly iterative and determined based on the changing landscape of the management team's growth. As such, we have utilised a number of techniques depending on the situation or individual.

For example, when we have met as a large group, Richard acted as facilitator to guide the subject matter whilst bringing in and encouraging different psychological approaches that took individuals beyond their normal day-to-day thinking patterns.

When dealing on a one-to-one basis, Richard would then reflect on the individual's personality traits to guide them through the process of their own interactions in the wider group. This has allowed us to understand in a much clearer way:

- Those individuals who are suitable for the management group and those who are not
- For those who remained, we have developed a greater understanding of their inputs and why they may have limiting factors for some elements of the strategy implementation

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## Innovation vs. Traditional Methods

**RD:** What you think of the uncertainty of our operating in an environment. So whether you think the knowledge of whether something is technologically feasible, or how to achieve what we have in practice to date, could have been readily available or deducible to you and Buckingham by a competent professional already working in the field.

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**IB:** The principal difference in operation we have undertaken to traditional methods is that we have been adapting and experimenting at every opportunity. Following each event, conversation, or meeting we would debrief to analyze the dialogue and outcomes to understand how our preconceptions may have played out (positively or negatively).

Subsequently this would be followed by further analysis to determine how new information should be assimilated into the strategy we were looking to play out. Traditional management methods look to use singular techniques throughout the implementation of an initiative, whereas we have constantly adapted to the current circumstance at hand and chosen the appropriate method of approach.

This could be adopting Lean Six Sigma principles or looking at Management by Objectives. No one theory was overlooked, and we always discussed what was best for the situation and what could be sustained in the longer term.

From my experience this is truly innovative, and I have not experienced this type of approach from a consultancy before. The whole approach has been to serve the business needs in real time and not simply follow some single route of implementation.

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## Counterfactual Analysis: Impact & Critical Moments

**RD:** What would have happened had I not begun working with you Aug21, what if I had not produced the fluid assessment Aug22, what if you had not agreed to our consultancy scope 1/11/22...

**IB:** Without doubt I'm firmly of the belief that I would have left BGCL in autumn 2021 if I had not met with Richard in August.

The meeting we had at that point was initially intended to be a meet and greet so that he could establish what new career route I was looking for. Instead, Richard took the time to not only get to know me and my drivers but investigated with far more vigour the circumstances that existed in BGCL and why I was looking to leave.

The dialogue further examined why I felt the need to leave and why staying with the business and adopting a different approach to driving my career with the business would work. This 4-hour meeting had a profound effect on my future as it was completely against the industry norm from a recruitment perspective—his aim was to find a vehicle for my success in my current business rather than make a fee from a move.

This was the start of a completely new way of consulting for me as we looked to map out not only a success route for me as an individual but moreover for that success to be instrumental in a wider success for BGCL.

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## The Fluid Assessment (August 2022)

This was confirmed when Richard carried out the fluid assessment a year later where he identified how the transition planning we had discussed had come to fruition and how we were at that point then working with other members of the Senior Leadership Group to establish their own suitability for progression in the business.

## Evolution of Consultancy Scope

The initial consultancy scope has expanded over time and has been dynamic based on the changing environment of both my own progression within the business and the Senior Leadership and Management Teams. The publication of the Build Business Strategy in early 2023 has developed the consultancy even further as it now has to move into the operational implementation of theories and strategies developed over the previous two years.

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## Emotional Intelligence & Navigating VUCA

**RD:** What do you think of our emotional intelligence, listening skills to help you make well-informed theoretical choices about the future realities and navigate VUCA?

**IB:** From my perspective the utilisation of emotional intelligence techniques has been invaluable in the development of my own career and personality but moreover has allowed us to better understand the individuals and their interactions in the Executive Group.

By analyzing the Strategy and how we are looking for it to be implemented, we have been able to better understand the needs of the various management roles and how members of the team are suited to what is required.

On a number of occasions there has proven to be a mismatch, but we have been able to manage expectations utilizing emotional intelligence analysis and refocus individuals in a direction that is better suited to their abilities and personality type.

As identified in a number of other responses, the whole process has been constantly iterative, with Richard and I talking almost on a daily basis. We have completely understood the VUCA principle as a necessary part of operation in a business that is ongoing and growing daily.

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## Product Novelty Assessment

**RD:** So far as I'm aware the product we are researching and developing is new to construction and the recruitment industry. Do you agree in your experience?

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**IB:** I have worked in construction for 40 years, at least 25 of which has been in management and executive capacities. I have never experienced this type of consultancy approach before.

This approach fundamentally interacts with the ongoing running of the business and seeks to develop not only the systems of operation but also the key individuals within it.

Whilst we are only at the start of our journey, the data and understanding that has been gathered over the past two years is allowing us to make deeper decisions about our structure and operating environment that is unique in our sector.

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## Customer Case Study: Detailed Analysis

### Context: Senior Leadership Team & Organisational Background

**RD:** I want you to provide me with a customer case study to share your experience Aug21 to present of my research and development, future-oriented methods of engagement, longer-term activities, how you rate our techniques, whether you have experienced anything from any other supplier of a similar nature providing people and consultancy services... What makes us different?

### Capability Prior to Involvement

**IB:** Historically BGCL has developed its leadership teams based on time-served promotions and occasional new recruits based on gaps in structure. This has predicated an approach that led to growth (and success) being achieved in an ad-hoc and circumstantial manner.

Relationships with clients and supply chain became imbalanced and created an environment that was unpredictable based on exposure to a single sector (Industrial & Logistics).

### Input & Development

Following Brownlee Cale's consultation, we have systematically examined the necessary components needed in the team structure and have examined the suitability of its composition and those individuals currently in post. Furthermore, we are now looking to develop competency matrices that include psychological and emotional intelligence skills.

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## Baseline People Planning & Methods

### RD: Pre and post our scope

**IB:** Our people planning methodology is still under development as we are at a relatively early stage of progression. Our quantum-based analysis is relatively mature; however, we are still

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working on the qualitative analysis to give a consistent success on a national and diversified portfolio.

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## The Advancement: Innovation & Developments

**RD:** The innovation and developments we helped facilitate and create

**IB:** Without doubt the consideration of the EQ portion of our operation has made the most significant impact. For too long BGCL has relied too heavily on a task-based approach to its management objectives and has not looked anywhere near hard enough at the quality of our management approach.

There is more work to do but I feel strongly that measuring and managing by EQ in a broader range of our management teams will create significant value in the future.

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## Operating Uncertainties & Conditions

**RD: What were the uncertainties and conditions we operated in?**

- Thinking the status quo dynamics and resistance to change
  - Market and economic impacts
  - Risk profile
  - Environmental considerations (Covid, Brexit, national park...)
  - Regulations and feasibility
  - Attitudes to strategy and risk management
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## Tackling Uncertainties

**RD:** How were the uncertainties tackled?

**IB:** Like any new approach there has been scepticism and even resistance to what is considered a different type of analysis, not least because it has confronted several senior team members that were content with the status quo and mediocre performance.

However, we are working through the discomfort and clearly establishing a much stronger base from which the business can grow and create a far more sustainable future. I firmly believe that with a clearer understanding of our individual personality types and reliance on a

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stronger competency match, our risk profile moving into diversified markets is far more manageable. This will allow us to accelerate our growth and capability simultaneously.

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## Why This Knowledge Was Not Easily Deducible

**RD:** Why the knowledge was not easily deducible by a competent professional working within Buckingham or a consultant working for another supplier that could have done what we have?

**IB:** There has never been this type of approach within BGCL. Its humble and honest beginnings were very entrepreneurial, based around a small number of key individuals that grew the business organically based on their own experiences and bandwidth.

The issue is that this approach is not scalable to a level that is required for the success of the Employee Ownership Trust. The quantitative and process approach adopted by so many large organisations does not work in a privately run business that has gained its past success on an entrepreneurial basis.

We are now developing a system of operation that can maximise the benefits of strong process and organisation but can then maximise the human element by having a greater flexibility in roles based on strong emotional intelligence abilities.

In my view it is highly unlikely that this could ever be achieved "in-house". The level of critical thinking that has been required can only have been achieved by external observation and translation into a context that could be understood by team members who are predominantly construction-centric.

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## Key Outcomes & Impacts

### Strategic Achievements

- Retention of a key executive who was at risk of leaving (August 2021)
- Publication of the Build Business Strategy (early 2023)
- Systematic team restructuring based on EQ and competency matching
- Risk management improvement enabling diversification from single-sector exposure

### Methodological Innovations

- Daily iterative coaching and embedded consultation model

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- Psychological assessment plus EQ analysis integrated into leadership development
- Theory-agnostic flexibility adapting methods to real-time business needs
- Competency matrices incorporating psychological and emotional intelligence dimensions

## Cultural Transformation

- Shift from time-served promotions to values-vision-competency alignment
- Move from task-based management to EQ-informed leadership
- Bridge between entrepreneurial agility and scalable process

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## Conclusion

This case study documents a two-year journey of transformative executive coaching and organisational development in the construction sector. The approach represents a departure from traditional consultancy models through its iterative, adaptive, and deeply human-centred methodology.

The work continues as BGCL moves from strategy development into operational implementation, with ongoing refinement of people planning and leadership development frameworks.

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**Status:** R&D feedback and case study documentation