



# Leadership Coaching Tutorial

## Science to Practice & Good Business

**JANUARY 2017:  
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AMBIDEXTROUS LEADERSHIP**

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**Great leadership hinges on knowing how to translate the latest research into best practice.**

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### DO YOU KNOW:

**AMBIDEXTROUS LEADERSHIP UNLOCKS INNOVATION IN TEAMS? LEADERS NEED TO KNOW HOW TO ENGAGE IN BEHAVIORS TYPICALLY SEEN AS CONTRADICTORY. FOR INNOVATION YOU NEED TO BE HIGHLY DEVELOPED IN OPPOSITE STRENGTHS.**

### **Ambidextrous Leadership**

“Leading with both hands” can unlock the best in your people and culture.



**Carol Kauffman PhD**, Founder/Executive Director IOC, Assistant Prof. Harvard Medical School Chief Supervisor of Meyler Campbell, Leadership Coach with over 40,000 client-hours experience.

### **Article selected for this volume:**

#### **Ambidextrous leadership and team innovation**

Zacher, H, & Rosing, K (2015) *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 136(1), 54-68

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## LEADERSHIP COACHING TUTORIAL

### INTRODUCTION TO AMBIDEXTROUS LEADERSHIP

#### What you need to know to move from Science to Practice & Good Business

Ambidextrous leaders can engage in opposing behaviors when needed. On one hand, they need to be able to generate possibilities, brainstorm, and encourage tangents, mistakes and risk. On the other hand, these same leaders also need to be strong on implementation by carefully tracking progress, holding people accountable and having them adhere to rules. One or the other is not enough to predict their capacity to lead innovation.

#### **Transformational leadership is not enough:**

Here's how the concept of ambidextrous leadership fits into the larger leadership literature, which highlights the unique contribution it makes. There is substantial research literature on Transformative Leadership, and its relationship to increased performance and innovation.

Transformative leadership has 4 subcategories summed up as the 4 I's (see the full Transformational Leadership Tutorial, Volume 1(2)). These are: 1) Inspirational motivation; embodying and expecting high standards; 2) Inspirational motivation; communicating a vision and recalling positive events; 3) Intellectual stimulation: encouraging creativity and challenging the status quo; and 4) Individualized attention; caring for tailoring leadership to individual followers.

These are necessary for innovation – but – the addition of ambidextrous leadership behavior led to much higher innovation in teams. This makes sense. To innovate you first need to open up and explore. Then to get anything done, narrow down and deliver. As a leader, are you equally good at both sides? As a coach, are you aware of how to help build up a lesser used side?

#### **How can we create greater innovation in teams?**

First, learn more about the behaviors involved in Ambidextrous Leadership (see full tutorial). Knowing this data can support your efforts to prioritize goals. Being able to articulate the concept and practice can help with your leadership brand, or for coaches to both market your practice and deliver better service. In today's complex, rapidly changing markets, innovation is a crucial skill and overlooking how to foster it can put your leader in peril.

#### **Explore & Exploit?**

What behaviors open up possibilities? Then exactly how do you tip the balance and move toward making decisions, throwing out options and moving forward to deliver? What other balances are key?

For those of us versed in the **GROW** model of coaching, moving from the **Goal** (vision of the future) and then assessing **Reality** (or the full terrain of the challenge) are steps one and two. Research then is quite clear; when assessing options one needs to identify 4 - 6 **Options**, or unique pathways forward. For any situation, an innovation leader needs a wide repertoire of choices (see below).

Are you equally strong in opening up options and exploring as you are in narrowing down and challenging your client turn dreams into reality by being a tough advocate? See the full tutorial.

# Innovation = Transformational Leadership + Ambidextrous Leadership



## LEADERSHIP COACHING TUTORIAL

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: RESEARCH TO PRACTICE & GOOD BUSINESS

**Key concepts: Ambidextrous Leadership, Innovation and Teams**

**It's not about balance, it's about being *strong on both sides of the continuum***

**What is innovation for teams?**

#### Exploration & Execution

- Ability to develop original ideas and approaches
- Brainstorm and prototype
- Experiment, fail fast, learn and iterate
- Monitor, set guidelines and stop exploration
- Execute, deliver and sell the product/service
- Triple bottom line performance: People, Profit and Planet

**What do we need to get there?**

- Assess and identify specific behaviors to develop both strength sets
- Develop safe high innovation environment

**Steps to coaching for ambidexterity and dialectical leadership: doing and being**

- Seven steps to coach for ambidextrous leadership and mini-case
- Developing the four behavior pathways
- Stepping into multiple identities

**What other tipping points lead to greater innovation?**

- Ideal balances necessary to access Flow States
- Positivity Ratios and how they impact creativity and capacity to deliver
- Psychological safety, high challenge and leadership shifting can feel dangerous without it.

**Innovate Yourself! Then your team – then their teams – experience a ripple effect by creating an environment for high engagement, experimentation and execution.**

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**LEADERSHIP COACHING TUTORIAL**  
**RESEARCH TO PRACTICE AND GOOD BUSINESS**  
**Ambidextrous leadership and team Innovation**

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*Leadership & Organization Development Journal, 136(1), 54-68*

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**LEADERSHIP COACHING TUTORIAL**  
**RESEARCH ARTICLE ABSTRACT**

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to report the first empirical test of the recently proposed ambidexterity theory of leadership for innovation (Rosing et al., 2011). This theory proposes that the interaction between two complementary leadership behaviors – opening and closing – predicts team innovation, such that team innovation is highest when both opening and closing leadership behaviors are high.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Multi-source survey data came from 33 team leaders of architectural and interior design firms and 90 of their employees. Findings – Results supported the interaction hypothesis, even after controlling for leaders' transformational leadership behavior and general team success.

**Research limitations/implications** – The relatively small sample size and the cross-sectional design are potential limitations of the study. The findings provide initial support for the central hypothesis of the ambidexterity theory of leadership for innovation. Practical implications – The results suggest that organizations could train team leaders' ambidextrous leadership behaviors to increase team innovation.

**Social implications** – Identifying ways to facilitate organizational innovation is important, as it contributes to employment and company growth as well as individual and societal well-being. Originality/value – This multi-source study contributes to the literatures on leadership and innovation in organizations by showing that ambidextrous leadership behaviors predict team innovation above and beyond transformational leadership behavior.

**How can you put these concepts into action  
for yourself, your followers or those you coach?**

## LEADERSHIP COACHING TUTORIAL

### THE DEEP DIVE: PUT THE SCIENCE TO WORK FOR YOUR PRACTICE AND BUSINESS

**Disclaimer** – Dr. Kauffman may have different and more generalized applications from what the authors of the article intend. Lessons drawn from the article are a combination of the research described and also come from integrating these ideas into the rich and larger leadership development literature and from extensive observation and coaching practice.

## How to enable Ambidextrous Leadership

### Exploration & Exploitation (Execution)

Ambidextrous Leadership is a way to put the concept of agile leadership into behaviors and action. Innovation is the result of multiple factors, but leadership is key. While not the focus of our tutorial, leadership behaviors are crucial, but leaders putting policies in place that foster an internal entrepreneurial spirit is core to success.

Innovation is a journey from concept generation to implementation. What is ideal for one phase differs greatly from what is needed for the next. Exploration is fostered by an open environment with high positivity and optimism. Execution requires the capacity to correct course and people as well as offering guidance, reducing tangents, having milestones and tracking performance.

Which is more important, if you had to choose? The researchers found that “opening behaviors” predicted innovation, but being able to engage in opening behaviors AND closing behaviors were much stronger in predicting what teams can innovate. Good closing skills did not predict innovation.

### What do we need to get there?

As a leader, the conditions you create allow the freedom for the team to open and explore. Enabling this requires trust and a culture of safety. Then a leader can encourage new ideas at one point and shoot down extended brainstorming when it’s time to close down and move from ideation to implementation.

The team needs clarity of communication and collaboration to know and ideally agree when it’s time to tip from one phase of the journey to another.

### What behaviors embody exploration versus execution leadership.

One can think of various assessments that can identify the natural tendencies of a leader. These are as far ranging as the MBTI (perceiver and judger) to 16pf. Hannes Zacher and Kathrin Rosing suggest some very specific behaviors that could be the target of training and coaching.

Opening behaviors	Closing Behaviors
Allows different ways of accomplishing a task	Monitors and controls goal attainment
Encourages experimentation w different ideas	Controls adherence to rules
Invites independent thinking and acting	Narrows down and limits actions
Gives room for own ideas	Sticks to plans
Allows errors, encourages error learning	Sanctions errors
Motivates to take risks	Reduces risk

## What other dialectical (opposing) tensions do leaders need to navigate?

Here are a few I've seen in my practice:

Aggressive --- Receptive  
Leading --- Following  
Asking --- Telling

What more examples have you seen, or have found it to be a struggle to do both sides? Let us know.

## Steps in coaching toward ambidexterity and dialectical leadership

Self-awareness:	Does the leader know his or her stronger side?
Motivation:	Does the leader see the value in developing the other side?
Self-assessment:	Is there relevant 360 feedback to encourage introspection?
Generalizing:	Where has the underdeveloped skill set surfaced, not at work?
Building:	Experimentation and feedback
Top of mind:	Keeping it conscious is the hardest part
Fail well:	If you are not failing you are not trying anything new
Celebrate:	When you have even small success, don't overlook it.

### An example.

A leader is a great driver for results, but great opening behaviors require deep listening. The leader says, "I am terrible at this." **Self-awareness** could be explored to understand what makes listening difficult, what the leader is doing and where the leader self-rates on a scale of 1 – 10.

**Motivation and self-assessment** would include understanding the expense of *not* developing this behavior set and looking back over 360 feedback and performance reviews. Is there data to create intrinsic motivation?

**Generalizing** is borrowing the skill from other settings. For example, you might respond, "I don't believe you can't listen, where have you listened well and with whom do you find it easier to listen?" Then generalize from that area to work.

**Building** is simple to say, difficult to do. Listening can be broken down into segments and built up from there. The leader can engage in listening experiments such as picking one report, reduce his or her word count by 50% and see what happens. Alternatively, to increase focus and warmth on the other, concentrate and notice if the person seems more engaged. If they rated themselves a 4, there are two questions to ask. First, what are you doing right that you're not a 3 or 3.5? Second, what could you do over the next 2 months to raise yourself half a point?

**Top of mind** is crucial; it's a hedge against losing track of what you want to develop (which is easy). Find ways to remind yourself to build the listening habits – reminders from your phone, a note, or your HR partner or trusted colleague to ask you regularly – Are you still trying to increase your listening?

**Fail well** If you are not failing regularly you are not trying, or you haven't raised the bar far enough. The point is to learn what your core challenge is. Is it emotional regulation and you blurt out? Is it a focus issue and your mind wanders? Debrief and unpack what took you off course.

**Celebrate** if you've had 5% improvement – notice it! Just like when you fail, debrief and unpack what it is you did right to listen better. And notice the result in how you feel, and then if your leadership impact shifts.

## More ways to build ambidextrous leadership

Research shows that having multiple pathways forward increases performance in nearly every area of life. CR Snyder, the leader of “Hope Psychology” says the key is will power and “Way-Power.” More pathways lead to better results.

### To become ambidextrous, find 4 pathways:

- Default: What you do without thinking
- Opposite extreme: What would that look like if you did it well?
- Identify pathways between these two options

In any leadership situation, it is ideal to have 4 or more choices available to you: Difficult conversation? Can you say Nothing? Confront? Educate? Nurture?

### Identify four “ways of being” and expand your identity.

If you are stuck in one way of being, it’s time to expand your repertoire. Are you a:

- Challenger?
- Analyzer?
- Observer?
- Nurturer?

**To truly lead we need more than engaging in behaviors.** We need to expand how we think of ourselves. When you enter a team meeting, who do you want to be? Can you access multiple aspects of who you are to match the challenge with a developed leadership identity? All have their strengths, and all have their limitations. It’s the match.

### What other tipping points lead to greater innovation?

For innovation, there is a tipping point of when to move from opening up to explore and narrowing down to execute. There are other key balancing acts.

- Flow states require an ideal balance of skill level and challenge.
- Positivity Ratio: 5:1 positive to negative/critical interactions for creativity and delivery.
- Without psychological safety, high challenge and leadership shifting can feel dangerous.

### Last word!

Ambidextrous leadership is a goal toward which we can strive and define as a goal of coaching. In team leadership identify those who show these contradictory strength sets and realize they may be of special importance when innovation is most necessary.