Transpersonal coaching offers a more complex technique than those based on simpler models such as GROW. Its proponents argue it is especially useful in leadership development.

Coaches are always looking to supplement their technique tools. As neuro-linguistic programming shakes off its fringe image to become almost as common in most coaching menus, so another and less controversial method is moving out of psychotherapy and psychology into business coaching.

It is called transpersonal coaching, and is an off-shoot of transpersonal psychology that has had a high profile in the UK since the early 1970s. As a coaching approach it is difficult to define, but it is one that its champions, an increasing band of executive coaches and business psychologists, see as relevant. They believe it can address the stress and malaise that sour modern society and the corporate world, and is a well-rounded approach of developing focused and energetic leaders.

Finding meaning

The best-known exponent of transpersonal coaching is Sir John Whitmore, non-executive chairman of Performance Consultants International. “In recent years, people – especially in Western society – are waking up to the transpersonal within themselves, through the emerging need to find meaning and purpose at all aspects of their lives, and to work in the service of something beyond just making a profit,” he says.

He believes: “Affluence, global communication and the secularisation of society have brought the transpersonal onto many people’s agenda, both personally and at work.”

So what is transpersonal psychology? Does it have a place in business, or is it merely a hangover from the happy days of the 1970s of peace and love?

Transpersonal means “beyond the person.” Its psychology is based on the idea of a spiritual centre or self within each individual. It draws together threads and influences from many high-profile, 20th-century role models, such as Abraham Maslow (who explored the relationship between self-realisation and motivation), Victor Frankl (prisoner of Second World War concentration camps who found that those who could invest their

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