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# International Coaching Psychology Review

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# International Coaching Psychology Review

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Case studies and book reviews will be considered. The *ICPR* is published by the BPS SGCP in association with the APS IGCP.

**1. Circulation**
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**2. Length**
Papers should normally be no more than 6000 words, although the Co-Editors retain discretion to publish papers beyond this length in cases where the clear and concise expression of the scientific content requires greater length.

**3. Reviewing**
The publication operates a policy of anonymous peer review. Papers will normally be scrutinised and commented on by at least two independent expert referees (in addition to the relevant Co-Editor) although the Co-Editor may process a paper at his or her discretion. The referees will not be aware of the identity of the author. All information about authorship including personal acknowledgements and institutional affiliations should be confined to the title page (and the text should be free of such clues as identifiable self-citations, e.g. 'In our earlier work...').

*Continued on inside back cover.*

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# International Coaching Psychology Review

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**Volume 11 No. 1 March 2016**

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# Editorial

Roger Hamill & Sandy Gordon

IN THIS ISSUE OF THE *International Coaching Psychology Review (ICPR)*, our first in the publication's 11th year, it is only fitting to begin by expressing an immense debt of gratitude to the outgoing UK Co-Ordinating Editor, Professor Stephen Palmer. As many of you will know, Stephen was instrumental in setting up the *ICPR* and has been tireless in his stewardship since then. After 10 years at the helm he decided to step down after publication of the previous issue (Vol 10, No 2), but his legacy continues in the articles he curated for publication in this current issue before handing over the reins in October 2015. We are confident that we speak for everyone involved with the ICPR over the past ten years when we say, thank you Stephen for the creativity, commitment and rigour that you have brought to this publication and, by extension, to the wider world of coaching psychology.

The current issue of the *ICPR* begins with a thought-provoking study by Mara Correia, Nuno Rebelo dos Santos and Jonathan Passmore who adopt an in-depth Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach to explore the subjective experience of the coaching process from the perspective of coaches, coachees, and commissioners. The authors identify three core themes reflecting 'essential mechanisms' that effect the coachee's sense of self, and thereby mediate outcomes, in the coaching context.

The second paper, by Wendy Wilson and Carmelina Lawton Smith, reports on a mixed-methods case-study research project that evaluates the impact of 'Spot-Coaching' in a 'volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous' (VUCA) environment (in this case, a large telecommunications company). They conclude that key features of Spot Coaching – such as extending input beyond the executive team, flexible delivery and promotion of personal responsibility – help promote better coaching outcomes at both individual and organisational levels.

In our third article, Qing Wang explores art-based narrative interviewing, a highly creative approach to coaching in secondary education settings where students' efforts to tell the story of their learning journeys enable them to construct their self-identities as learners and thereby develop more positive dispositions towards the learning process. The author suggests that this is how art-based narrative interviewing becomes a novel 'style' of coaching that may promote an individual's capacity for creativity and meaning-making in the coaching context.

Michelle Pritchard and Christian van Nieuwerburgh open our fourth paper by noting the relative dearth of research on positive psychology interventions (PPI's) with adolescents from more deprived socio-economic backgrounds. They begin to redress this imbalance with an important exploratory qualitative study on the impact of a combined coaching and PPI intervention for adolescent females from inner-city London who have been identified as 'at risk'. The authors conclude that such interventions may prove effective in promoting quality of life for at-risk young people with regards to education, employment and health.

In the fifth article, Liz Robson-Kelly and Christian van Nieuwerburgh build upon the previous paper by using a Grounded Theory approach to explore the potential benefits of coaching for young people at risk of developing mental health problems. They find that coaching helps promote coping for participants by enhancing accountability, awareness and responsibility. The authors present a tentative theoretical model to facilitate the use of coaching interventions amongst such at-risk groups.


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In the final substantive paper of this issue, Ashley Weinberg presents a longitudinal study that examines the potential role for coaching as a primary level approach to protect psychological health for individuals at times of organisational flux. The author finds that coaching can have a significant protective effect in this regard, but that impact is mediated by the degree of coaching input and various organisational factors.

We finish with reports from the BPS SGCP Chair and the APS IGCP Convenor, and Julie Allen's review of Max Landsberg's latest book, *Mastering Coaching*.

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# Understanding the Coach-Coachee-Client relationship: A conceptual framework for executive coaching

Mara Castro Correia, Nuno Rebelo dos Santos & Jonathan Passmore

***Objectives:*** *There is a need for a more comprehensive understanding of how coaching processes psychologically operate. This paper presents the findings from a study aimed to characterise the coaching process experience and to identify how specific experiences contribute to coaching outcomes.*
***Design:*** *A qualitative design was adopted. Data was analysed by Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, 2008).*
***Method:*** *Data was collected from 10 participants, this included coaches (N=4), coachees (N=5) and one commissioner, three times along the coaching process. A total of 30 interviews were undertaken.*
***Findings:*** *Coaching outcomes can be generated by three essential mechanisms: Projection of Future Self; Perspectivation of Present Self; and Confirmation of Past/Present Self. Each mechanism's name represents a particular effect on coachee's self and may evolve diverse coaching behaviours. Although they all can be actively managed to generate sustainability of outcomes, each mechanism tends to contribute differently to that sustainability.*
***Conclusion:*** *The study provides a comprehensive understanding of the different methodological and experiential ingredients of the coaching process and its implications. While most coaching research is focused on identifying coaching results based on a retrospective analysis, this is one of the first studies accompanying longitudinally the coaching process and capturing an integrative understanding of its dynamics. Moreover, the study provides evidence of how coaching can differently deliver sustainable outcomes and be used as a valuable developmental tool in organisations. The study contributes to our understanding of theory building and raises questions for further research on the uniqueness of coaching interventions.*
***Keywords:*** *coaching relationship; coach triad; commissioning managers; psychometrics in coaching; 360-degree feedback.*

## Introduction

COACHING aims to help individuals and organisations to become more effective, by reaching positive and significant results, through making intentional changes in behaviour, thought or emotion (e.g. Joo, 2005; Kilburg, 1996; Peltier, 2001; Peterson, 1996; Zeus & Skiffington, 2004). The popularisation of the term coaching, the growing success of professional bodies responsible for certifying coaches and the high number of individuals practicing as coaches, indicates that the activity involves a shared identity. However, inspite of this our knowledge of many aspects of coaching remain unexplored (Feldman & Lankau, 2005; Maher & Pomerantz, 2004; Palmer & McDowall, 2010; Zeus & Skiffington, 2004). The emergence of coaching psychology since 2000 has significantly contributed to the development of an evidence-based approach and a desire for a stronger theoretical framework (e.g. Grant, 2009; Latham, 2007; Peltier, 2001).

According to Grant et al.'s (2010) review, the study of coaching outcomes has been one of the most popular research issues. In general, the results from coaching research show that coaching; enables previous classroom learning to be transferred to real work situations (Miller et al., 2004), positively impacts


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leadership (Kampa-Kokesch, 2002; Thach, 2002), enhances goal-attainment, promotes resilience and workplace well-being (Duijts et al., 2008; Grant, Frith & Burton, 2010; Spence, Cavanagh & Grant, 2008), increases self-efficacy (Evers, Brouwers & Tomic, 2006), and improves manager performance (e.g. Kombarakaran et al., 2008; Luthans & Peterson, 2003; Smither et al., 2003). More recently meta-studies (Jones et al., 2015; Sonesh et al., Theeboom et al., 2014) have found an Effect Size that further supports the efficacy of coaching, as a comparable intervention to training and appraisal.

Studies assessing coaching outcomes do not clarify, however, what actually happens in the coaching process. Several authors have reinforced the importance of understanding the coaching process by focusing on coach behaviours that influence coaching outcomes (Boyce & Hernez-Broome, 2010; De Haan, 2008a, 2008b, 2011; Grant et al., 2010; Joo, 2005).

Given the multi-disciplinary nature of coaching, and the intimate nature of the coaching relationship, coaching processes are a particularly challenging subject of study (Kauffman & Bachkirova, 2008). The coaching use of a specific approach or models (i.e. CBT, MI or Systemic) can depend on diverse aspects, such as the theoretical and conceptual perspective of the coach, the coachee's readiness to change, the characteristics of the issue being addressed, or contextual aspects (Grant, 2011).

The diversity of coaching approaches may be expressed in terms of the aim of the coach's intervention and in terms of the specific session and the overall process. The aim of coaching can be external or internal. In an external, or output focused coaching intervention, coaching is focused on bringing about external changes, such as the development of a new behavioural skill or achievement of a statement goal. In internal focused coaching, the principal focus of the session is on personal development; the development of self-knowledge or self-reflective. The literature suggests that coaches must take greater care with internal focused coaching when working in organisations, as organisational clients may impose time restrictions for the number of sessions or seek clear measurable outcomes (Peltier, 2001; Thach, 2002; Whiterspoon, 2003).

How the session is structured provides direction and thus shapes the coach-coachee interactions across the coaching relationship. Session structure is recognised as a fundamental and positive attribute of the coaching process, providing guidance to the coach-coachee conversational interaction and helping the coach and coachee to stay focused (Bush, 2005; Grant, 2001; Gyllensten & Palmer, 2005). Research, however, has not explored how individual sessions are structured throughout the life of the coaching relationship; which typically can involve four to 12 individual one- to two-hour sessions or meetings (Boyce & Hernez-Broome, 2007; Grant, 2011). For instance, one relevant aspect is to clarify what factors might determine the sustainability of coaching outcomes (Joo, 2005; Smither, 2011).

There is some evidence that coaching can create sustainable impacts (see Grant, 2001; Green, Oades & Grant, 2006; and Libri & Kemp, 2006) over six months, 30 weeks and 18 months, respectively. But so far, no research provides evidence as to how this is achieved. As suggested by Smither (2011), compared to psychotherapy, research on the effectiveness of different coaching approaches is still in its infancy.

So, even though the diversity of coaching approaches may be interesting, these studies do not explain how coaching works, and research on coaching results has so far failed to provide a detailed explanation as to the how these outcomes are achieved. Accordingly, as Grant, Frith and Burton (2009) suggested, retrospective approaches to evaluation, where participants are asked their views once the intervention is completed, result in multiple biases, such as recall errors and demand characteristics. As a result in designing future research studies it is important to carry out research considering the

dynamics of processes while doing so using a longitudinal perspective (Baron & Morin, 2009; Boyce & Hernez-Broome, 2011; Grant et al., 2010).

What is also missing in the research to date are the multiple perspectives from the different participants in the coaching process. In executive coaching, this includes the coach and coachee, but also often includes the commissioning client/manager, who may be a more senior executive or the HR director. While studies have looked at coachee experiences or coach perceptions, few studies have involved all three stakeholders in the process; coach, coachee and commissioning client (Wanberg et al., 2003). Besides the lack of research, the organisational commissioner's perspective represents the interests of the organisation and thus has an important role in the process.

The objective of this study was to characterise the experience and perceptions of the coaching process according to coaches, coachees and commissioners. While undertaking it, the research team aimed to generate new insights on the complex phenomenon of coaching processes. Specific research questions were: (1) what happens; (2) why is that happening; and (3) what that is going to lead to, during the coaching process?

## Method

Several authors have noted the value of qualitative research in helping to understand the complex human processes involved in interactions such as coaching (Coe, 2004; Grant, Frith & Burton, 2009; Gyllensten & Palmer, 2007). The primary aim of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is to explore how participants perceive and make sense of their experience, and understand the meanings of that experience (Smith, 2008). As Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) suggest, IPA explores experience in its own terms and that's why it is phenomenological. IPA assumes that there is a relationship between individual's verbal accounts and their cognitions and emotions (Smith & Osborn, 2003). According to this, IPA research implies a dynamic process of interpretation in which the researcher attempts to get an insider's perspective of the participants' experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Due to its characteristics, IPA is especially useful to approach aspects such as complexity, human processes or novelty (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Considering the aspects described above, IPA was considered an ideal approach to explore individual experiences of the coaching process.

### *Data analysis*

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) provides guidelines that can be adapted by individual researchers in light of their research aims (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Stages used throughout analysis in this study first included using the left-hand margin to note descriptive and linguistic comments that appeared of interest. Next, the same margin was used to note the first conceptual comments resulting from the first reflections, questions or interconnections of the researcher, from a psychological perspective. Secondly, the right-hand margin of each transcript was used to transform the initial note into more specific themes or phrases, evoking psychological concepts and abstractions (Smith, 2009). This reflective process involved a vice-versa movement between inductive and deductive positions that enabled the first steps in conceptualisation of the content. In the next step, the data was further reduced by establishing connections between the preliminary themes and clustering them appropriately, according to their descriptive and conceptual nature. Interviews were first analysed independently and then grouped according to participant and the number of interviews. The first procedure facilitated the identification of themes across the interviews. The second procedure enabled the identification of the dynamic experience of the process. After the individual analysis for each participant, connections between participants were established until a set of super-ordinate themes was produced.

Data of different types of participants have been combined because the purpose of this study was to characterise the coaching process according to participants' perceptions and experiences *per se* and not to explore differences between them.

***Participants***

IPA usually implies a fairly homogenous sample, that is, a purposive sampling to attempt to find a more closely defined group for whom the research question will be significant. This homogeneity makes it possible for subsequent studies to be conducted with other groups and to gradually make more general claims (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). A sample size of one can be adequate, although generally studies have tended to use between five and 10 participants (Smith, 2009). Given the bi-partite or tripartite nature of the executive coaching relationship, research needs to include the perspective of not only the coach, but also the coachee and the organisational commissioners (Grant et al., 2010; Wanberg et al., 2003).

The study involved 10 participants of coaching processes: four coaches, five coachees – two of them were simultaneously coachee and responsible for the commissioning decision – and one organisational commissioner (HR director). The age of participants ranged from 38 to 63. Participants corresponded to three triads coach-coachee-commissioner and two dyads coach-coachee (both coachees were also responsible for the commissioning decision). The three triads and one of the dyads were organisational commissioning and the other dyad was an individual commissioning. All coachees were experienced in their professional activity and held management responsible positions in their organisations. The purpose of the coaching processes was to help coaches improve their performance at the workplace, including managing their teams under 'crisis', in decision-making, and enhance communication skills. Table 1 identifies and characterises participants in the study.

***Procedure***

The research team employed an opportunistic sampling, one of the most common procedures of sequential sampling (Teddlie & Yu, 2007), which is frequently used on qualitative studies (Bernard, 2004). The procedure consisted of a formal meeting with professional coaches (all accredited by International Coach Federation). The meeting agenda consisted of a presentation of the study objectives, general procedure and ethical considerations, and invitation to participate. Criteria for coaches participation in the study were: (a) being a certified coach; (b) having recently initiated or are about to initiate (within the next nine months) a coaching process; (c) respective coachee and commissioner are willing to participate in the study (both, preferably); and (d) organisational commissioning involving the

**Table 1: Distribution of participants according to the respective triads and diads.**

| | Coach | Coachee | Commissioner | Type of commissioning |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Triad 1 | C1 | A | Com1 | Organisational |
| Triad 2 | C1 | B | Com1 | Organisational |
| Triad 3 | C2 | C | Com1 | Organisational |
| | **Coach** | **Coachee-Commissioner** | | |
| Diad 1 | C3 | | Com2=D | Organisational |
| Diad 2 | C4 | | Com3=E | Individual |

triad coach-coachee-commissioner were considered preferential. Other relevant criteria for selection of eligible coaching processes were: (a) coaching objectives related to work and professional issues; (b) processes involving external commissioning of coaching services; and (c) coachees with management positions (preferential). All participants were informed of, and signed, the Research Protocol which established the research proceedings. Each participant was provided with a copy of the signed Research Protocol.

***Interviews***

Data was collected through three semi-structured interviews with each participant during the coaching process. As Grant, Frith and Burton (2009) noted, retrospective approaches to evaluation, where participants are asked their views once the intervention is completed, can result in a number of biases including recall errors and demand characteristics. Thus, it is also important to carry out research considering the dynamics of processes from a longitudinal perspective (Baron & Morin, 2009; Boyce & Hernez-Broome, 2011; Grant et al., 2010).

Interviews, ranged between 41 minutes and 1 hour and 37 minutes. They were audio recorded and conducted by the same individual. Participants were previously informed about the purpose of the research. All interviews were conducted in person, except one that was conducted over the telephone. Although as Weinberg, Butt and Knight (2001) noted, the use of different forms of interviewing is equally valid and in this study revealed no differences in research findings.

***Evaluating the analysis***

The analysis and interpretations of previous interviews were validated by each participant during their second and third interviews. Participants agreed with the interpretations provided by the research team in terms of how previous descriptions fitted in the preliminary emergent themes. The process allowed participants to complete previous descriptions and/or to add to it with other new information.

Considering the subjectivity of a qualitative analysis it is also important to note that research team members inevitably influenced the course of the study with their personal and professional perspectives. In this study, the researchers' interpretations were influenced by their experience in training in behavioural issues and HR consultancy, and previous research experience in coaching and work and organisational psychology. Nevertheless, an effort was made to minimise bias during interviews and during the interpretative process.

## Results

Three main themes emerged as part of the super-ordinate theme 'Mechanical Philosophy' of the coaching process. The three themes were 'Projection of Future Self', 'Perspectivation of Present Self', and 'Confirmation of Past/Present Self'.

The three themes were interpreted as mechanisms that operate during the coaching processes. Each mechanism relates to a set of quotations (referring to individuals' experiences and the identification of coaching behaviours) that evoke a certain structural organisation of the coaching procedure and/or coaching sessions. Also, each mechanism evokes a particular aspect of the 'experienced process', both in terms of its action on the self, and in terms of the changing management process. The expression coaching mechanics has been previously suggested by Boyce and Hernez-Brome (2007), and reported as one relevant aspect to investigate in coaching process. The term 'Mechanical Philosophy' was chosen by the authors to represent the coaching process as a changing and dynamic interaction between coach and coachee, in which both parties engaged in thoughts and reflections about events and how the process helped them plan or make sense of the past, present and future.

***Projection of Future Self***

The theme Projection of Future Self can be defined as the exercise of developing an imagery achievement (projection) of a goal (future self). It consists of generating motivation for action by decreasing the perceived distance between the coachee's aspirations (future self) and his/her reality (present self). This implies the movement of aligning the coachee's individual action with the objective(s) aimed for. The projection can be understood as the result of two cycles of reflection, carried out in sequence. In the first movement the use of imagery achievement (IA) of the self projected to the future, allows identification of the results the coachee intends to reach through the process. In the second movement the selection of actions (SA) is stimulated and involves identifying actions that will be useful in moving towards the results the coachee intends to achieve. As coach C2 describes:

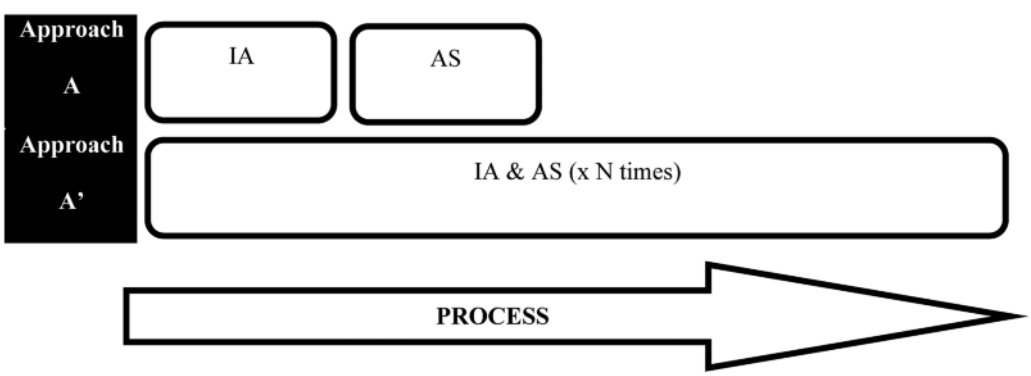
> *This exercise is done placing C very far in the future and then approximations are created* (C2, I).

The mechanism of Projection of Future Self gives structure directivity to the sessions through the two reflection cycles. However, that directivity of structure can vary in terms of when it is placed in the process and in the sessions, and also in terms of the depth and duration of each reflection cycle. This variation let us identify two approaches to this mechanism, which are illustrated in Figure 1. In the approach labeled as A, the projection is represented by dedicating one or more complete sessions, in sequence, to each reflection cycle, which gives structural directivity to a set of sessions at an early stage of the process. In this more exclusive dedication to each reflection cycle, structural directivity is also added to the first reflection cycle through carrying out exercises that are also structured and imply the coachee's imagery positioning in a scenario in the distant future. As coach C2 describes:

> *It's as if, by placing very far off, in the future, what is kept are the basic pillars that are important for that person, what they are, what their structure is, we're speaking for example about principles that are present throughout that person's life and which guide him* (C2, II).

Turning to the second cycle, structural directivity comes from an elaboration of a detailed and formal plan of action. This approach provides structural directivity to the set of sessions (typically four to 12 sessions) at an early stage of the process. In Approach B, there is less differentiation of the reflection cycles, through their more frequent use and also shorter duration, throughout the process. In this case, structural directivity is offered at specific moments during the process. As an example of this approach, coachee-commissioner

Figure 1: Approaches to Projection of Future Self.



Com2=D describes his coach's frequent use of metaphors, thereby mobilising (and assuming) the knowledge that the projected self has of himself and the process to reach objectives:

> *The way this coach works is with a lot of metaphors, with a lot of metaphorical games… Imagine which would be best, let's see… which would be your dream? my dream is… going from where the company is now to going as far as that position in the company. OK, now imagine you're in that position… what would that Com2=D say to this Com2=D?* (Com2=D, I).

In the following excerpts, from his first and second interviews, coachee C shows his differentiated experience of the two cycles involved in this exercise. In the first interview, C highlights the usefulness of the imagery achievement of results in terms of clarifying his objectives:

> *We understand that we want to get somewhere, OK… but often we don't even have a clear goal, where we want to go, and it's in this sense that I'm saying… that reflection… I think that C2 has helped me in some way… ah to think and become aware and in some way express those values, those objectives, those ambitions, all those things* (C, I).

Besides the specific outcomes identified above, it is also possible that the Projection, particularly during the exercise of imagery achievement, is mediated by an emotional reaction of discomfort, since according to coach C2, this exercise implies that the coachee focuses on the future, going against his tendency to focus on a reading of the current situation. As she describes:

> *Sometimes it's difficult for us to leave the present time, and the obstacles we have and place ourselves in the distant future… eh… because that causes us a certain discomfort not knowing very well… having to let go of a set of things, some of which we like, others not so much, but we know them all, when we do this exercise of going off into the future it's as if we've nowhere to give us support, isn't it?* (C2, II).

Figure 2 illustrates the outcomes of Projection of Future Self.

***Perspectivation of Present Self***

Perspectivation of Present Self consists of focusing and identifying beliefs, and reframing, re-construct or changing them in order to provide a more effective perspective. It involves helping the coachee to access the assumptions inherent to his/her present actions with a view to increase self-awareness and learning. Through perspectivation, the coachee is invited to question his/her own assumptions and to construct new possible assumptions, making him/her more able to assess and make his/her current action more appropriate and more favourable to obtaining results. According to coach C1, this experience of self-awareness and a change in self-perception is a determinant aspect and a guiding principle of his intervention:

> *It has a lot to do with self-awareness, with deepening self-knowledge, with the perception that mental models, or the way I considered my unity might not be the only one and very likely it isn't, more suitable to ensure better eh better results* (C1, II).

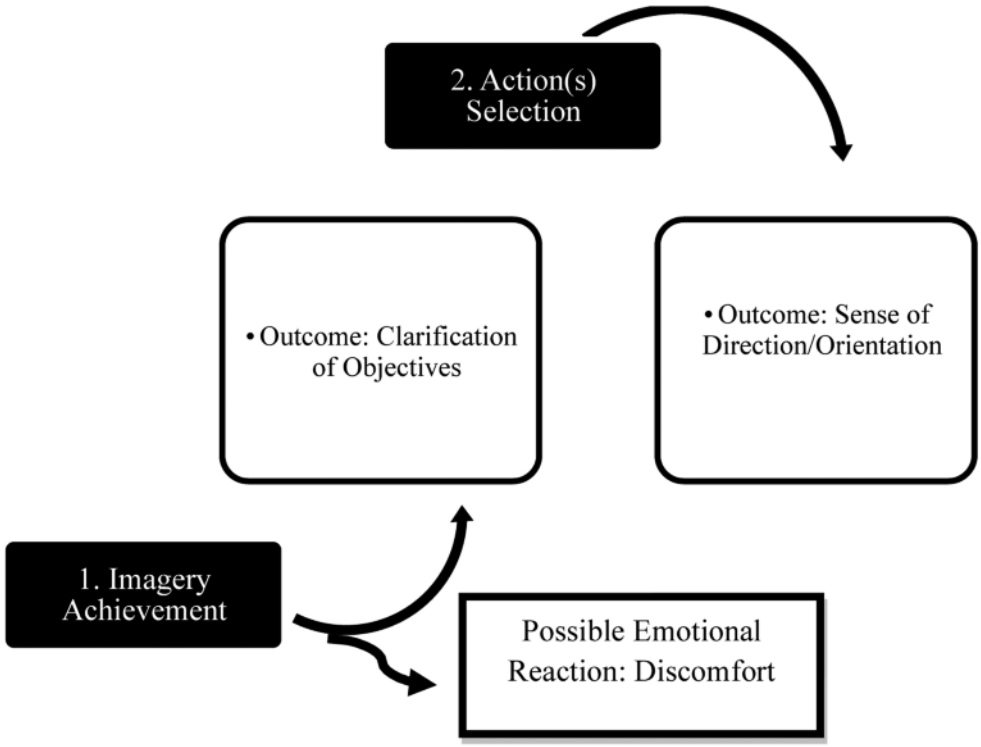
Perspectivation can be activated through assessment and/or through the coach-coachee conversation, both at an early stage of the process. In the case of assessment, the 360-degree emerged as an instrument particularly suited to perspectivation, in as much as it offers the coachee multiple perspectives of his performance, allowing him/her to compare others' assessment with their own self-assessment. In processes where assessment was made using the 360-degree, the choice of instrument was, in fact, made based on obtaining new possible readings of the coachee's action. As highlighted by commissioner Com1:

> *What's the first conclusion that you can make during a coaching process…? Are people seeing me the way I think they are?* (Com1).

In the following excerpt, coachee A confirms the importance of that feedback in learning about himself, in this initial stage of the process:

> *one thing I think is fantastic is knowing what others think about us… isn't it? Because usually it's something that… we think about*

**Figure 2: Projection of Future Self mechanism and outcomes.**




> *ourselves and believe what we think about ourselves is also what others think about us… Wrong, isn't it?* (A, I).

Also, by implying the adoption of a fresh perspective, coachee B points out the challenging nature of the perspectivation experience generated by the assessment:

> *understanding what reading people make of us, helping me to know better… eh… it was good, I felt there was a challenge there* (B, II).

Besides 360-degree assessment, the use of other instruments, such as public identity questionnaires and personality psychometrics, can create the perspectivation experience. As C4 describes, in their last interview:

> *Ehhh… look, this project had a very special characteristic for me which was, eh, the big push was given by the assessment through the PCM [Process Communication Model]. What… I don't know if I can consider it accidental, I don´t know… it had never happened to me, not that the PCM was that clear, concerning that person… and comprehension of the situation loosened the knot* (C4, III).

Besides the aspects identified above by coachees A and B, it is also possible that perspectivation implies an intense and contradictory emotional experience, associated with the coachee's learning about himself. In the following excerpt, coachee-commissioner Com3=E describes her own experience generated after getting back the assessment results:

> *a mixture, on one hand, of happiness, because of many competences I have and also a mixture, initially with some difficulty in accepting all this, particularly, this this… that I'm a person above all who's not big on relationships, am I?* (Com3=E, I).

Perspectivation as a mechanism activated at the core of the coach-coachee interaction, consists essentially of directing attention to

the assumptions and beliefs underlying the coachee's present action, and through that reflection, gaining access to different understandings of the same situations. As coachee A describes:

> *People when they speak follow a line of thought, don't they? And sometimes, the coach's intervention is exactly for the person to ask himself about the line of thought he has, that he's taking and that intervention is going to… sometimes see that really I could change my line of thought and that line of thought doesn't need to be the only way, perhaps there are more, more pathways, more ways… different ways of looking at, at our thought* (A, II).

According to coachee B, this questioning can even reveal itself to be effective in producing changes in the coachee's behaviour right from the initial sessions of the process:

> *in an instant, a great calmness came over me, he would take my own words and lead me to think about them and make me reflect… questions that made me think, that did me good,… reflections I got back, I'm sure, change some of my behaviour* (B, II).

Another relevant aspect of the Perspectivation of Present Self approach is stimulating the coachee's capacity for self-transformation, though the exercise of continuous self-questioning. This capacity for self-transformation provides the opportunity for greater self awareness, reflection and thus the maintenance of performance. In this sense, perspectivation contributes to the coachee's capacity to continually manage internal change, particularly once the process ends. As coachee B stresses, it is this exercise of self-questioning that gives her experience of the process a perception of sustainability of results and not learning directly associated with the specific objectives established in the process:

> *That is my biggest fear… that what I have learned can somehow fade away a little, now the reflection, looking inside, questioning what it is I can do, what can I do, what can I do, I think that exercise and its benefit is here inside… one of the great benefits of the process is learning to do this or make this very automatic* (B, III).

Further on in the same interview, B also highlights the contribution of this exercise in giving the capacity to become autonomous with regard to the process:

> *essentially he was a figure, a person who gave me, who helped me to orientate myself towards going alone, set me on a difficult path which is the path of self-assessment and going alone…* (B, III).

As we can also observe in the words of coachee C, the capacity for transformation via perspectivation comes from the coachee's focus on efficiency, as a transversal aspect of his action:

> *if we question all these processes, both ourselves and the processes through which we are involved and also try somehow to always organise things so as to gain more efficiency, we are always somehow managing with a view to continually obtaining better results, gains and bonuses and get things working better. More efficient, at least* (C, II).

By developing the capacity for self-transformation as a lasting and sustainable result, the same exercise meets the expectation of Com1 in terms of assessment of the process:

> *What I hope for is that each one involved, each coachee is aware that the company has just given him a tool. A tool for evolution, a tool for improvement and development. Because I know that some of the commitments taken on in the PDP will not yet be complete […]* (Com 1, III).

This capacity for self-transformation is also what sustains or meets the expected return on the organisation's investment. Also in his third and final interview, commissioner Com1 describes how the process can even have a determinant effect on strategic decision-making in terms of HR:

> *Ah, what I feel is that, point number one, we have to be more demanding with whoever was in the process […] the demands increase, today we are more demanding with the directors involved in this process. All that will have, at a first stage… one issue or another could be tolerated, at this moment it's no longer tolerated. There has to be a return and… it's normal… […] a decision can be made with a*

> *view to continuing or not continuing in the position, that can happen* (Com1, III).

Figure 3 illustrates the development and outcomes of Perspectivation of Present Self.

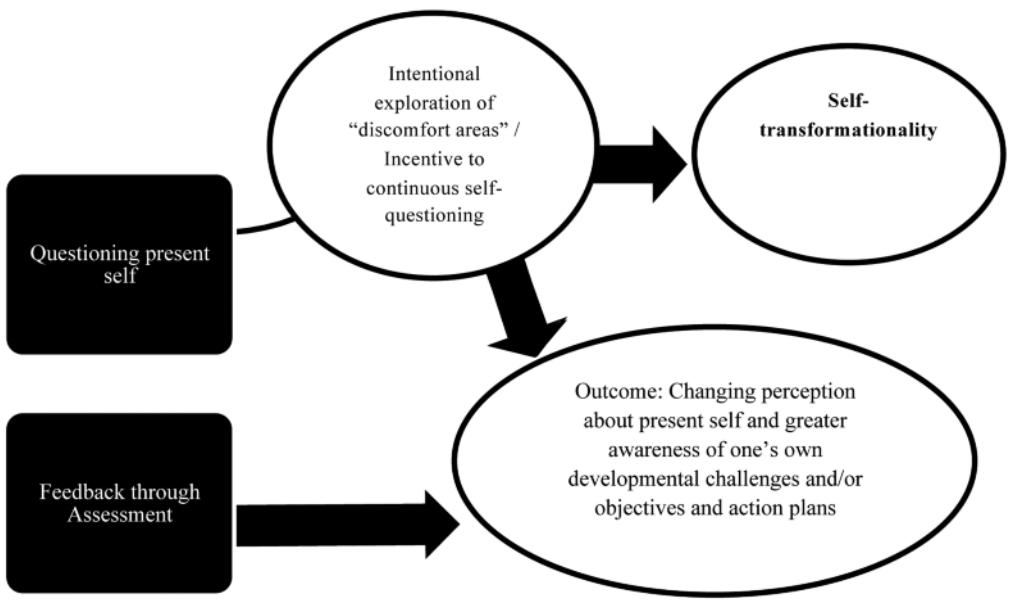
***Confirmation of Past/Present Self***

Confirmation of past and/or present self can be defined as the recognition and development of beliefs and actions that strengthens one's own behaviours and/or attitudes, which are useful in reaching goals. This process can be developed in two ways: through identification and mobilisation of the coachee's existing behaviours, competences or abilities, or through positive reinforcement of new behaviours shown spontaneously by the coachee during the process. The first approach consists of identifying other situations in the coachee's life with which the present situation he or she faces can be compared, or which in some way could activate the coachee's memory towards identifying competences and/or resources he/she has and that help him to manage the present situation. In the following excerpt, coach C3 describes the usefulness of this approach in making the coachee aware of his existing capacities. In this sense, a significant and recurring part of coaching work may consist of evoking other situations in the coachee's life that can help him to identify behaviours he already exhibits and which in some way can be applied to current specific situations in his professional life:

> *one thing that I learned… I've discovered with him, or confirmed with him… is the importance of finding ourselves in what the person knows how to do, and specifically in the extra-professional setting, ah… good examples and good practices of what could be possible in the specific case, good leadership practices, and that the coachee realises he already has those competences and that he already uses them in another setting and so it'll be relatively easy, or that practice could be inspirational for application in the professional setting* (C3, I).

For his coachee-commissioner, Com2=D, this approach contributes to increasing his perception of self-effectiveness, in this case, in the professional context:

**Figure 3: Perspectivation of Present Self mechanism and outcomes.**



> *as you can make the maximum use of an idea, how to find, perhaps a situation that's difficult to manage, find a similar situation in your private life, take examples of how you were able to manage a situation in your private life and take it to your professional life… If you're able to manage much more complicated situations in your private life, how are you going to manage the situation in the world of work, which doesn't stop being the world of work* (Com2=D, I).

In addition, confirmation of the present and past self can relate to behaviours and/or attitudes that the coachee shows spontaneously, supporting him at an initial stage of adaptation to the coaching work and his active role in the process. For example, coachee-commissioner Com3=E emphasises the importance of her coach's reinforcement during the initial stage of the process:

> *At the beginning there was an effort to give me a lot of reinforcement… as if through reinforcement I was finding an answer to my questions…* (Com3=E, II).

Also, the feedback from others (for example, colleagues) regarding the very changes being implemented by the coachee during the process can serve as reinforcement of those changes. This aspect is described by coach C1, concerning the development of listening behaviour by his coachee A, one of the actions included in his plan of action:

> *from where he least expected major contributions, when he listens to people, he's receiving significant contributions… and that'll help him* (C1, II).

This consolidation work favored by feedback from others contributes to the coachee taking possession of and gaining expertise in behaviours that are useful in following up the objectives. Confirmation of present self by consolidation of new behaviours are also part of coaching conversations. As coach C1 describes, this work aims to stimulate maintenance of the coachee's investment in implementing actions previously identified by himself as those allowing him to reach his goals:

> *Accompaniment can be important, above all because there are things that in the design of a plan I say 'promote conversations between the two of you to listen to my collaborator, to ask him how he's feeling, what areas of improvement he proposes to work on, what help I can give him'… but imagine that four or five conversations like that have no effect, and he begins to get… then the day-to-day pressure is very heavy…so… here the sessions feed the flame a little…* (C1, II).

Underlying this work, as coach C3 highlights, is the importance of the process promoting the sustainability of change actions which are being identified and implemented by the coachee:

> *Often what happens is that you have a quick win, that is to say, you leave the coaching session empowered and you carry it out and then you call the coach to say you managed it, but to create conditions of sustainable behaviour you need to work on it over time. Because you advance and then fall back. There are habits that are set and habits take time to pass…We need at least six months to sustain a change of attitude* (C3, II).

The mechanism of Confirmation Past/Present Self is illustrated in Figure 4.

Figure 5 presents the different possible approaches to Confirmation to Past/Present Self previously described.

## Discussion

The mechanical philosophy of the coaching process can vary according to the temporal positioning of the self in the future, present and/or past. Analysis revealed that each mechanism implies different specific coaching behaviours and approaches, and varied in terms of its presence and relevance among processes.

The use of different approaches for establishing objectives, such as Projection of Future Self and Perspectivation of Present Self, shows however, different positionings by the coach in relation to the methodological objectives of the process. If on one hand, Projection of Future Self sets out from imagery of fulfillment of the coachee's objec-

**Figure 4: Confirmation of Past/Present Self mechanism and outcomes.**

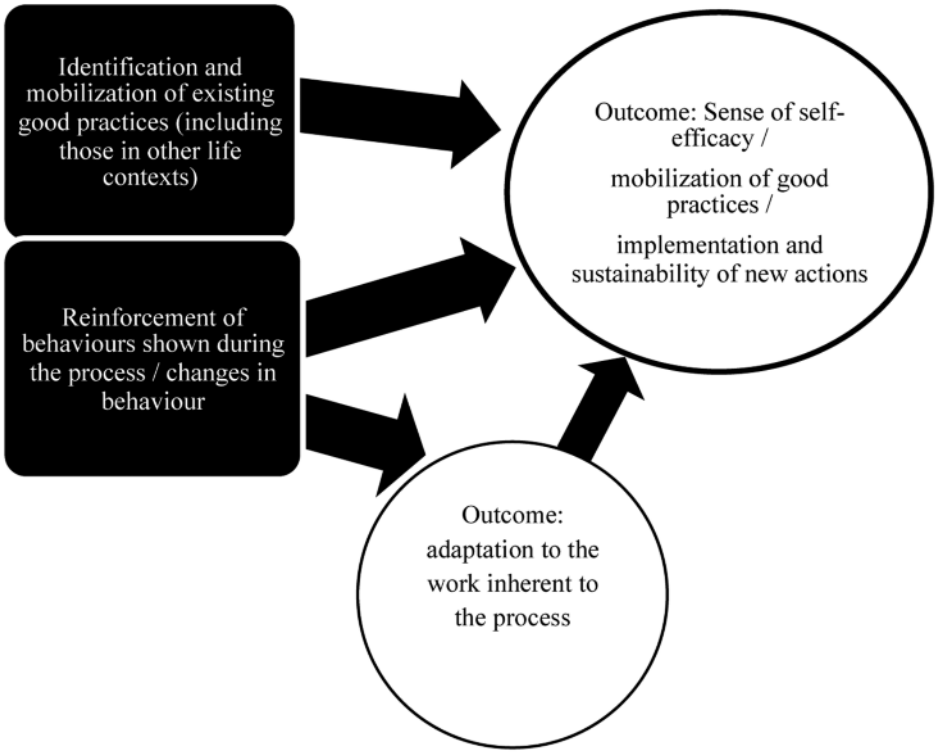
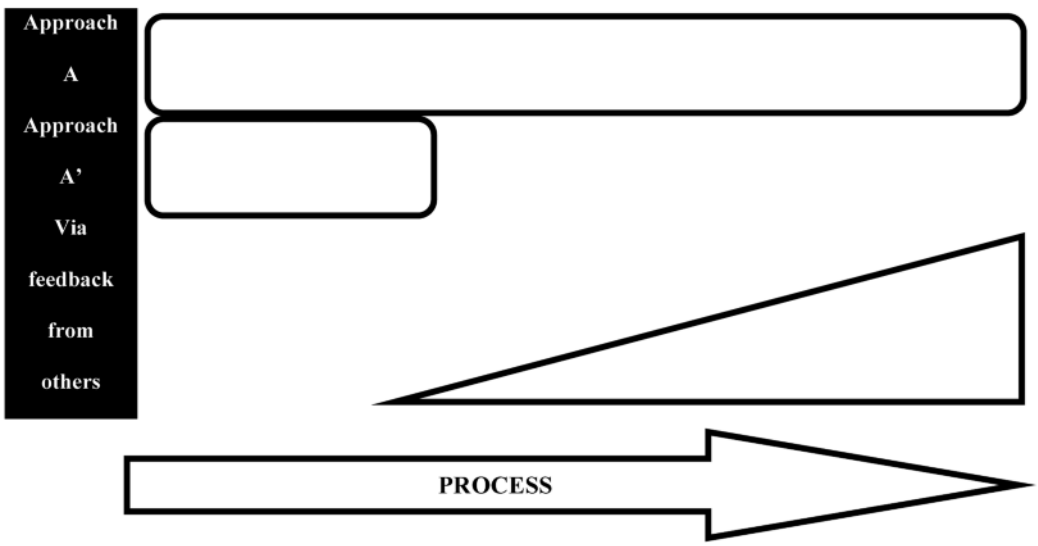



**Figure 5: Approaches to Confirmation of Past/Present Self mechanism.**



tives to construct action, Perspectivation of Present Self primarily concerns the creation of awareness of self in the current situation, leading to subsequent construction of the coachee's objectives, which tends to invoke changes in his or her present behavioural pattern. The emergence of these themes offers, therefore, clarification in expressing the external and internal coaching aims in methodological management of processes. In this sense, coaching behaviours may be easier to characterise according to their position in one approach or another. For the same reason, the array of procedures and experiences specific to each approach form eclectic scenarios that can be adopted by the diversity of existing coaching models. This discussion agrees with previous findings that coaching behaviours do not express self-designated coaching models (Passmore, 2008), suggesting, therefore, an understanding of those behaviours based on analysis of the identified mechanisms. In addition, accompaniment of the processes allowed confirmation that there may be quite diversified use of these mechanisms, both in the coach's specific approach within each mechanism and in exclusive or mixed use between mechanisms. From the methodological point of view, the use made of the above mechanisms seems to be the most determinant aspect of coaching processes, namely in terms of their effectiveness in work with different coachees and the sustainability of outcomes.

At a first glance, Projection of Future Self seems to be a mechanism indicated for more immediate identification of change actions. This mechanism offers structure to the process in two ways. In Approach A, the Projection of Future Self can offer structure to sessions throughout the process; in Approach A, the mechanism offers structure to an (undefined) set of sessions at an initial stage of the process, culminating in formal elaboration of an action plan. However, the coach's regulating focus on the temporal depth of objectives and outcomes – through the invitation he or she makes to the coachee to project the future self to a distant temporal scenario (including the end of his or her life) – stimulates intrinsic motivation by evoking the fulfillment of the coachee's personal values. This might offer an empirical evidence of the applicability of Self-Determination Theory to the understanding of coaching practices, as suggested by Spence and Oades (2011). In this sense, it would be relevant to investigate if temporal regulation of objectives can generate a greater promotion of well-being and vitality in individuals (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

In turn, Perspectivation of Present Self focuses on stimulating the production of a change in the coachee's internal vision of himself and the context. This mechanism, which can be activated more or less intentionally by the coach, offers structure to the process through the assessment and through the coach-coachee interaction, the latter being especially expressive during the first undefined number of sessions in the process. By being integrated in the coach's methodological approach, through promoting self-questioning by the coachee, the mechanism of Perspectivation of Present Self tends to promote the phenomenon of sustainability of the process outcomes through developing its self-transformationality, according to coachees and coaches. Therefore, self-transformationality is identified as a distinctive outcome of the process, occurring irrespective of the coachee's specific objectives. It is important to mention that attributing the name of self-transformationality arises from confirmation of the level of change this mechanism is able to stimulate in the coachee. In our view the prcoess can be compared to transformational learning (Mezirow, 1991), but is also applicable at an organisational level, for which the term 'double-loop learning' has been applied (Argyris & Schön, 1978). According to Mezirow (2003), transformational learning occurs when structures of reference are transformed in order to be 'more inclusive, discriminative, open, reflective and emotionally apt to change' (p.2). As a result of

**Figure 6: Type of outcomes according to mechanisms activated during the process.**

| Perspectivation of Present Self | Projection of Future Self | Confirmation of Past/Present Self |
|---|---|---|
| • Self-transformationality | • Alignment with life values and self-expansion (Approach A') | • Increased perception of Self-efficacy<br>• Facilitates coaching work<br>• Mastery of new implemented behaviours |

critical reflection, transformational learning can occur in the transformation of values, beliefs and attitudes (Mezirow, 1991). Accordingly, by stimulating coachee's autonomy in generating his or her own change, that is, in the generation of a new purpose, Perspectivation of Present Self enhances the sustainability of coaching outcomes, providing evidence for the suggestion of Gray (2006) that coaching can contribute to transformational learning. As evidenced in this study, this is high valued by the organisational commissioner, who perceives coachee's transformation as a desired and expected change during the coaching process.

Perspectivation of Present Self can also be understood as a mechanism that favors the development of the coachee's *autopoiesis*; a system capable of reproducing and maintaining itself (Maturana & Varela, 1973). In this sense, individuals, as autopoietic systems, exist simultaneously with their regenerative capacity, through the change in perspective and the relationship between their components. These assumptions are found at the basis of some coaching models, such as ontological coaching (Sieler, 2003) which is focused on increasing the coachees' capacity to observe their own way of being and create purposeful changes in language, emotion and/or physiology.

The two described mechanisms favor development of the integrity and congruence of self, a phenomenon identified previously by authors such as Grant (2006), and Griffiths and Campbell (2009). Complementary, Confirmation of Past/Present Self acts as an agent facilitating the coaching work and motivating implementation of actions through mobilising knowledge, competence and/or resources the coachee possesses and/or discovers during the process. This mechanism consists essentially in the identification and reflection about the coachee's strengths, that is, authentic behaviours, thoughts or feelings that energise the individual and contributes to optimal functioning and performance (Linley & Harrington, 2006).

Generally, sustainability of coaching outcomes seems to be determined by internality of change, which can be generated in two ways: by stimulating the internality of the established objectives – observed in the mechanisms of Projection of the Future and Perspectivation of the Present – and by Confirmation of Past/Present actions representing optimal performance levels. Nevertheless, mechanisms seem to have different functions and determinants. On one side, the development of self-transformationality in Perspectivation of Present Self contributes to the coachee's capacity for adaptation and co-creation of the scenarios in which he or she is involved and, thus, confers efficiency to the coachee's action. On the other side, Confirmation of Past/Present Self involves

identification and development of specific actions by the coachee which, through their progressive sedimentation, represent the development of capacities for action that are useful to accomplish specific objectives. This suggests the relevance of differentiating non-circumstantial from circumstantial coaching outcomes, respectively. The former seem to be particularly relevant in scenarios of change or instability. The latter, are suitable and functional for specific scenarios.

## Practical implications

Characterisation of coaching processes, particularly coaching behaviours and techniques, and the implications of coaching interactions, allows comprehension of the methodological characteristics of the activity, serving as a basis for reflection on the training and the very activity of professional coaches. Although the overall purpose of coaching professional bodies is to define guidelines for coaching practice and regulate the training of professionals, coaching is still a non-regulated activity and is fertile terrain for practitioners without the appropriate training (Joo, 2005). Similarly, the proliferation of coaching models creates more space for diversified attitudes and behaviours, and potential client confusion. The methodological characterisation of coaching processes and the understanding of its implications in coaching outcomes provides evidences of coaching identity and uniqueness as a developmental practice across models, clients and time.

## Limitations and further directions

This study aimed to unite a set of perceptions of participants in coaching processes, namely coaches, coachees and commissioners. Although we have accessed those perceptions, and with them obtained diverse experiences of coaching processes, we consider it would have been enriching to have joined a more uniform and balanced group of participants from the point of view of representation of each figure: coach, coachee and commissioner. In this case, it would be relevant to gain access to the perceptions of more organisational commissioners. In this connection, we also consider that bearing in mind the active role of the researcher in studies of this nature (Smith & Osborne, 2003), the analysis made represents a possibility for conjugation of data.

It is nevertheless important to stress that the information gathered from participants represents a considerable volume of data, which could originate subsequent studies. There is a need for a deeper characterisation of the three identified mechanisms, including the analysis of their application, their specific coaching behaviours and results. In addition, these findings suggest a need for a more critical review of the return on investment (ROI) evaluation method, using both circumstantial (ROI of circumstantial sedimentation) and non-circumstantial (ROI of transformationality) outcomes. Finally, further research should also focus in identifying other possible coaching processes mechanisms.

## Conclusion

This article provides evidence of how coaching processes involve different methodological mechanisms, which represent the use of organised coaching behaviours. It demonstrates how those mechanisms activate change in the coachee and contribute to sustainability of outcomes. The study revealed the emergence of two types of sustainable outcomes: those arising from progressive sedimentation (circumstantial) and those resulting from generating self-transformationality (non-circumstantial).

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# Spot-Coaching: A new approach to coaching for organisations operating in the VUCA environment

Wendy Wilson & Carmelina Lawton-Smith

***Objectives:*** *This study evaluated the outcomes of a new delivery format for coaching in a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) environment. It reviewed the impact on individuals of making external executive coaches available for individual coaching conversations to all employees at the TalkTalk Telecom Group. The research objective was to identify the potential contribution of this Spot-Coaching approach to individual development in a complex rapidly changing business environment.*
***Design:*** *A case study methodology was used to gather data from multiple stakeholders over a three-month period by independent researchers.*
***Methods:*** *The mixed method data collection included an online questionnaire, one-to-one interviews and a focus group.*
***Results:*** *Findings reported by participants included increases in confidence and communication skills, the development of personal responsibility and enhanced resilience. Results indicate that the Spot-Coaching model can be a valuable development tool for a wide group beyond the executive level. It also suggests that the delivery format common to executive coaching based on fixed and regular sessions with a consistent coach, may not be necessary or appropriate for all contexts in order to show positive results.*
***Conclusions:*** *Adapting coaching delivery to a more flexible and inclusive format that is in greater alignment with the culture operating in such VUCA contexts can deliver enhanced skills to organisations. In this study it appeared to encourage individuals to take greater personal responsibility for their own contribution and learning thus becoming more agile workers who can thrive in a constantly changing environment.*
***Keywords:*** *business coaching; coaching outcomes; VUCA environment; individual development; organisational culture change.*

COACHING has become a core development strategy for many organisations and the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development reports that close to 80 per cent of UK organisations now use some form of coaching to develop organisational talent (CIPD, 2010). However an external executive coach is frequently only made available to managers or senior leaders (Walker-Fraser, 2011) often in a structured programme of four or six sessions (Stokes & Jolly, 2014). In this case study we review how a new delivery format for coaching has been implemented at the TalkTalk Telecom Group plc and summarise some of the key outcomes. TalkTalk[1] operates in a highly competitive and rapidly changing telecoms and media market in the UK. Such contexts are often referred to as Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous (VUCA) (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014a). The aim of this study was to evaluate how the coaching approach chosen by TalkTalk meets the needs of the VUCA context and what outcomes were achieved.

This paper will start by describing the context for this case study with some information about the organisation where this research took place. This will be followed by a review of existing literature with respect to the VUCA context in relation to personal development. It will then move on to review literature about coaching outcomes that might be valuable in a VUCA context and to

[1] TalkTalk have given permission to publish this article and to name the organisation.


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highlight the role of cultural fit in coaching provision. The paper will then summarise the findings from this mixed methods case study, including data from a variety of stakeholders and discuss the potential implications. The paper will finally draw together conclusions, address limitations and identify areas for future research.

## The context

In recent years TalkTalk has experienced high levels of expansion and change, driven by both growth and acquisition. As a result of this rapidly changing, technologically driven context it became clear that the organisation's learning and development strategy would also need to change to support the skills needed in the new business environment. This is a common issue for many organisations experiencing consistent technological advances (Schuchmann & Seufert, 2015). TalkTalk operates in what is often referred to as the VUCA context (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014a). The telecoms market is changing rapidly, creating volatility and uncertainty about the future. Technological change creates ambiguity and the telecoms market has expanded to include information, entertainment and shopping. Some argue that labelling their business context as VUCA can become a way to excuse a lack of strategic planning but that what is actually needed is action to better prepare for such an environment (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014b). One aspect of this is how staff can be supported to build the skills needed to meet the challenges of the VUCA environment, as traditional training is in danger of being out of date very quickly and will often deliver a single performance outcome (Stewart et al., 2008). In contrast, coaching has been shown to deliver both personal and performance outcomes (Stewart et al., 2008) and can create experiential learning that is current and responsive to the immediate needs of the business. It can be delivered flexibly around personal schedules and work commitments and provides individual customised development that is both efficient and targeted. Coaching has been described as a 'human development process' (Bachkirova et al., 2014, p.1) and this brings a unique contribution to the VUCA context. By developing the individual, rather than just transferring knowledge, coaching can help workers to become more self-directed and better able to manage their own development so they ultimately become more agile and flexible to meet the constantly changing challenges.

At TalkTalk the desire to achieve cultural change in such a volatile context led to the launch of a bespoke leadership development programme. To support this programme an innovative coaching strategy called 'Spot-Coaching' (SC) was put in place to embed a coaching culture more widely within the organisation. We define Spot-Coaching as:

> *…an on-demand coaching conversation with an independent professional external coach, which is made available to all employees in an organisation.*

Spot-Coaching was designed with two aims. Firstly, to democratise coaching and make it available to everyone, whatever their level within the organisation, thus widening the use and benefits of coaching and demonstrating inclusivity. The second aim was to increase personal responsibility by helping individuals across the organisation to take ownership of their own learning and development. By building this personal responsibility, it was felt that individuals would become more self-directed and thus more able to respond to business challenges. The aim was to create more self-sufficient and independent learners so that staff might become more responsive, and therefore, more agile workers, better able to thrive in a VUCA environment.

Professional external executive coaches were made available for on-demand coaching conversations with any employee based on a booking system. The organisation allowed each employee up to three coaching sessions in a one-year period, which the employee could book and take as required. The scheme was publicised as a positive

opportunity to enhance individual personal and professional development. The Spot-Coaching model was, therefore, quite a fluid concept to mirror the culture that was being promoted within the organisation.

There was no formal assessment by the coach, no defined model that needed to be followed or implemented, and no regular follow up with a consistent coach. Each coach, once recruited as a suitable fit for the organisation, was asked to provide confidential coaching conversations and was able to use their own personal approach. The distinctive nature of this programme was therefore the lack of formal structure, availability to all, yet employing external professional coaches. External professional coaches are often engaged to provide long-term development interventions, with more informal coaching conversations provided by managers or internal coaches (Spaten & Flensborg 2013). TalkTalk felt that the confidentiality and expertise offered by external executive coaches would better support staff, if it could be delivered in a cost effective and timely way.

The objective of this case study is to evaluate how Spot-Coaching was received and what impact stakeholders reported on individual development in this complex rapidly changing business environment.

## Literature review

### *The VUCA context for development*

The VUCA acronym has become popular in practitioner literature (Horner, 2013; Swarbrick & Stearman, 2012), but relatively little academic research has been conducted with this specific focus in mind. This study aimed to evaluate this new SC model that had been designed to meet the needs of an organisation operating in the VUCA context, and to assess if this model would deliver the outcomes required to support staff working in this environment.

Some argue that the VUCA term can be used to justify the complete futility of strategic planning. Yet Bennett and Lemoine (2014a) argue that the four words that make up VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity) need to be clearly deconstructed and used to inform practice. It is not helpful in their view to generate vague solutions such as 'innovate' or to abdicate any attempt at planning for this context.

Bennett and Lemoine (2014a) suggest Volatility must be met with agility to generate flexibility in the system; that Uncertainty needs to be minimised with information; that Complexity of the context needs to be mirrored by the organisation so that restructuring happens regularly to meet emerging demands; and that Ambiguity needs to be met with active experimentation that allows new approaches to be tested when the 'rules of the game change' and no one is quite sure which is the best new approach.

The implications of such an approach are that the skills of the workforce also need to be re-evaluated and that the learning and development strategy needs to support individuals to develop the core competencies that are required to thrive in such a context. Table 1 (on next page) suggests the attributes that might support the objectives proposed by Bennett and Lemoine (2014a) which might inform the development strategy.

The development of such attributes can be addressed through training but coaching is another option that may better fit the VUCA context for two reasons. Firstly, coaching can be more flexible in terms of delivery and can be made available when it is both relevant and convenient. Secondly, coaching is well placed to offer the individual level of development that underlies many of the characteristics identified. Coaching has been shown to increase a number of the attributes mentioned (Grant et al., 2009; Stokes & Jolly, 2014) and may prove more effective for enhancing personal characteristics, such as confidence and self-efficacy where individuals may be less prepared to admit weakness, or to address such issues in a team or group training context.

Significant data already exists on the outcomes of coaching (De Meuse et al., 2009; Ely et al., 2010), however, within organisa-

**Table 1**

| | How to effectively address it | Skills required of the workforce |
|---|---|---|
| Volatility | Agility | Flexible mentality and the ability to see and hold alternative perspectives. The ability to take the initiative and responsibility for action, the ability to be accountable for their own development so that they develop more quickly the attributes required and respond to change more quickly. |
| Uncertainty | Information | Enhanced communication skills to ensure networks and information flow freely, the confidence to seek out information and to convey even difficult messages to all levels of stakeholders. Greater self-awareness of their impact on others and how to manage their behaviours to facilitate the flow of information. Willingness to collaborate with others. |
| Complexity | Restructuring | Resilience to deal with constant change and adaptability to new situations. To be self-reliant so that individuals do not rely on the hierarchy of command and are able to take responsibility for supporting change. |
| Ambiguity | Experimentation | Confidence to suggest new ideas and to question established approaches or hierarchy. High self-efficacy to motivate action towards testing of new ideas, the ability to set their own goals and to drive development conversations. Willingness to take risk. |

Adapted from Bennett & Lemoine (2014a).

tions, external executive coaches are often only offered to managers or senior executives based on an intervention lasting a number of months (Stokes & Jolly, 2014). The programme put in place by TalkTalk presented a new delivery format so it was unclear if this approach would show similar positive outcomes.

***Outcomes of coaching***

Coaching has become a common development strategy in the organisational context (CIPD, 2010) and although many forms of coaching exist a working definition suggested by Bachkirova et al. (2014) is:

> *'Coaching is a human development process that involves structured, focused interaction and the use of appropriate strategies, tools and techniques to promote desirable and sustainable change for the benefit of the coachee and potentially for other stakeholders'* (p1).

Gathering data on the impact of coaching is also still an area of considerable debate, with no commonly accepted procedure for evaluating coaching (De Meuse et al., 2009; Ely et al., 2010). However, numerous studies report positive outcomes from traditional executive coaching interventions that are aimed at managers and involve at least three formal sessions (Stokes & Jolly, 2014) with the same coach (Baron & Morin, 2010). In many cases the reported enhanced attributes are the characteristics that might be desired by organisations seeking to develop staff skills for the VUCA context, thus supporting the strategic aims suggested by Bennett and Lemoine (2014a).

Grant et al. (2009) reported increases in goal attainment, resilience and wellbeing in executives following four individual coaching sessions with external coaches based on a Solution-Focused approach. Yu et al. (2008)

also measured increases in pro-activity, core performance, self-insight, wellbeing and goal-attainment although not all individual scales showed positive movement. Bowles et al. (2007) reported positive impacts on performance when middle managers received coaching from internal more experienced managers. Internal coaching has also produced increases in self-efficacy following a coaching programme over a two year period (Leonard-Cross, 2010).

In contrast, Sherlock-Storey et al. (2013) found no significant change in self-efficacy following three 90 minute coaching sessions over a six-week period. However, participants did report significant positive changes in resilience levels and confidence in dealing with organisational change following the coaching programme. This coaching programme delivered by external coaches, was specifically aimed at helping individuals facing organisational change and increasing their resilience. Coaching executives through times of organisational change has also been associated with 'increased goal attainment, enhanced solution-focused thinking, a greater ability to deal with change, increased leadership self-efficacy and resilience, and decrease in depression.' (Grant, 2014, p.258).

The positive effects of executive coaching are, therefore, well documented, with positive outcomes reported using both internal and external coaches. However there is some evidence that perceived effectiveness is higher when using external coaches who are psychologically trained and have credibility with the target group (Bozer et al., 2014). Within the scheme being evaluated in this study, the use of external coaches was felt to bring greater credibility to the coaching and also ensured confidentiality.

The data available on the effectiveness of coaching outside the executive or managerial sphere is more limited (Jones et al., 2015). Most of the existing literature evaluates the impact of executive coaching delivered as a long-term intervention of often between three and six sessions. However, little work has established if similar effects might be seen with much shorter interventions or with non-executive groups. Blackman-Sheppard (2004) argue that 'the foundation stones for executive coaching – quality integrated thinking, confidentiality, trust – are equally important to all its people if an organisation is to perform well financially and sustainably' (p.5). There may therefore be substantial benefits in making coaching available to a wider population. In addition, Smither et al. (2003) did report positive impacts on managers who received coaching despite 45 per cent of the sample meeting their coach only once or twice, resulting in an overall sample average of only 2.42 coaching sessions per participant. Others also advocate the value of brief coaching interactions (Hicks & McCracken, 2013; Szabo et al., 2009).

The common model based on executive coaching requiring extensive meetings with a regular external coach aimed at only top levels may, therefore, merit further investigation. The organisational culture required to succeed in a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous context is one of agility and responsiveness. The organisation needs to support the development of adaptable, agile and innovative workers who are self-driven and able to respond to constantly changing demands. To try and achieve this with highly structured regular formal meetings aimed at only the elite top levels, seems a poor fit for the context, and fails to model the very behavioural profile that the organisation may be trying to promote.

***Organisational alignment of coaching***

At TalkTalk the objective was to mirror the desired culture with the coaching offer by providing flexible, responsive coaching that was available to everyone. The aim was to demonstrate the cultural shift required in how the coaching was set up. The programme encouraged everyone to take part thus delivering a message of inclusively, and devolved responsibility: it was short term, agile and flexible – all the characteristics that

TalkTalk sought to promote in the new organisational culture. HR took a minor role in the organisation of the scheme and simply provided the framework. It was the responsibility of individuals to take the initiative and to sign up, again a characteristic that the organisation was seeking to encourage in the day-to-day working context. Finally the organisation was not involved in the setting of goals or milestones known as 'Free-Agenda' coaching (Jarvis et al., 2006). Again, this was a clear indication to employees that the organisation was willing and able to support growth and development, but that individuals needed to take responsibility for moving forward and setting their own goals. This approach represents a clear application of the principles proposed by Fillery-Travis and Lane (2006) who advocate the need to ensure the coaching approach used addresses a coherent set of aims in a consistent way. TalkTalk, therefore, demonstrated alignment between the organisational context and the coaching framework set in place (Jarvis et al., 2006).

The purpose of this research was to identify if positive effects might be seen when coaching was not delivered in a formal programme and aimed at a far more diverse client group. The TalkTalk scheme was aimed at all levels of staff and involved no long term commitment. If this delivery format proved to be successful in such a complex, technologically driven and rapidly changing environment such as TalkTalk, it may become a suitable development option for other environments enabling the benefits of coaching to reach a wider population.

## Methodology

A case study methodology was used to gather data from multiple stakeholders by two researchers who were independent of the organisation, although one had coached within the organisation. The data collected over three months was based on three sources.

1. Internal documentation and intranet information
   - A review of the on-line documentation from the organisational website.
   - Access to the post-Spot-Coaching internal survey.
2. Online anonymous questionnaire to coachees

   Forty-two responses to an online questionnaire to coaches. Between June 2012 and March 2013, approximately 219 employees from across the organisation had taken advantage of one Spot-Coaching session, 34 employees had received a second follow-up session. All 219 were sent an e-mail invitation to complete the anonymous questionnaire, of which 42 completed the questionnaire.
3. Interviews with a variety of stakeholders
   - One focus group discussion with all coaches used on the Spot-Coaching programme.

     The four coaches involved were asked to take part in a focus group and all agreed.
   - Six one-to-one interviews with members of HR and HR Business Partners (HRBP).

     The HR department identified individuals who had some experience of the programme and these individuals were asked to take part in a short interview. These individuals represented various levels and locations but participation was voluntary.
   - 11 one-to-one follow-up interviews with coachees across three sites.

     Questionnaire respondents were asked to add their e-mail address if they were prepared to take part in a subsequent follow up interview.

The objective of the research presented here, based on these three data sources, is to identify the potential contribution of Spot-Coaching to individual development in a complex rapidly changing business environment.

***Spot-Coaching format***

A cadre of four external coaches was made available on certain days of the month across all the TalkTalk UK office sites. These executive coaches had no specific SC expertise but the organisational selection process did try to identify coaches who would be happy to work in such an unstructured way. Coaches were then briefed on the organisational context at TalkTalk and how the scheme would run. Any member of staff could book a one-to-one session lasting 90 minutes. All staff could book up to three sessions a year but there was no guarantee of meeting the same coach. In creating this flexible and immediate format for the delivery of coaching, TalkTalk aimed to align coaching with the desired culture of the organisation. The organisation would support and provide development opportunities that staff could take advantage of, but individuals had to take the initiative. The intervention was short term and staff were expected to set their own goals. There were no boundaries regarding which workplace issues could be discussed and the coach worked completely independently with no line manager/HR report back required.

SC was advertised on the company intranet together with general information about coaching. Any individual could then book a session with the available coach on a set day of the month through HR. The often late confirmation of clients meant that spot coaches were not able to prepare for sessions, therefore, any benefits would be gained purely from the coaching conversation as the use of assessment, tools and psychometrics was limited. Following the session there was no commitment to a second meeting and no guarantee that a follow-up session would be with the same coach.

***Research participants***

All interview participants were given a Participant Information Sheet to read and asked to complete a consent form before the start of the interview. The online questionnaire also included participant information at the start that confirmed participation was voluntary. This was clearly understood as the return rate was 35 per cent, meaning 65 per cent opted to not take part. The questionnaire was completed by 42 coachees from four divisions and all office locations. It included responses from four different grade bands and covered a cross section of ages, 48 per cent were between 25 to 34 years, 27 per cent were between 35 to 44 years and the rest declined to say. There was a slight bias towards male responses (54 per cent) to female (43 per cent) that is in line with the company profile. Only 22 per cent of respondents had been with the company less than one year, 54 per cent one to four years, and 24 per cent more than five years.

The coaches were asked if they would be prepared to attend a confidential focus group, which all four agreed to do. No member of the organisation was present and the session was recorded and transcribed.

Members of HR staff were asked to volunteer to take part in confidential interviews with the researchers. Volunteers came from every level of HR giving a broad cross-section and were contacted independently by the researchers to arrange an appropriate time and venue. All interviews were recorded and transcribed.

All coachees who had taken part in the SC programme were sent the research questionnaire link that was held on an independent platform. Responses were anonymous but the last question asked if they would be prepared to take part in a follow up interview. Those who were prepared to take part added their e-mail to be contacted directly by the researchers. All interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Following data collection the interview data was analysed using NVivo software for thematic analysis. The questionnaire data was then linked with the emerging qualitative themes to provide the multiple perspectives appropriate to case study research.

***Questionnaire***

The self-report questionnaire included ten qualitative questions such as:

- *Can you describe one example of how the coaching has had an impact? What, if any, feedback have you had that might relate to the impact of the Spot-Coaching?*

It also contained 25 Likert-style questions in which respondents had to rate the degree to which they Agreed or Disagreed with a statement on a five-point scale, for example, The Spot-Coaching I received helped me to…

- *Build my confidence.*
- *Deal more effectively with uncertainty and change.*

The questions focussed on five key areas:

1. Self-Managed Learning: The degree to which SC had influenced their ability to take charge of their own development.
2. Behaviour/Attitude/Skills: The degree to which they felt any of these attributes had changed.
3. Reactions: How they felt subjectively about the scheme.
4. Organisational commitment: How the programme had influenced their commitment to the organisation.
5. Process: Feedback on the process of implementation and communication.

***Interview questions***

In order to ensure come consistency of structure all three participant groups (coaches, coachees, HR) were asked similar questions during the interview, grouped into four categories. The categories were:

1. Best Practice – this covered aspects of what worked well and included procedural and logistic topics.
2. Support for Personal Development – this section asked for perceived changes experienced or seen.
3. Contribution to Organisation – this section asked for examples of how the programme might be linked to the strategic or business environment.
4. Reactions – here participants were asked for feelings about the scheme.

The interviews therefore followed a semi-structured format with key areas for discussion and specific prompt questions. However, participants were encouraged to elaborate where necessary.

The quotes below are anonymised according to the following annotations: C denotes a coachee response, followed by I,W or L to represent their work location, plus a number. For example 'CL2' is coachee participant number two, based in London. Central HR are coded as 'HR' plus a number and all HR Business Partners are identified by 'HRBP' plus a respondent number. All coach responses are labelled 'Coaches'.

## Findings

All of the survey respondents felt SC could be useful for everyone and was something they would like to continue. Many felt the experience was invaluable and often described it as life changing or an 'epiphany'.

Quantitative survey results from SC attendees highlighted a significant number of positive outcomes that were further supported by the qualitative data from interview participants. These included an increase in confidence and communication skills, the development of personal responsibility and accountability and an increase in taking responsibility for their own personal wellbeing. The main themes that emerged in relation to personal development will be discussed below and were:

- Confidence.
- Improved interactions and communication skills.
- Enhanced self-awareness.
- Greater personal responsibility and accountability fuelling action.
- Clarifying a career development path.
- Wellbeing and resilience.

***Confidence***

Of the survey respondents, 95 per cent agreed that SC had helped build their confidence and many coachees gave examples of how they felt their confidence had increased.

> *It's certainly having the confidence to go out and do. Sometimes you stop yourself doing things for all the wrong reasons rather than all the right reasons, so it's recognising that some of the things you're doing are for the wrong reasons. So it's highlighting those and giving you the confidence to get on and do it.* CI3

Some coaches, HR and the HRBP's, had also noticed these changes in confidence.

> *…they begin to feel really important, it's a boost to low confidence and low self-esteem.* Coaches

> *From being one of the quieter members of my employee reps, he's probably been one of the more prominent members in that he nominated himself to become one of the national members so I think it was related to that – could be – but I've certainly noticed a change in him.* HRBP1

This increase in confidence manifested in the business in a number of ways. Firstly it was increasing self-awareness and helping employees deal more effectively with feedback they received.

> *It's made me more confident, made me aware of how I deal with people, made me aware of how I take feedback. I might have taken things personally before but I am more aware of communication styles now.* CL5

Secondly it improved interactions between people.

> *Confidence – definitely beneficial – I think, I have built a relationship very quickly with someone who I think will help me with my development so it's about facilitating that conversation. So from starting to try and construct this process last year, coaching has now helped me develop that conversation and that process so now I can talk around it and ask those people 'what do you think about it?' so it's a growing idea.* CL4

Thirdly it helped employees to have a voice and develop the confidence to be heard with regard to suggesting and making improvements in the business.

> *I think its confidence… because I'm more confident. People are sitting up a bit more… so now if I was to say something that actually we should do XYZ, I am able to vocalise and people actually listen. Now I have the confidence to say, 'actually I CAN make a change' so I am motivated to come in and actually say I think this will be better so let's give it a go and see if we can make improvements.* CL3

This increased confidence gave some individuals the ability to question the status quo and to enhance performance and working processes. In addition, it gave them the confidence to have potentially difficult conversations with others. Ultimately this made an impact on decision making because employees were more open to ask about the opinions of others without feeling threatened and to put their own thoughts forward for debate.

> *Now I would go to my boss or my bosses boss and say 'you asked me to do this but I think this is more important' and I would not have done this before… so it impacts my ability to make decisions in my role.* CL2

***Improved interactions and communication skills***

The enhanced confidence was explained by participants as helping to drive better communication. There also appeared to be a cyclical relationship whereby improved communication skills precipitated better interactions, which in turn, fuelled an increase in confidence.

> *Feeling invested in has made me feel more positive in myself. It has made me think about when I'm communicating with people, the need to communicate in a different way depending on who it is – alter communication styles to overcome some of the frustrations, which I certainly had in the way I've been communicating information. So making it more short and succinct has helped me to form better relationships with some senior people… has reassessed their opinion of me which in turn has made me more confident and I feel better about myself and the contribution I'm making –it's self-perpetuating.* CL5

Over 75 per cent of survey respondents agreed that the SC had improved their communication skills and 80 per cent agreed that they were more able to effectively deal with difficult situations or people.

> *I was really struggling with this person – couldn't approach them, couldn't get on with them. We were constantly clashing and now I haven't got the best relationship in the world but I can speak to them and deal with the business issues that arise with that person. And that was me realising that I would have to change my behaviour to get this relationship to work. I couldn't just blame x, I had to change my own behaviour around x which I did.* CW2

Some also reported having received positive feedback on the changes they had made.

> *Thoroughly worthwhile and given dealings I've had with one person as a result of the session and the positive feedback I've had from him, yes I'm pleased.* CL1

Overall, 73 per cent of the survey respondents believed that SC enhanced skills relevant to their job and much of this related to developing better interaction skills with others.

> *It promotes better teamwork. If I can get a team of 10 people to do something by just being nice to them, it is better utilisation of resources and links to better customer service.* CL2

In summary, it appears that communication skills were perceived as having improved and this helped create better working relationships, which could potentially drive productivity.

***Enhanced self-awareness***

Some of the improvement in communication was driven by enhanced self-awareness. Nearly 88 per cent of survey respondents agree that their self-awareness had increased.

> *It has made me more self-aware than I was before… I am very, very blunt and do not think I understood how my bluntness came across to people, especially those lower down the organisation than me… I came across as rude but I was just trying to direct. I am much more self-aware of how I come across and spend more time reflecting on how I say things.* CL2

There were consistent reports that this self-awareness was making people more aware of their own emotions and behaviours. Once they developed this awareness they started to appreciate the impact these behaviours had on others and on their own potential career prospects.

> *I didn't understand the effect – that those around me could have an impact on my career development – I didn't get it. My boss tried to explain it but I didn't understand it … those people were just there… I got that completely wrong.* CL2

SC appeared to help people take a new, often more objective perspective in situations. This development of emotional control was reported as supporting better interactions and often contributed to solving business problems.

> *It's that ability to step back, to take that moment before you jump in with both feet and see it from the other person's perspective.* CI2
>
> *Ultimately an important element in this is when people say 'I've been working on this and really struggling with this but I'm now coming at it from a different angle because I've thought about it with my coach and I've unlocked it…' – it's about getting an 'outside looking in' perspective and getting people to reflect on that and we're ultimately helping them to achieve some tangible things that they've been working on.* HRBP1

Self-awareness therefore appeared to increase, and this was in line with the strategic aims of the programme.

***Greater personal responsibility and accountability fuelling action***

One of the primary goals of the Spot-Coaching (SC) programme was to encourage personal responsibility for learning and it would appear this goal was realised by survey respondents.

- 98 per cent of survey respondents reported that SC had helped them to appreciate their own role in their personal and professional development.
- 92 per cent of the survey respondents agreed that SC was valuable in helping them take charge of their personal development.
- 92 per cent had subsequently taken positive action towards their own professional development as a result of the SC experience.

- 90 per cent agree that they are now more confident to manage their own personal development

  *It probably made me more accountable – made me feel like I own my personal development more.* CW3

  *Definitely more ownership for learning – that sort of subconscious thing I was referring to – that's the bit that has changed I guess because I've realised that if anyone is going to do anything about it, it's me not somebody else. How much I go down that road is dependent on time etc. but it is still there – it's in my thought processes – it's stuck there now.* CL1

HR also noted this impact.

> *There are a couple of people who are really negative about where they were going and about their career and what was available to them. They were probably of the mindset of 'why bother?' They were very much not taking responsibility for their own destiny. Following coaching you can see a significant change in their mindset.* HR2

In taking responsibility for personal development many coachees also took steps towards greater personal responsibility in other aspects too.

> *As soon as I realised that was what I didn't like, it was right then – 'what can I do to change that?' …being much more proactive about it… and now I know that if I don't like a situation I have to stand back and say 'right what is it that isn't right?' and 'how do I take control of that?' I can't sit there and be a victim.* CL3

Coaches also noted this change in responsibility that manifests as empowerment enabling greater pro-activity.

> *I think what I tend to find prior to working with them is resignation and I think what tends to happen as a result of the session or when they come back is that they tend to feel enabled, empowered or able to actually take responsibility for what they need to do in a way that feels hopeful – not hope just to make them feel better but something constructive and I think that effects the spirit.* Coaches

This is in line with what HR wanted to achieve. In supporting personal responsibility for learning, this was cultivating a cultural mindset that supported responsibility in other areas of the business.

> *Getting them to think differently, to take more responsibility of themselves as individuals… Our philosophy is that we want people to take ownership and to drive the development agenda themselves so we will put the support and the tools in place to make that happen. But part of that coaching session is getting people to think really differently and to take more ownership themselves and that can flow into other things, not just development but across the organisation. So for me that is a critical cultural mindset change as well.* HRBP2

Once people appreciated and accepted their personal responsibility they felt empowered to take action to make things happen. Many reported examples of how they had gone on to take specific action. For some this related to taking action on future development.

> *So my objective is to learn about a new area of the business, so I have the motivation for that engagement… yes the same thing – a personal ownership for learning – I have created a structure and this allows me to go back to my manager and to say this is what I want to do before the next session.* CL4

However, for others the action taken was a business related idea.

> *It has prompted me as well – I've got a big idea about new project development – I'm in research so it's helped me think about the people I need to go and talk to and how I'd approach them.* CL4

Overall there were many examples where coachees felt an increased sense of control and were able to convert this to action.

> *These people go out and they make a difference – they go out and they change the way they operate – they communicate differently with their team. And those difficult relationships they have going on can be made different or they cannot be made different or they decide how they want to progress – where they're going to go for help with their need, you know which department they would really like to be in.* Coaches

Feedback highlighted that the SC scheme had acted as a catalyst for taking action in a number of ways: Firstly, personal responsibility for making changes that created the attitude, energy and desire to take action. Secondly, building the confidence to engage with others to facilitate the change required, through appropriate conversations and interactions. Finally supporting the motivation to become more proactive and engaged in the change process because individuals were more hopeful and believed their actions were more likely to succeed.

***Clarifying a career development path***

The personal responsibility for self-development was also having an impact on potential future career paths. 97 per cent agreed that SC had helped them focus on what they were working towards in the future. 70 per cent agreed that the coaching had given them permission to manage their own career and learning, and 87 per cent said it had helped them appreciate the next steps to take their career further.

Others reported that the SC had given them space to think about short and long-term options, and to highlight or discuss possible career paths with others. For some, this resulted in more suitable career paths being identified that could ultimately aid retention.

> *There's one guy who was in a team lead role who was really struggling and was at breaking point. He had two coaching sessions and after the second session he decided he did not want to be in a team-leading role, it was not for him. So there are changes being made within his team and he is feeling so much better about it.* HR2

***Wellbeing and resilience***

In line with previous findings (Grant et al., 2009) coachees reported that coaching was supporting their wellbeing and resilience.

> *It has increased my resilience. For me I'm not as impacted when people treat me in a way that I don't want to be treated. So when that happens my resilience will be 'if you're treating me like that now, what can I do to change their behaviour towards me?' So I put more ownership on myself rather than blame others. I'm in a role where I have to have relationships with a lot of different people so if I don't have this approach I'm never going to get anywhere in my job.* CW2

This seems to link back to the concept of having more control, self-awareness and Emotional intelligence that has enabled self-management. Many used the SC to help them develop personal tools and techniques that have enabled them to notice and deal with triggers that could cause stress.

In total, 95 per cent agreed SC has increased their personal resilience and 78 per cent agreed that it had helped them more effectively deal with uncertainty and change.

Overall the SC programme was perceived to have had an impact on many individuals across the organisation. Reported impacts included building confidence, improved communication skills, enhancing self-awareness and greater personal responsibility. For some it was also helping to define future career paths and was identified as instrumental in supporting resilience and wellbeing. Many of these skills will be of direct relevance in better equipping staff to deal with the VUCA context and align well with skills potentially required to support the Bennett and Lemoine framework (2014a).

## Discussion and conclusion

Like many organisations TalkTalk is challenged with operating in a fast paced environment. In this context people development can prove challenging, yet the organisation has been able to implement an effective, innovative, on-demand coaching scheme that supports the personal development of all staff in line with the strategic goals of the organisation. That strategic goal was to develop the skills, attitudes and behaviours required for staff to thrive in the VUCA context. Below we will highlight how some of the findings might relate to the aspects identified by Bennett and Lemoine

(2014a) as valuable in the VUCA context, namely, information, agility, restructuring and experimentation.

This case study found reported increases in confidence that helped people take the initiative and speak up. There were also specific examples where this allowed new ideas to be discussed and new communication routes to be opened. Enhanced communication skills were a key feature of many of the examples reported that would clearly facilitate the flow of **information** around the company. This coupled with improved self-awareness was supporting more successful interactions that also helped build and maintain information networks that could help to reduce uncertainty.

Coachee participants reported better resilience in dealing with change, together with enhanced wellbeing that helped them deal with ambiguity and volatility. By becoming more self-reliant and embracing personal responsibility for career choice and development, it could be argued that workers can develop the **agility** required in this context, and may be better equipped to deal with the potential **restructuring** that is often the result of change.

In a number of cases individuals reported now having the confidence to suggest and generate new ideas that could also help contribute to future change. This confidence also extended to taking action on new ideas that may help contribute to the culture of **experimentation** that supports growth in the VUCA context.

Overall outcomes therefore, appear positive following the implementation of this programme: Bringing professional external coaching to a broader population beyond just the executive pool, has delivered enhanced skills to the business and encouraged individuals to take greater personal responsibility for their own contribution and learning. In doing so, employees are learning to become more agile workers who can thrive in a constantly changing environment. The outcomes reported are therefore likely to support the tactical imperatives suggested by Bennett and Lemoine (2014a) as ways to effectively deal with the VUCA context.

This SC programme was delivered in a format that was felt to be more appropriate to the VUCA context, with fewer sessions, booked at short notice with more immediacy and less formal assessment. The positive outcomes reported suggest that such a format could be appropriate for the VUCA context and can deliver results in such a format. It also demonstrates that coaching provision may not need to follow a formal pattern of assessment followed by four or six sessions with a regular coach. It appears that coaching can deliver dividends even with one-off coaching conversations. This supports the work of de Haan et al. (2011) who found that specific interventions are less helpful to clients than the relationship and empathetic understanding that a coach provides. This means that professional external coaching delivered in this more cost effective format might have a much wider application and be a valuable development route for staff at all levels in the organisation.

This case study represents an initial attempt to evaluate how professional coaching can contribute to an organisation in the VUCA context. Such contexts present challenges in people development to identify approaches that not only develop appropriate skills, but that can also be delivered in a way that maximises cultural fit. The results of this study are therefore valuable to development professionals who may be looking at innovative ways to deliver a people development strategy that is in-line with a highly volatile and changeable context. It also contributes to the development of the coaching profession by expanding the potential applications of coaching and by proposing how coaching can adapt to meet the needs of the changing workplace.

## Limitations and future research

This study was carried out by two independent researchers, however the questionnaire contents were agreed with the company before distribution. In addition, the organi-

sation sent out the initial email asking for participants, which meant that anyone taking part knew that the study had organisational approval. Although participants then contacted the researchers direct and were never known to the organisation, this does mean that participants with more negative views may have chosen not to take part because they may have assumed the organisation would have access to named data. It is also clear that the positive impacts reported are based only on those who agreed to engage with the process so it cannot be assumed that similar effects would be found on a larger scale or for a broader population. It may be that the group who signed up for coaching were already in a developmental frame of mind and might have achieved change without the aid of a coach even though participants attribute changes to the SC intervention.

It should also be remembered that much of the data is based on self-report or is from stakeholders with a vested interest in the programme. Coaches and HR would clearly want the scheme to show success so may not be free from bias in their assessment of outcomes. A future trial of such a format would therefore benefit from additional objective performance data to support the current findings. In addition, all the data was collected over a relatively short period. A subsequent longitudinal collection of data would clarify if the outcomes are as enduring as those produced by longer term coaching relationships.

While the research does suggest that the SC model can produce benefits, it is not possible to equate if the benefits are of a similar order to those reported following longer term interventions. Future research may be able to pursue a matched study to more carefully assess the potential scale of respective benefits.

This programme used professional executive coaches who are likely to have the training and credibility that Bozer at al. (2014) suggest enhances coaching effectiveness. Therefore, the relative contribution of the coaches versus the delivery format would merit further investigation. It may be that internal coaches being made available for on-demand coaching may also show benefits. At this stage the relevant variables that contributed to the positive outcomes reported, are relatively unclear. A future study might investigate more fully the elements that are the essential ingredients of a SC programme.

This scheme was designed to support a very specific organisational culture, reflecting in its operation the same attributes that the organisation sought from its staff; namely, flexibility, responsiveness and personal responsibility. Therefore, the cultural fit of the programme to the context is likely to have had a significant effect on the reported outcomes. As a result it is unclear if the positive outcomes are due to the specific format, or to the cultural alignment. This might mean that a similar scheme in another organisation may prove ineffective if the cultural alignment is missing. The SC format would, therefore, need to be evaluated in a broader set of contexts before it could be said to be an effective intervention.

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# Art-based narrative interviewing as a dual methodological process: A participatory research method and an approach to coaching in secondary education

Qing Wang

***Objectives:*** *The purpose of this article is to discuss art-based narrative interviewing as a dual methodological process with the focus on coaching.*
***Design:*** *A qualitative study was designed in order to explore how secondary students view their own learning as a journey.*
***Method:*** *Art-based narrative interviewing was employed as an approach to coaching that aimed to develop positive learning dispositions and enhance learners' identities. Dialogic/performance analysis and cross case analysis were conducted to all the three cases.*
***Results:*** *Three distinctive learning stories were told, together with students' narratives, drawings, and the interactive dialogues between the students and the author as the interviewer/coach. The analysis highlighted the learners' growth, the use of metaphors and images, students' experience of transformative learning and the landscape of time and action.*
***Conclusions:*** *The article covers the features of art-based narrative interviewing as a method of data collection, analysis and presentation, and its potential to be utilised as an effective coaching approach alternative to traditional pedagogical intervention.*
***Keywords:*** *coaching; art-based; narrative interviewing; secondary education; learning disposition.*

## Introduction

THIS ARTICLE aims to explore art-based narrative interviewing as a special coaching method whilst this approach helps to investigate students' learning experience in secondary education as a form of illustration and documentation how this type of coaching can help.

Narrative interviewing, facilitated in the form of art, has been proved to be a useful way to collect, analyse and represent qualitative data between the researcher and the participants when students reflected on their inquiry-based learning experience (Deakin-Crick et al., 2012, Wang, 2013). This particular approach might also be employed as a special method fulfilling the coaching purpose by focusing on students' learning stories and their own voices through arts and conversations when the students and the coach were going through a democratic dialogic journey. However, the potential of art-based narrative interviewing as a coaching method requires further exploration.

In the educational context, coaching students essentially focuses on designing professional dialogues and conversations to aid students in developing their positive learning dispositions, fostering their learning agency and a sense of ownership, enhancing their learning performance and academic attainment (Wang & Millward, 2014). Nonetheless it seems that there is a lack of methodological development of the actual way of how to dialogue in coaching secondary students.

This article aims to present art-based interviewing as a specific 'style' of coaching where the results presented illustrate this, rather than a research report. In the following I firstly give a brief review of art-based research, narratives and coaching. Then I describe three individual cases using the


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art-based narrative method to understand students' experience in their inquiry-based learning projects, viewed from my perspective as a reflective interviewer. Next I consider common issues of all the stories in cross case analysis. Lastly I discuss the methodological enrichment of art-based narrative interviewing in coaching.

## Using art-based forms in research

Art-based forms of research use visual, performing, music, movement and literary artistic practices in the systematic generation of new knowledge through aesthetic discoveries (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Chilton, 2013; Leavy, 2003; McNiff, 1998). Embedded in these artistic forms that are regarded as 'playful, exploratory, and expressive' (Springgay et al., 2005), is a scholarly belief that they empower and change the manner through which research is conducted, created and understood; and they tend to disrupt traditional modes of scholarship and knowledge production (Slattery, 2003). Bochner and Ellis (2003) understood art as an embodied inquiry in personal and collective narratives: 'art can be viewed as an object or a product, but it also can be viewed as an idea, a process, a way of knowing, a manner of speaking, an encounter with Others' (p.506).

Artistic expression is an effective means of capturing the particularity and universality of a person's experience (Simons & McCormack, 2007). Art-based forms have been extensively used in various cases for different purposes. For instance, poetic and dramatic forms are used to represent experience (Richardson, 1997), dance is used as a method of evaluation (Cancienne & Snowber, 2003), art has a long tradition of its usage in therapies (McNiff, 1998), creative art is used in the process of designing, conducting, analysing and disseminating evaluations (Simons & McCormack, 2007), and art-based research is presented as part of a multimedia learning journey and as a strategy for pedagogical inquiry (Chilton, 2013). The use of art in the above examples inspired me to investigate whether an art-based strategy could be implemented in the collection and analysis of narrative data.

Influenced by Hervey's (2000, 2004) definition of artistic inquiry, I define art-based narrative interviewing as 'a focused, systematic inquiry with the purpose of contributing to a useful body of knowledge through narrative, artistic, and dialogic methods in data collection, analysis, and presentation of findings'. This approach entails moving beyond the use of existing criteria and framework of qualitative research and toward developing inter-disciplinarily, which 'must seek its heuristic and methodological basis in concepts rather than methods'. The approach also opens up new ways of conceiving of research as an active space of living inquiry (Merleau-Ponty, 1962), involving art and education that offer possibilities of deep engagement and authentic expression. Working with images and stories we can see how themes and patterns, drawn on students' tacit practice knowledge (Polanyi, 1967) and practical wisdom (Reeve, 1992; Schwandt, 2000) rather than mere propositional knowledge, formed an integrated whole and carried a message beyond formal explanation.

## Narrative coaching and interviewing

The approach of narrative coaching is inspired by narrative therapy. Taking the notion of Madigan (2010) and Payne (2006) on narrative therapy, narrative coaching empowers the participants to live their stories intentionally and with greater personal agency. Narrative coaches seek to free their coachees to create stories that can provide meaning and direction to their lives. Narrative coaching and narrative therapy both use art and metaphorical expression as an instrument to access and transform clients' interior lives, and both invite the clients to the world of phenomenological knowing that is not easily put into words. The difference is that narrative coaching has less of a therapeutic purpose; it emphasises self-directed learning, self-reflection and

transformative learning in people who mainly search for change and learning, not necessarily healing. Healing may naturally happen during narrative coaching because of the emancipative nature of its participatory process, the deep learning stories that touch one's identity and the conversations that provide trust, positive regards, and unconditional acceptance (Rogers, 1961) through professional coaching practice.

The narrative approach of coaching is based on the assumptions that meaning shapes our lives, human experience is multi-storied rather than one single story, and the primary meaning-making frame is the storyline (White, 2006). We use stories cognitively, discursively and socially to remember and organise our past, communicate about and negotiate our present as well as envision and act into our future (Drake, 2007). The significance of storytelling is highlighted in narrative coaching (Law, 2013; Stelter & Law, 2010). Viewed from the narrative perspective, there is a collaborative reflection with moments of symmetry between the coach and the coachees of the dialogue. Coaching has thus become important as a form of dialogue, allowing a space for reviewing, reassessing, and reinterpretation of experience. The key goal of this coaching dialogue is to become contact with coachees' significant strengths, knowledge and capacities that may not be discovered before, as well as foster dispositions, identities and authenticity of the individuals for reflection and personal development .

Because coaching often takes the form of dialogues and conversations, it can be regarded as interviewing or an exchange process between coach and coachees. What connects a coaching interviewing and a narrative interviewing is that both approaches give the interviewees much more control in shaping the agenda and identifying the themes; that the narrative accounts are not fixed but fluid; and that the character of the relationship between the narrator and the audience is of central importance (Murray, 2003).

Looking at the relationship between art-based research, narrative interviewing and coaching, it seems that there is a shortage in published coaching literature on using art as a part of the communicative process of interviewing. The main research question is: how does art-based narrative interviewing help to explore secondary students' learning experience and serve as a special coaching approach? Apart from being a research method, it would be interesting to see how art-based narrative interviewing is implemented in coaching context. This article intends to bridge artistic knowing and intellectual knowing because images and metaphors contribute to our understanding of narratives and bring an aesthetic dimension to the coaching experience.

## Research design

The overall research design was informed by a participatory research approach, which emphasises research as a collaborative, practical, emancipatory, critical and reflective social process between researcher and participants that aims to transform both theory and practice (Neill, 1998). The detailed methods of data collection and analysis are presented as follows.

### *Methods*

I adopted art-based narrative interviewing as the research method. Epistemologically, artistic form aids us to witness and know embodied sounds, movements, images and stories through metaphors and symbols – all the elements are important in our inner experience (McNiff, 2008; Neilsen, 2004; Pink, 2009). Art-based axiology values intersubjective truth (Bickel, 2005), and it is well linked to other qualitative research paradigms such as narrative research (Kapitan, 2010). Art-based and narrative approaches were embraced in the current research as they were potentially able to provide the participatory process. Thus the interview here was defined as a collaborative and conversational flow that explored and explicated experience, negotiated meaning concerning

the question raised, and co-constructed interpretation and knowledge.

***Participants***

Three Year 7 students (one male student and two female students) from a secondary school located in the south-west of England were invited for the art-based narrative interviews. The average age was 12 years old. They all came from British-white families.

***Data collection procedure***

The students were interviewed for the first time in April 2011 to investigate their learning experience and how they viewed themselves as learners in the inquiry-based learning projects. They were invited again after two months for follow-up interviews. The interviews were conducted in a seminar room in the school. Facilities such as whiteboard, coloured pens and papers were provided for students to create their drawings. Light refreshment was also provided. I conducted the interviews on a one-on-one basis in an interactive-relational (I:R) approach, encouraging the students to reflect on aspects of their past, present and future learning. The I:R approach, with its origin in counselling and psychotherapy, was suggested by Chirban (1996) as a method to access information that would not emerge through formal questioning alone. All interviews were video recorded and transcribed.

***Data analysis***

As for data analysis, I adopted dialogic/performance analysis (Riessman, 2008) where attention was paid to what was told, how the stories were organised and how talks evolved inter-subjectively and collaboratively. And then I conducted cross case analysis in order to provide scientific understanding of common issues in all the cases and aimed to offer a nuanced picture of art-based narrative interviewing and coaching.

***Ethical considerations***

The research was approved by the Committee of Ethics in Social Sciences of University of Bristol. CRB check was obtained for the purpose of working with young people. The informed consent to participate in the research was obtained from the students themselves, their teachers, their parents/guardians and the gatekeeper of the school. Pseudonyms were used for confidentiality. The collected data and drawings were shared and discussed with the students in order to enhance their sense of ownership and participation in the research process.

## Results

In this section I truthfully present three distinctive cases in conversation sequence with the participants including drawings, detailed observations of interactions and dialogues to illuminate the students' learning journeys. Each case focuses on a major theme that represents the students' personal learning journey. The themes are captured in the titles, which are direct quotations from the students' accounts. The students' names are pseudonyms. The italics are used to mark direct speech.

**Case 1: *'I have got more confidence'***

The first time I met Louis was in a group discussion. He was not the most talkative one in the group, but he was not the most silent one either. He was sitting in the group staring at his hands most of the time. He raised his head when he wanted to speak, but if there was someone else who was about to talk at the same time, he always remained silent and gave others the opportunity to talk. Whenever he spoke, his gentle, calm tone gave the impression that he was a natural deep thinker. The teacher referred him as 'one of the best students' in the class.

I wondered how this bright, yet rather timid, student viewed his own learning. *'Can I draw?'* he asked me carefully. With my 'permission', Louis drew himself in the middle and a school on the top corner of a blank paper.

*'Why do you want to put yourself there?'* I asked.

He answered, *'I think I used to be around here (the bottom of the paper) and I think coaching for learning has helped me progress my learning. So I think the next one would help me to move up to the school.'*

Louis described his typical learning situation: *'I need to ask questions but I don't have the confidence. I didn't know as much. I wasn't confident, and I felt a bit more laid back and the other person does the talking and asking questions instead of me.'*

He drew the shapes of his learning journey based on his confidence level as ups and downs. I asked whether he had learning partners along the journey, he put his classmates beside himself in the picture, and teacher near the school building in the top corner. He explained: *'Working in a group helps learning when you are frustrated working alone on your own… teachers help us, being with us here. But knowledge wise they are up here. They do come back here when we need them.'*

*'How do you think the teacher has supported you in your learning journey?'* I asked.

Louis said, *'She was a coach and an expert, but mainly a coach because she does not just tell you an answer. She helped you to find your own answer… at this phase she is 85 per cent a coach because she might give you some lessons about what you are learning about, give you ideas about how to answer your questions…in the next phase, probably 90 per cent or 95 per cent a coach, because we really start to understand inquiry-based learning more…we start to work more on our own as a group than just being told what to do…'*

When asked to imagine himself achieving the end, he smiled: *'Quite happy with myself because I've been able to get through that, and I've been able to finish what I need to do, by making a movie, by research that I have done, everything… very proud being able to successfully make three presentations about three different subjects all by myself, well not all by myself, but without letting the teacher get in the way because she's been a coach, she's been supporting us.'*

He drew the park as a representation of the *'fun part of learning'* and a wall as the obstacles. I asked him how he could manage to climb over the wall and continue his journey. He answered that he would use meaning making and strategic awareness to make connections with past experiences and strategies to solve problems. He expected the turning points in the learning journey to indicate *'I am committed to the end and I understand more. I am going up and free to go.'*

Louis finished his picture with a curving line beyond school, indicating that *'it is going higher and higher because I would be able to boost my confidence and understanding what I am learning in a lesson, and I would learn more.'* His final drawing in the first interview looked like this (see Figure 1 overleaf).

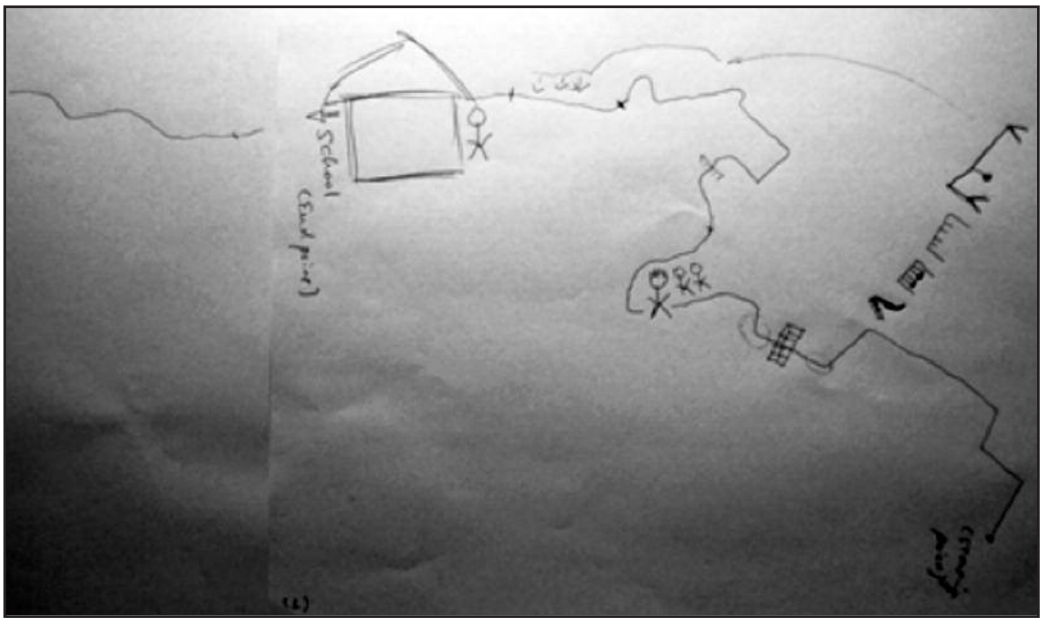
After two months we met again. This time Louis did not draw a new journey. He extended his story based on the same picture he drew in the previous interview. He put himself in a new position near the school and clearly claimed that he has improved resilience and creativity, found new approaches to solve problems rather than giving up when facing obstacles. He developed his learning relationships by undergoing a few changes: *'A good learning relationship makes me feel more confident by not actually working with a friend, with anyone really. In the future, if I am not able to work with a friend, I can cope with working with people who may be not friends.'*

Louis implied that he could apply learning dispositions developed through coaching to other parts of his learning life, especially confidence: *'…confidence is what helps me quite a lot more than other subjects because it helps me to share ideas with other people, so I used to not put my hand up, but now I can, so it helps my confidence a lot.'*

*'How have you changed as a learner?'* This was a key question that I wanted to ask.

He gave me a full picture of developing various learning dispositions and confidence: *'I've got a lot of confidence. Confidence will help me in the future, like interviews for jobs so I won't be shy. Creativity could help me to have ideas in the future, so if there's a job coming I will have good ideas to work at that. Resilience would*

**Figure 1: Louis's learning journey.**




*help me in the future not giving up on the stuff… learning relationships would help me to work with people whom I don't really know in the future… meaning making is connecting ideas together, so if I work with someone in the future or they have to work with me, I will be good at bringing them together. Strategic awareness would help me to get rid of problems I have in the future, like if something goes wrong in the job, I would be able to work and fix it. Critical curiosity would make me think more about what I am doing. If I get some big topic for homework I will be thinking about it before I get started… like doing a project, it makes me think more about it before I just get on with it.'*

I thanked Louis for the interview and demonstrated my appreciation of his change and growth as a learner. When I asked him whether he would like to keep his drawing, he responded blissfully that he would like me to keep it as a gift.

**Case 2: *'I am not as bossy as I used to be'***

Cathy demonstrated her energetic, confident characteristics in the classroom. When she was talking, she was leaning forward to the camera, waving her hands cheerfully when she spoke, and turning her body to the person sitting beside her in order to have interactions. However, before the person responded, she moved her body back to the normal position or turned to another person if she suddenly changed a topic or wanted to talk to someone else. It might indicate that she usually positioned herself as the controller of conversations with other people. These behaviours fit into how she described herself as 'bossy' in her story.

When we first met, she was genuinely interested in the idea that she could draw her own journey when she first saw the blank paper and colour pens on the desk.

Without any prompt from me, she began her learning story by describing learning dispositions using her own metaphors: a monkey as critical curiosity, architecture as creativity, a jigsaw as meaning making, the TV programme *Friends* as learning relationships and the army as resilience. I found her metaphor for changing in learning was especially fascinating: *'What does the caterpillar mean to you, Cathy?'*

She answered: *'It means change, Miss. I did a caterpillar changing into a butterfly. I did that because they don't just stay one thing. It's like you*

*picture them turning into other things, and they are still the same thing though, but just in a different form.'*

She drew a school house and herself in front of the gate. *'I am not already in the house'*, she said. I wondered if that meant she had not felt fully engaged in learning at this point. Before I asked, she quickly drew a curve, a park, and interestingly, a Tesco supermarket along the curve.

*'Why do you want to draw this shape of the road?'* I asked.

*'Because I think it shows all the twists and turns that I had in my journey'*, she replied instantly.

*'How does it feel like at the top?'* I continued my question.

She answered: *'It's quite difficult in a way, but also it's fun and challenging. And you want to rise to the challenge and make it as best as you can do.'*

She was indeed a very confident girl, I thought. *'What does it feel like at the bottom then?'* I asked.

*'At the bottom I'd feel a bit timid, not being able to do it…'* She turned her eyes away for a few seconds and then looked at me assertively, *'but then again I want to feel I can rise to the challenge and try to make myself better to go to the top.'*

I asked Cathy to imagine herself where she was, where she is, and where she expects herself to be in her learning journey, and how she would feel in these three different positions. She answered: *'I felt it would be too hard for me and I didn't trust myself. I would find it's too difficult and I would be a mess over it. I wouldn't be able to do anything… but now I've done most of it, I think I would be better if I had enough thought of it… I think I will feel better doing it next time… I will be a happy learner and a quick thinker.'*

*'The Tesco here… it is really interesting. What does it mean for you?'* I was curious about the big Tesco on the drawing.

She explained: *'It indicates a stop, where we can pause and think what we are doing. And then we realise we haven't answered our question yet, so we have to find out answers to that… because we always research, research, just carry on researching, and then miss out what is the actual question… so we would like to pause and think what we should do. That's a big pause, I did a big Tesco.'* So the Tesco might indicate reflectiveness and mindfulness in learning.

She put many parks with different sizes on the journey indicating different levels of enjoyment and fun in learning. She wanted to draw something representing arguments in her learning relationships with peers but she could not think of anything.

*'How about talking mouths?'* I suggested gently.

*'Oh yes!'* She immediately put down many mouths along the journey. Meanwhile, she said that she valued quality communication and relationships in learning. She recognised that arguments might be caused by individual differences. However, she did not think arguments would help to move the whole group forward to complete the inquiry task. Therefore, she learned how to apologise and make compromises in order to end an argument.

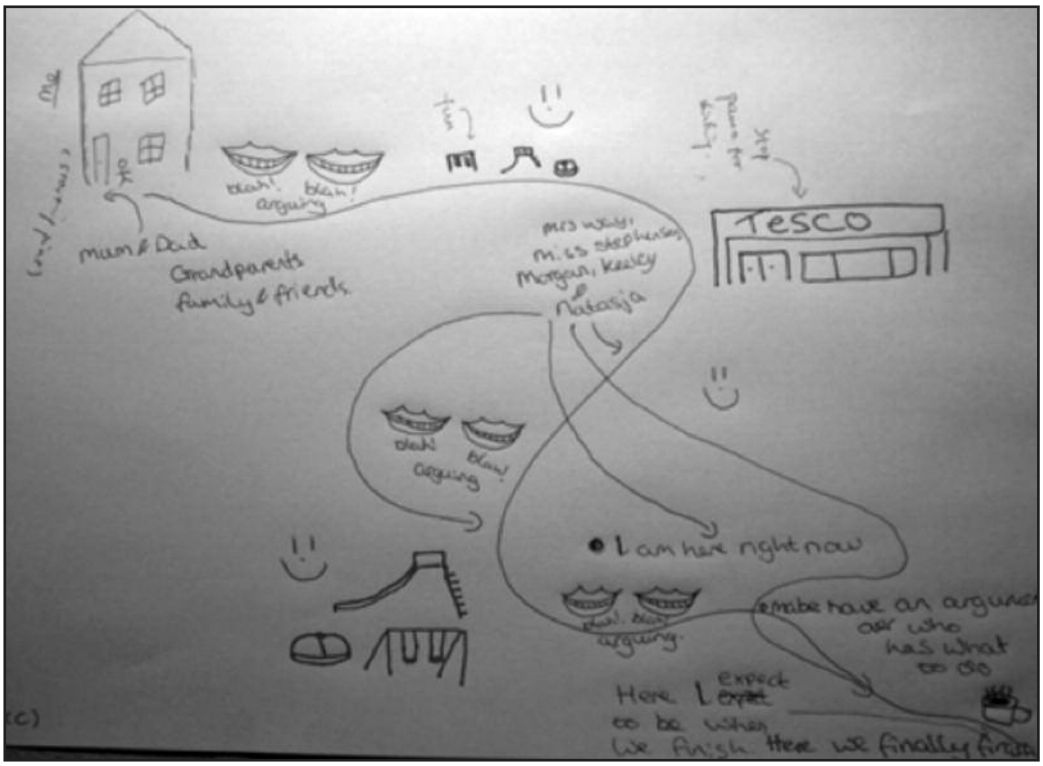
She thought inquiry-based learning was a positive experience and she looked forward to continuing the journey. She drew a cup of tea and smiling faces showing relaxation and happiness in completion of the project.

At the end of our first meeting, Cathy presented her learning journey picture like this (see Figure 2 overleaf).

After two months Cathy and I met again for a second meeting. She seemed to be very pleased about her learning in the last two months and she claimed that *'I have changed as a learner now'*. Her learning dispositions had developed: *'Creativity, and team work, definitely team work. Resilience helps because we can never give up. Definitely changing and learning. We definitely changed.'*

This time she drew the similar shape of her learning journey indicating far fewer arguments in the group. She told me how she and other girls successfully persuaded a boy, who was reluctant to do any stage performance, to join them for a short drama to present their inquiry outcomes. She thought learning was 'like playing a ball game, and it

**Figure 2: Cathy's learning journey at the first interview.**




was fun to play with other people' with equal status in relationships: *'We have fun all the way… no one is the boss. I am quite bossy but I am not the boss. I think it's better that no one is the boss, otherwise we feel like being a remote control car with someone else's performance. The ideal relationship I think is to have someone you don't work with and work with them, and listen to other people's ideas, work with that as much as you can, and definitely think that you are not the boss.'*

*'What is the most challenging part of your journey?'* I asked.

*'Trying to be not so bossy'*, she thought for a while and answered, *'It's difficult to appreciate people's knowledge and pretty much taking their ideas and don't throw them away, and try to work on their ideas and yours.'* She said, *'I sort of made myself the boss the last time because no one wanted to do what I wanted to do'*, whereas this time she decided to be *'just a spokesman': 'I am not as bossy as I used to be, but I still am, and even though I hate to admit it, it is still true.'*

Since she has made a great improvement in learning relationships, Cathy highlighted the interdependence and self-awareness of being a learner in a team: *'We can learn how good learners we are and how well we can learn with different kinds of people. I think we can learn how we work as individual learners too. We can take individual questions from each of the different people, and we can give our opinions, and we can get other people's opinions. We can learn how well we can judge other people's opinions. I can definitely take that. I can work in groups. I can be more open to more facts and more opinions. I can take in other people's ideas… And I don't have to be more dependent on adults and other people. I can be more independent.'*

I asked how coaching supported her learning, she replied: *'Coaching helped with resilience because coaches can say keep going keep going like a basketball coach. Coaching definitely helped us to be more independent and work more as a team, and to find out more individual learning abilities.'*

*'How have you developed as a learner?'* I asked.

She adopted a growth mindset in the development of learning dispositions: *'I think a bit about everything because we can all work on different things. We can try and be good at abilities. Definitely mine is about everything because I am better at something and I am better at others. But I am definitely better or at least good at a little bit of everything.'*

At the end of our second meeting Cathy gave me the following picture (see Figure 3).

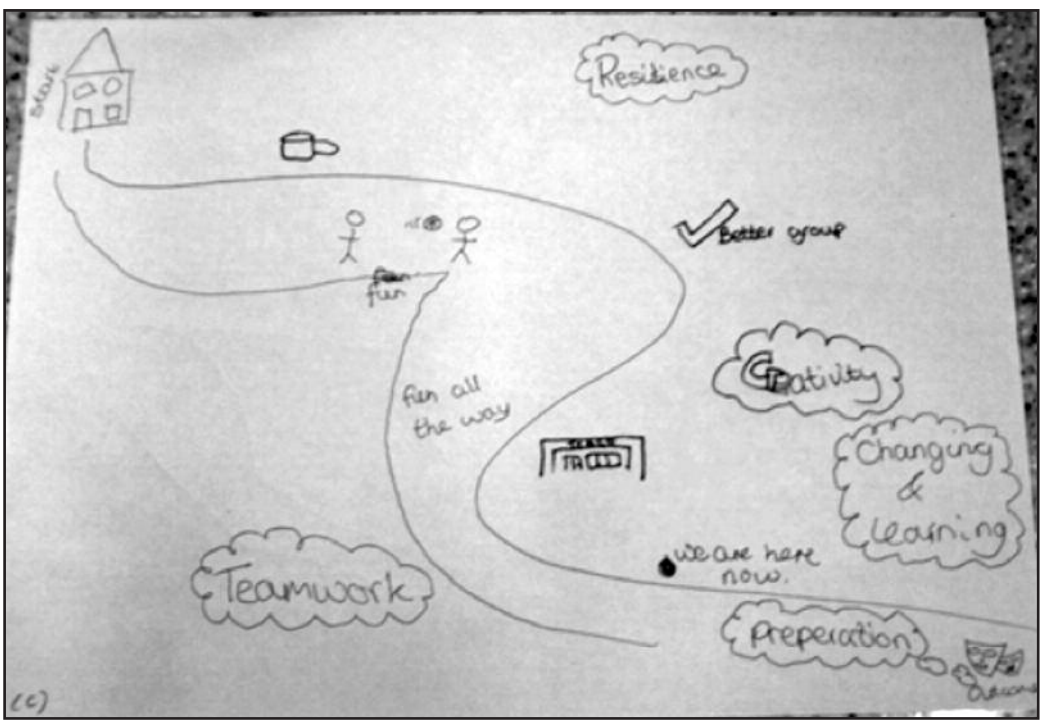
*'I am a lady cheetah in learning, a kind of animal that moves really fast'*, she said with eyes shining, *'I have been really quick and quite fierce to everyone.'*

*'…but not too much!'* We almost uttered this at the same time, and we had a great laugh.

**Case 3: *'It's not just my own journey'***

*'I feel negative about myself'*. This was the first sentence that Monica said to me when we had the first interview. She might suffer from low self-confidence whilst she was an excellent listener in the group discussion. She was a shy, gentle girl who used to hide herself behind the crowd. She would remain silent most of the time in the group, lowering her head and occasionally passing a glance to the person who was talking. When there was a short silence, she sometimes licked her lips, indicating that she might have something to say but she felt too nervous to speak. When I noticed it, I invited her to talk. However she seldom indicated that she would like to join the conversation actively from her behaviours.

**Figure 3: Cathy's learning journey at the second interview.**



At the beginning of the interview I suggested that she could use some metaphorical images to describe herself as a learner. She could not think of anything and she seemed to be a little bit uneasy. So I hoped drawing could open up our conversation.

She began to slowly draw her learning journey in a simple, purple line with a circle in the middle. And then she drew one blue line on the top of the purple line, and a red line beneath the purple line. The picture looked like this (see Figure 4).

I asked: *'Which one is your journey?'*

She indicated the purple one. And then she commented: *'I wasn't a confident learner, and I would rather be doing things in a group and being taught… I am more independent in the group… I would be quite happy because I reached the end, so I know I've done it. And I hope I've done it with my best.'*

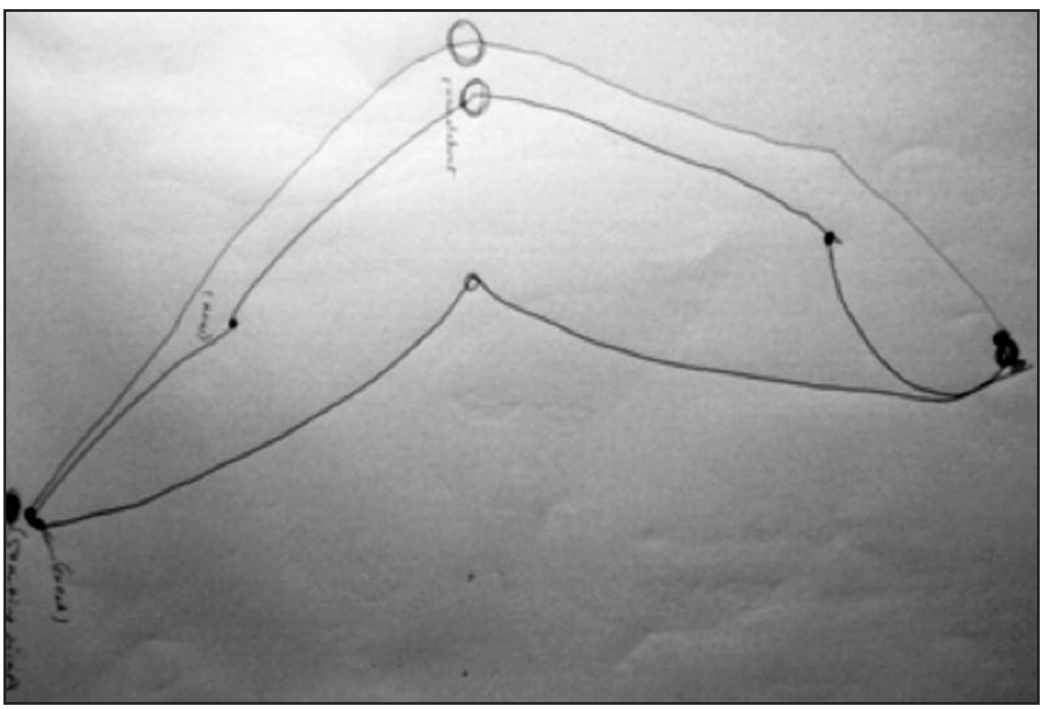
*'What does the little circle mean, Monica?'* I asked.

*'Learning obstacles',* she said in a low voice, *'I had obstacles but I think I tried to dodge them instead of trying to get through them… I hope I can be a more confident learner. I'd like to be able to do really whatever… because my group had a lot of arguments so you faced up to the arguments. I think I would be more confident to just say 'I cannot go along with it'. I would be more confident to just speak up and say what I think than just keep quiet and say "yes yes yes" to everything.'*

It seemed that she experienced problems with interpersonal relationships in her group. I asked what was there in her peers' learning journey. She said the blue line besides her own learning route indicated what she thought her peers have experienced. She thought her peers' learning route *'is smoother but they have done basically the same things'.*

I was curious: *'Why do you think other people's learning journey was smoother than yours?'*

**Figure 4: Monica's learning journey at the first interview.**



She lowered her head, saying nothing.

Then I changed the topic to the red line in her picture. She thought that it represented the teacher's learning route: *'She's there with me from the beginning all the way to the end'*. She told me that the teacher might face obstacles with her and try to solve problems together with her: *'I think she would take a simple route but going up and down as well because she's more of a coach. I don't think she can just go a simple route. She has to help and maybe face some obstacles with us, trying to sort these obstacles out, which are probably there to help us get to the end.'*

Monica further mentioned non-direct guidance: *'I feel challenged a bit because it was just us and the teacher, but although she wasn't a teacher during this, you can just go and ask questions, you have to figure out yourself. And then she would give you advice which you don't have to take at all… but you can take the advice. We take it because we find it's good advice… I don't think we can go on our own without her.'*

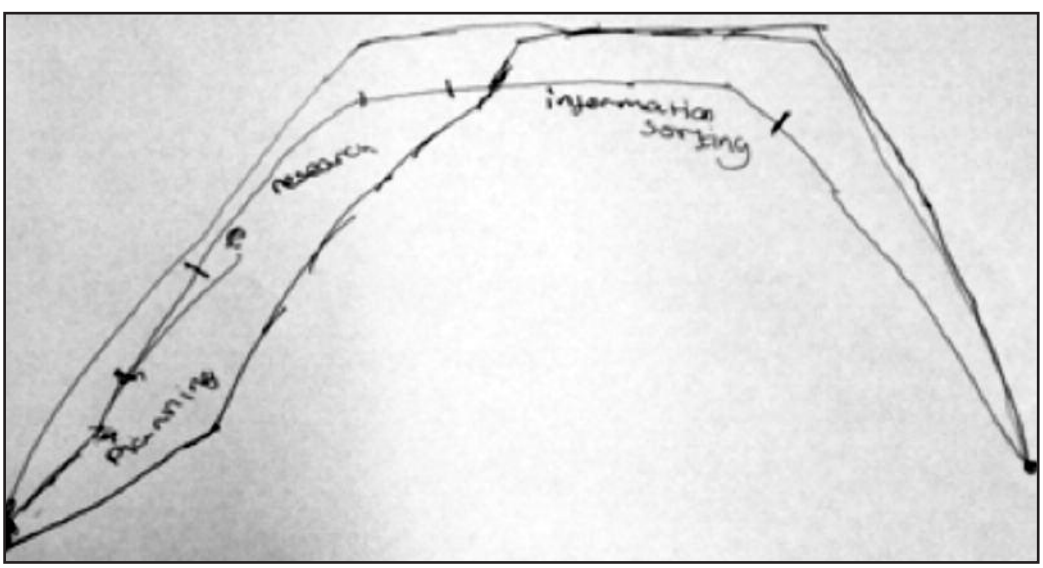
During the meeting I found self-contradictory descriptions about her resilience. She said *'I am very determined and I don't give up easily even when I face difficulty'*, and she also admitted that *'I can give up easily when things are difficult; I don't keep trying and trying; I just don't carry on.'* However, she seemed to be positive about the development of learning dispositions: *'I am getting better at learning all the time. I think I am very curious in a good way. I don't just go yes; I think about it. And for strategic awareness I am aware of my strengths and learning preferences… I started to make connections between all the different facts and what differences there are them… I think more about how to solve problems… I try to enjoy thinking more about new ways to solve problems.'*

*'What kind of metaphor would you use to describe yourself as a learner?'* I asked.

*'I think I am a spider now and the web is there'*, she said, *'I need to make it a web, so when I am trying, it's being made. When I get to the end, it will be nice.'*

Monica was invited again after two months for a second interview. She seemed to be much more relaxed than she was in our first meeting. She happily told me the meaning of her inquiry question, which was about society's impact on people's self-perceived appearance. I exclaimed in my heart that Monica has become stronger in her own voice. She gave me three routes in purple, green and red colours with the same order as in the last time (see Figure 5).

**Figure 5 Monica's learning journey at the second interview.**



She pointed out that this time interpersonal relationships in the group improved enormously. *'We just got to start and go on with everything, it went very quickly.'* She began to enjoy her inquiry more when good relationships helped her learning: *'You can just speak your mind, you have more chance to get things done because you are more friendly with them, so you can do this at break time, lunch time, and out of school. With people you don't necessarily know, you don't really want to go around to their house; you don't really want to spend your free time with them.'*

*'How about the teacher's journey this time?'* I asked.

Monica said that the teacher went a similar route to hers: *'She knew exactly what to do. She helped us, struggled with us, and then there I think we are moving up a bit more, she really didn't need to help us. I think she wanted us to do our outcome on our own, that's where she left us. She did help us in some moves, but she left us more on there… we felt it was really good. I think it gives me more independence and more confidence. She was still there for us but as a coach.'*

*'How did you change as a learner?'* I was surprised at her improvement in terms of articulation and I wanted to know more about her growth.

Monica looked at me directly and answered cheerfully: *'I think I definitely got more confident, and I don't need to go into a group with someone. I can do it on my own, but I'd rather find information with other people than on my own because I would be confident that it would be right. Learning relationships let me work independently with my team or on my own. If other people in my team don't want to do it, we have to compromise. I think that helps me as well because it's not just you, it's you and your team.'*

She described herself as a learner using the metaphor of a horse: *'It is confident, it can be independent as well, and working as a team because the rider and the horse need to work together in the team'*. We then finished our second meeting in an agreeable, satisfying way. I could see her true colours shining through.

## Cross-case analysis

The previous section is an actual presentation of the process of art-based narrative interviewing in a conversational format. I paid attention to the students' learning stories, the organisation of the stories and the collaborative conversations between the participants and me based on dialogic/performance analysis (Riessman, 2008). In this section I analyse the common issues in all the cases and present my own perspective as a reflective interviewer.

### *The students' growth as learners*

The learning stories that the students generated were trustworthy, authentic accounts of how they understood learning and how they viewed themselves as learners. At the beginning of the research, the students only had a vague idea of themselves as learners, probably because the concept of identity was too abstract for them, and they were not usually encouraged to ask themselves questions such as 'who am I?' in the current educational system. Encouragingly, the students were able to present a general idea of what kind of learner they were and what makes a better learner after the second interview. There were differences between the first and the second interview shown in the content of their stories, the metaphors interwoven in the narratives, the students' tones and the images in the drawings. It is evident that students have developed confidence, positive learning dispositions and a sense of learner's identity through the process.

### *The use of metaphor and images*

Our language and everyday life is permeated by metaphors (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Across all the cases, the images and metaphors were introduced as a basic framework in order to offer students a starting point. The students used the same metaphors to describe a significant part of their learning, for instance, they used 'park' to describe 'fun' or 'happiness' in learning, and 'wall' to describe learning obstacles. Sometimes I provided ideas of using certain

metaphors and the students could understand them immediately. The active use of metaphors in the conversations could enable a felt sense into words so that dialogue partners would have the opportunity to develop a sort of relational attunement (Stelter, 2014a). This is where individual phenomenological perspective meets the collaborative meaning-making: by using metaphorical language and images as a way of expressing and reflecting on their learning experiences, the students were able to engage in sharing their thoughts, feelings and implicit knowledge about their own learning; meanwhile different people were able to connect in the mutual metaphorical interpretation and understanding of specific experience in learning contexts.

***The experience of transformative learning***

The art-based narrative interviewing served to express beauty, dynamic, energy, and complexities of all the cases. The students' stories were an integrated reflection of their understanding of learning preferences and styles, beliefs, values, attitudes, dispositions and identities so that they gradually developed self-awareness and self-knowledge. The more aware and acceptant one is of one's own experience, the more authentic one can be (Stelter, 2014b). This authenticity equipped the students with intrinsic motivation, personal strengths and goal direction that were ultimately the source of self-development and transformative learning (Mezirow, 2000). However, the transformative process was more than individually held – it was negotiated, collaborated, adapted and shared in interaction with others. For example, Cathy weighted herself and changed to be much less bossy to fit into the group work; Monica developed more confidence and agency to participate in group discussions more actively. We could say that a learning self almost always involves transformative personal and social dimension simultaneously; and consciousness, cognitive and feelings of personhood become anchored in relationships (Gergen, 2009).

***The landscape of time and action***

The cases were examples of art-based narrative interviewing processes and situations where the students and I were directly involved in the exchange and enriched each other's experience. As the interviewer, I guided the process by means of questions and comments on the content, meaning and value of students' statements. In addition, I facilitated the students to develop a particular structure of storytelling. The students were invited to describe their learning journey in the past, now and future situations and their feelings throughout the journey. The students all mentioned what they did and how they felt in the past, what happened in the current inquiry-based learning projects, and what kind of learners they would like to become in the future. They all connected their 'here-and-now' learning experience with the desired future career settings. We could see that a clear landscape of time and action was applied to all the cases. The landscape linked their past learning experience, current reflections of emotions and thoughts and ideal future learner identities with concrete action perspectives. It helped the students to foster a sense of direction with action-oriented growth mindset. Moreover, it challenged the students to view their past history differently by incorporating new events and relationships into the stories.

The cross-case analysis showed that the method of art-based narrative interviewing not only serves the research purpose; it has a number of essential ingredients that might fit into the third generation coaching framework (Stelter, 2014b). How this particular method could be used in coaching will be discussed in the following section.

## Discussion

***The art-based narrative interviewing as coaching***

The objective of the article was to explore art-based narrative interviewing as a potential coaching method in addition to its contribution to better understanding students' experience in inquiry-based learning pro-

jects. The interviews clearly served as a part of research process. What might be more interesting is that the underlying structure of the interviewing could be applied as a useful interventional approach to coaching inspired by narratives and arts – the texts and the pictures are complimentary to each other and altogether they weave a rich coaching context, where coaches and coachees are provided opportunities to connect with their identities and develop a holistic, multidimensional, and embodied understanding of an individual's experience. The art-based narrative interviewing enabled the students to illuminate their experiences from the perspective that learners are living in time, in space, in person and in relationships. Describing a learning journey and telling learning stories helped to construct students' identities and form positive learning dispositions through meaning making and identification. This was where the art-based narrative interviewing became a coaching process. In the actual interviewing process, I was not at all a mentor or a knowledge expert in the relationship with the students. Nor did I intend to influence them with the researcher's power in order to get the answers that I wanted to hear. To enter the experience of the students openly as an empathetic witness alternative to other canons of coaching, I engaged in an encounter from the depth of my own subjectivity. By listening and questioning in particular ways, I shaped the journeys that the participants chose to describe, and I played a part in constituting the learning stories (Riessman, 2008).

***Compare art-based narrative interviewing with other approaches of coaching***

The method of art-based narrative interviewing could be viewed as a special dialogue form with a focus on making the process a source of connection, contact and relationship between the teller and the listener using artistic expression in addition to verbal conversation. This method has the basic intentional orientation that is in line with the narrative-collaboration generation of coaching (Stelter, 2014b). Stelter claimed that coaching has developed from its first generation phase (where the goal is to help coachees to achieve a specific goal) and its second generation phase (where the goal is to maximise coachees' strengths, resources, and potential) towards a paradigm where coaches and coachees establish a *narrative collaborative partnership*. There are coaching approaches in a problem-solving or goal-attainment perspective, for example, GROW model (Whitmore, 2002) or cognitive-behavioural coaching (Palmer & Szymanska, 2007); and there are coaching methods focusing on coachees' existing strengths and qualities in order to generate positive future scenarios, for instance, positive psychology coaching (Biswas-Diener, 2010) or solution-focused coaching (Berg & Szabo, 2005). Compared with the above coaching methods, narrative-collaboration methods focus less on helping the coachees address their problems or achieving specific goals, or selecting the positive qualities that the coachees should be able to build on. The narrative-collaborative methods emphasise that both the coach and the coachees are fellow human being in a reflective space where the coaching conversation is around values and meaning-making aspects of life (Stelter, 2014b).

It should be noted that these differences among coaching methods do not indicate a 'better' or 'worse' approach; and the adoption of a particular method should be based on coach's intentional orientation rather than theoretical position (Stelter, 2014b). These methods co-exist and continue to work together in educational coaching depending on different purposes of coaching. For instance, some students have clear goals to achieve and they want to develop specific action plans with the coach ('I want to get A in the next maths exam, how do I accomplish that?); some students have interests in effectively using their existing strengths and exploring their potential qualities that they have previously been

unware of; some students want to develop higher self-awareness and self-knowledge but not necessarily generate action strategies after coaching.

***Possible benefits of art-based narrative interviewing as a coaching method***

The reason why I favoured an art-based, narratively inspired way of coaching is that it has possible benefits in: (1) deepening the understanding of personal experience from a wider societal perspective; (2) facilitating the overall development of secondary students as learners; and (3) bringing interesting challenges to continuous professional learning of coaches.

Firstly, resonating with May's (1994) argument, there is an intimate connection of the unique understanding gained from personal involvement in and through artistic narrative expression and the universal recognition and emergent understanding. How students perceive and act in their learning is phenomenological and influenced by their specific socio-cultural contexts. Personal narratives are situated in one's own world and in relationship with others and the external world (Kushner, 2000; May, 1994). The narrative interviewing method is almost always about exploring students' stories involving other learners, particular learning events or activities and certain learning conditions. Therefore, it is more than focusing on the subjectivity of the individual's experience – it recognises the interrelationship of the person with his or her external world, a disciplined subjectivity (Guba & Lincoln, 1981) or a critical inter-subjectivity (Heron & Reason, 1997). So that the students are co-creators of meaning and knowledge production in conversations rather than merely storytellers (Bochner & Riggs, 2014), and we could get closer to capturing and representing the complexity of their experience by navigating their current life context.

Secondly, the art-based narrative interviewing method could help to establish a relational, dialogic, reflective, qualitative and collaborative conception of inquiry (Gergen & Gergen, 2012) where students have the opportunity to develop their learning dispositions and capacities. When the art-based technique is combined with narrative coaching (Drake, 2007, 2008; Stelter, 2009), it contributes to exploring deeply into learners' identities, identifying values that individuals hold, aspects that the learners would like to develop, planning cycles of actions and anchoring the desire of change in a creative and relaxing environment. In addition, the development of learners involves a change process where building sufficient motivation is the key. The core interventional skills used in motivational interviewing (Miller, 1983; Miller & Rollnick, 2002; Rubak et al., 2005) such as open questions, active and reflective listening and summary could be adopted in art-based narrative interviewing with the goal of creating relationship through empathy and rapport, exploring values, beliefs and attitudes in learners, discussing the discrepancies and barriers and enhancing intrinsic motivational towards behavioural change in learning (Cramer & Sauer, 2014; Passmore, 2007). The multiple-time interviewing strategy also helps to track the progress of change of the individuals and prevents them from slipping back.

It could be very difficult to explore values or learners' identities with secondary students who may not yet have the cognitive ability to verbally reflect on philosophical issues in the actual narrative-collaborative coaching. The lack of propositional knowledge could be compensated by presentational knowledge (e.g. a piece of artwork) fully embodying experiential knowledge. The art-based strategy could be a useful means of engaging students who are less articulate in reflecting on their own learning and offering them a voice without making any assumptions about their prior knowledge and experience. Additionally students may be fearful of having the origins of their identities being judged or examined. By inquiring into the personal journeys through art and interactive dialogues, the

students and coach would cultivate a sense of valuing stories with reflexivity, acceptance and empathy. By drawing and talking about the learning journeys, learners would be engaged intuitively and rationally (and emotionally and intellectually) in the reflective and creative process of meaning making with coach's facilitation. In order to engage in this process, the learners would exercise their 'learning muscles' in resourcefulness, reflectiveness, reciprocity, resilience, taking responsibility in learning, critical thinking and mindfulness. The list could continue. However, the main point here is that the coachees would have the opportunity to become more self-aware and self-directed learners through making their own voice heard and participating actively in art-based narrative interviewing.

Thirdly, the art-based narrative interviewing method brings a few challenges that coaches may not need to face in other coaching approaches. These challenges encourage the coaches to stretch their zone of proximal development and step out of their 'comfort zone'. For example, in art-based narrative interviewing coaches need to read texts as well as figures and make connections and significant meaning out of information in different forms. So that coaches are required to pay attention to both the artistic work and the personal narratives on emotional, intellectual and relational levels, move back and forth across multiple reflections and reactions, become an active participant and co-learner in the coaching dialogue and develop professional knowledge by experiencing, feeling, and associating with the work rather than standing apart from it. Generally the art-based narrative interviewing method requires coaches' expertise and professionalism, which could be a great opportunity for their continuous professional development.

### *The practical challenges of art-based narrative interviewing as coaching*

The approach of art-based narrative interviewing to coaching brings a number of challenges in practice. Firstly, we may have an initial difficulty of engaging learners to produce artistic work, as they may feel judged in terms of product criteria. We should note that aesthetic awareness may naturally unfold during the process, yet it is not a requirement to produce quality artwork. For students who are fearful of engaging with art forms, we need to assure them that the judgment of the products is not the issue; it is the authentic expression and deep engagement that elicit the values in art-based narrative interviewing. Secondly there is still little or no agreement on how this approach to coaching should be assessed in terms of its effectiveness. However, as an educational psychologist and a coach, I believe that it is the quality of observed engagement and self-awareness of the learners that count, not the quality of the end product. The evaluation of effectiveness in art-based narrative coaching is beyond the scope of this article, and I would like to invite readers to consider this question with me.

## Conclusion

In the article, I tried to demonstrate art-based narrative interviewing as a method of coaching given its flexible, dynamic and intersubjective nature in addition to a way of collecting narrative data in exploring secondary students' learning experience. From a research perspective, my participants and I co-explored their distinctive learning journeys through drawings and conversations. The process itself is a positionality that constitutes agency and change (Springgay & Irwin, 2004). The engagement in the art-based narratives emphasises an active participation of creating and meaning making rather than a product-driven representation of inquiry. From a coaching perspective, it attends to the process of creativity and co-construction through which one inquiries into learner's identity through artistic and aesthetic means. The journey that I experienced, similar to the learning journeys that the students experienced, engaged with a continual process of knowing and not-know-

ing, searching and researching, being and becoming. It is difficult to come to a conclusion or to settle into a linear pattern of inquiry as it calls forth new meanings and knowledge. An examination of the effectiveness of art-based narrative interviewing as a coaching method is to be explored. For psychologists and coaches who are potentially interested in art-based narrative interviewing, we shall allow for deeper understanding to emerge with time.

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# The perceptual changes in life experience of at-risk adolescent girls following an integrated coaching and positive psychology intervention group programme: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Michelle Pritchard & Christian van Nieuwerburgh

***Objectives:*** *The research sought to analyse the perceptual life changes and perceived quality of life (PQoL) subsequent to participating in an integrated coaching and PPI programme.*
***Design:*** *A qualitative approach was employed and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was utilised to analyse the data.*
***Method:*** *Three girls from an inner-city London school were selected to participate. Semi-structured interviews were used.*
***Results:*** *Three key themes emerged: the ability to control emotions/reactions; increased experience of positive emotions/thoughts; and the identification of purpose and meaning to life.*
***Conclusion:*** *The participants reported that participating in the programme brought the benefit of an improved perception of quality of life.*
***Keywords:*** *at-risk; adolescents; girls; appreciative coaching; interpretative phenomenological analysis; coaching psychology; positive psychology coaching; subjective wellbeing; perceived quality of life.*

## Introduction

PREVIOUS RESEARCH on coaching and positive psychology interventions (PPI's) has focused on middle-class/private-school adolescents. In order to demonstrate its effectiveness, these interventions need to be replicated on different socio-economic/cultural backgrounds (Seligman et al., 2009). Additionally, the area of subjective wellbeing and life-satisfaction in at-risk adolescents is supported by only limited research (Oberle, Schnonert-Reichl & Zumbo, 2010). This is pertinent given the societal need subsequent to the London Riots which took place in August, 2011. One of the drivers of unrest was found to be anger at a lack of hope and desperation about their current, future and economic situation (Howker & Malik, 2013).

For this study, we define 'at-risk adolescents' as those experiencing a range of problems that render them 'at-risk' for developing into healthy, functioning adults such as stress, poverty, abuse, death of a parent/sibling (Schonert-Reichl, 2000) and/or at-risk of becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training).

Coaching, 'unlocks a person's potential to maximise their own performance' (Whitmore, 2002, p.8). PPI's increase wellbeing through the cultivation of positive feelings, thoughts and behaviours (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009). This research employed an Appreciative coaching approach. Appreciative coaching focuses on what 'is' working rather than what is not (Orem, Binkert & Clancy, 2007) and stems from Appreciative Inquiry, which again focuses on a relationship between a positive core of experiences and a positive future (AI) (Cooperrider, 1990). AI was initially delivered in organisational settings as a vehicle of change, there-


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fore it was decided to deliver the coaching in a group format. Using coaching and positive psychology interventions in group settings is a cost-effective solution to schools given the financial climate (Brown & Grant, 2010).

'Positive education' (Seligman et al., 2005) is defined as applied positive psychology in education. It provides an antidote to depression, increases wellbeing and serves as a pathway to increased life satisfaction (Seligman et al., 2009). Coaching and PPI's are integral to positive education (Green & Norrish, 2013) and yet there is no guiding, empirical framework. Therefore an exploration of the programmes that combine the best ingredients of coaching and positive psychology is needed. Currently these approaches operate in isolation. However for greater sustainability, integration is key (Green, Oades & Robinson, 2012).

## Literature review

To improve one's life, one must improve the quality of experience. It is argued that those from lower socio-economic, dysfunctional families have increased chances of stress (Norrish & Vella-Brodrick, 2009). Moreover, they are at-risk of under achieving/languishing and experiencing more undesirable outcomes and less desirable outcomes in comparison to flourishing adolescents (Howell, Kern & Lyubormirsky 2007).

It is important that research into at-risk adolescents is developed to support them to flourish. Being labelled at-risk, however, often contributes to the risk (Kerka, 2003) due to the attachment of at-risk characteristics, which neglect the student's assets (Calabrese, Hummel & San-Martin, 2007). Focus, therefore, ought to be on developing resiliency/mental toughness (Clough & Strycharczyk, 2012) and the identification of strengths/positives (Schonert-Reichl, 2000).

Wierenga (2008) researched adolescents who were 'making a life' amid non-optimal social conditions. Time and connecting holistically without agendas with youth workers enabled transformative work to begin. Just talking helped the adolescent form a narrative and develop a trusting relationship leading to greater resource access. Furthermore, Oberle, Schnonert-Reichl and Zumbo (2010) found that positive personal traits such as optimism, a sense of belonging in school and supportive relationships with family, peers and non-related adults were important developmental contexts associated with life satisfaction. Gilman and Huebner (2003) found that high life satisfaction was associated with hope, positive relationships and negatively related to depression, anxiety and a negative attitude of school and teachers.

Huebner et al. (2004) studied adolescents' perceived quality of life (PQoL) and found links between low PQoL and living in commercial/ethnically diverse areas and substance abuse. Furthermore, those that reported high life-satisfaction had less chance of developing behavioural problems after a stressful life event than adolescents with low PQoL.

Due to coaching being a developing field in schools mentoring has been described to a greater extent. Maldonado et al. (2008) found that high-quality, long-term mentoring relationships impacted the self-efficacy, aspirations, and possible-selves of at-risk adolescents. Herrera et al. (2011) found that mentoring positively impacted how adolescents viewed themselves academically. However, these outcomes were not sustained and there was no improvement in classroom effort, self-esteem or peer/parent relationships. The evidence, therefore, suggests mixed results. Given the potential impact of coaching and mentoring programmes in these settings, further study is required.

Van Nieuwerburgh et al. (2011) found GROW coaching impacted adolescents' self-awareness, relationships and study skills and that they met/exceeded their academic targets. Green, Grant and Ryansaart (2006, 2007) found cognitive-behavioural (CB), solution-focused (SF) coaching was associated with significant increases in resilience, hope and goal striving and significant decreases in depression. The sample popula-

tions were self-selected private-school girls, therefore they may have had a significant amount of hope initially and, therefore, been more motivated to achieve their goals.

Appreciative Coaching (AC) is a new approach within the field of coaching, which was introduced by Orem, Binkert and Clancy in 2007. Rather than trying to fix problems, the coachee's attention is pivoted on what is working and what could be. The coachee is taken through four phases; discovery, dream, design and destiny in collaboration with five principles, power of vision (Anticipatory), appreciative stance (Constructionist), art of the question (Simultaneity), pivoting (Poetic) and genuine affirmation (Positive). Again, there is limited empirical research to support its use however its source, Appreciative Inquiry (AI), is beginning to be used in higher education as 'appreciative education' (Bloom, Hutson & Konkle 2013). San Martin and Calabrese (2010) used AC to empower a group of at-risk adolescents in a pupil referral unit (PRU). Focusing on their strengths, a shift in mind-set was evidenced as they began to think more optimistically and believe that a desired, imagined future was possible. Unfortunately, due to time constraints only two stages of the 4D model were delivered. This promises to be a valuable avenue for enquiry and further research is required.

Collins, Eisner and O'Rourke (2013) propose that the use of coaching in group contexts produces more advantageous results than one-to-one coaching due to the coachee receiving more support via a network of peers thus reducing isolation. This realisation may open the door for positive change. Also, there is greater accountability to achieve goals especially if others demonstrate progress (Brown & Grant, 2010). Group coaching clients can even gain a sense of gratification from being able to help others in similar situations. Concern exists, however, that coaching delivered in this way will prevent coachees from disclosing openly due to confidentiality. Furthermore, group size may affect group dynamics and as groups learn at different rates, the coach needs to ensure their communication fits each participant (Collins et al., 2013). However, using coaching and PPI's in group contexts may be preferable when working with adolescents as they may find it difficult to trust adults (Vella-Brodrick, 2013).

There have been numerous studies examining the use of positive psychology with adolescents (e.g. Ewan & Green, 2013; McGrath, 2009; Norrish & Vella-Brodrick, 2009). The Penn Resiliency Programme is the most researched, with sustainably reduced depression and anxiety outcomes (Seligman, 2011). The majority of the evaluations, however, were implemented by their team (Kristjannson, 2012) and only small, inconsistent depression outcomes found (Gillham et al., 2006). However, in the UK, those of disadvantaged backgrounds benefitted more (Challen & Machlin, 2009).

Seligman et al. (2009) found that strengths identification (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) and 'three good things' PPI's improved school engagement and social skills. However, no decreases in depression and anxiety were found. Norrish and Vella-Brodrick (2009) found no significant results however, qualitative feedback stated the life satisfaction of the adolescents was improved. In contrast, Bromley, Johnson and Cohen (2006) found that strengths identification protected against the development of mental-health problems despite the participant experiencing two negative life events. Finally, Froh, Sefick and Emmons (2008) found a relationship between participating in a gratitude PPI and school experience satisfaction. Students with low initial levels of positive affect benefitted most.

There have been various critics of positive psychology stating that it adopts a 'Pollyanna' attitude where everything is seen through rose-tinted glasses (Ehrenreich, 2010; Norem, 2002). Additionally, theories such as Fredrickson's 'broaden and build' (2001, 2009) are thought to be conceptual not empirical. AC has faced similar critique of being naïve, idealistic and ignoring prob-

lems whilst focusing only on the positive (e.g. Bushe, 2007a, 2007b; Bushe & Kassam, 2005).

Positive Psychology and AC do not deny negative emotions. Instead they recognise these as natural, important aspects of life whilst shifting individual's outlook so to discern what makes their lives more meaningful and pleasurable. In 2015, longitudinal, empirical results are expected from a PPI study at Geelong Grammar school in Australia, which may empirically conclude what positive psychology can bring to the wellbeing of adolescents (Norrish & Vella-Brodrick, 2009b).

Discussion is developing around integrating positive psychology with coaching particularly in schools, as in Positive Education (Green, Oades & Robinson, 2011; Linley & Harrington, 2005). Green et al. (2013) recommend for these to be combined as both are necessary to increase wellbeing and goal striving.

Positive Education is based on five foundations of wellbeing: social/emotional competency, positive emotions and relationships, strengths identification and sense of meaning and purpose. Educational Psychologists have advocated for a stronger focus on prevention and promotion for wellbeing (Noble & McGrath, 2008). Due to schools being a direct resource to at-risk adolescents, it would be the ideal place for integrative coaching and PPI programmes (Clonan et al., 2004). Adolescence is a pivotal stage in development that carries huge implications for functioning over life (Norrish et al., 2013). Schools are now seen as institutions whose role extends beyond academic competence to preparing the 'whole child' to increase wellbeing (Huitt, 2010). Vella-Brodrick (2013) argues that there is currently a one-size-fits-all approach that creates disengaged students and feelings of low self-efficacy. The evidence suggests that coaching and PPIs do the opposite and do not negate needs of at-risk students but instead promote flourishing and mastery which will raise their aspirations to succeed. Moreover, it is key to intervene at multiple levels simultaneously and design interventions that focus on minimising factors that lead to problematic functioning (i.e. risk factors) along with strengths within the adolescent and his/her environment (i.e. protective factors). The school context may serve to mediate the relationship between risk exposure and outcomes. Schools that are perceived as positive, empathising and with a sense of belonging/connectedness have implications for adolescent functioning (Schonert-Reichl, 2000).

There is, however, the contentious issue of whether those at-risk may actually have undiagnosed mental-health issues (National Research Council & Institute of Medicine, 2009). It has been suggested that Positive Psychology could lead to negative outcomes in these cases (Wood, Perunovic & Lee, 2009). Better screening and understanding is, therefore, required (Green & Norrish, 2013).

A recent grounded theory study by Robson and van Nieuwerburgh (forthcoming) on disadvantaged adolescents at-risk of developing mental health problems suggested that the experience of coaching as well as positive psychology creates a process, a positive relationship and a set of skills that help young people to deal with their situations. Skills included growing accountability, awareness and responsibility of choices and control over their thoughts, feelings and behaviour, which resulted in increased confidence. Therefore, coaching and positive psychology do have much to offer young people at-risk of developing mental health problems and thus there may be parallels with this research.

This literature review suggests that the research question is a relevant realm for analysis. However, there is no research integrating appreciative coaching with PPIs with Seligman (personal communication, 17 April 2014) stating 'I am not aware of a similar study'. Therefore, this research contributes to the understanding of how coaching and PPIs are experienced by at-risk adolescents.

## Method

### *Research paradigm*

The theoretical framework is concerned with examining and understanding the lived experience of the participant. The conceptual framework centres on the belief that humans are 'sense/meaning-making organisms' (Smith, 2009). The main driver for choosing the epistemological framework was the research question. The phenomenological position was chosen because it examines participants' perceived lived experiences. Based on the phenomenological approach, there is not one valid reality to be observed but infinite equally 'real' realities that stem from our subjective experiences (Langbridge, 2007). Additionally an idiographic position is taken as the research is seeking to identify the 'meaning' experienced by each participant. Due to there being two levels of interpretation within IPA, a double hermeneutic position is taken. In other words, it is recognised that as the participant is making sense of her lived experience, the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of her experience. Therefore, it is highly reflexive (Smith & Osbourne, 2009) and enables the practitioner to be interviewer.

The traditional methodology used for PPIs and coaching, which primarily are conducted on private school adolescents, are quantitative, randomised control (e.g. Green et al., 2011; Norrish & Vella-Brodrick, 2009; Seligman et al., 2009) with self-report questionnaires being utilised. These do not allow for full disclosure/voices to be heard. There are also limited longitudinal studies conducted. Longitudinal studies would demonstrate long-term effectiveness of PPI's and coaching (Norrish et al., 2013).

The traditional methodology for at-risk adolescent's research is qualitative through a mixture of longitudinal grounded theory (Wierenga, 2008) narrative (Tellis-James, 2013), action research (Doveston & Keenaghan, 2006; San-Martin, 2010) and thematic analysis (Maldonado et al., 2008) using structured and unstructured interviews. Green et al. (2013) propose that future research should focus on qualitative data so that more understanding can be gleaned into the complex human dynamics involved in these interventions.

Quantitative methodology was ruled out for this study as the research does not seek to measure. Instead it seeks meanings, experiences and data richness. Furthermore, quantitative researchers aim to keep themselves at a distance from those they are researching whereas qualitative methodology recognises the complex two-way process. Schools are also not practical environments for quantitative studies, due to the difficulties of controlling the variables that influence the outcome. Within schools, there may be other interventions running which may impact findings. A qualitative method was deemed the best approach to conduct the research as it explores, describes and interprets experiences of small samples (Smith, 2009).

Interpretative phenomenological analysis which is 'committed to the examination of how people make sense of their major life experiences' (Smith et al., 2009, p.1.) was chosen as it works with small homogenous groups to interpret meanings. However, there are limitations to IPA, due to the focus on hermeneutics/interpretation. Moreover, one is unable to test a hypothesis as it only concentrates on the participant's experience. Further research can be conducted on larger groups to glean quantitative results.

### *Participants*

The participants were three 15-year-old girls from a comprehensive girls' school in north London who fit the 'at-risk' criteria. There is some ethnic diversity between the sampling. They are all from a similar socio-economic backgrounds and were languishing therefore are a purposive, homogeneous sampling.

### *Procedure*

A reflexive journal was kept throughout. Participants attended a six-week coaching and PPI's group programme at their school.

This took place weekly where possible. Towards the end of the programme, the three girls were asked whether they were interested in being interviewed so to better understand their experience. A consent letter was signed by their parents with a briefing letter given to explain. Due to IPA being chosen and it being highly reflexive, the practitioner is able to also be the interviewer. The semi-structured interviews took place two weeks after the intervention. Each interview lasted between 30 to 40 minutes. Students were briefed prior to the interview and informed of their right to withdraw during or after the interview; that the interview was going to be audio-recorded yet their anonymity would be protected. A semi-structured interview guide of five open-ended questions was used based on Smith and Osborne (2009) (see Appendix 1 for the questions used) Further questions were asked such as 'what do you mean?' and 'how did you feel?' to allow for clearer examination. After the interview, the participant was thanked, debriefed and interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researcher shortly thereafter.

***Data collection***

Prior to commencing, the researcher ensured that she was open-minded, flexible, empathetic, persistent and curious (Smith, Larkin & Flowers, 2009). There may have been some issues of power-play that needed to be negotiated (e.g. the student wanting to please the researcher and give the 'right' answers). This was overcome by the researcher saying at the start of the interview that she wanted them to be open and honest and that nothing they could say would offend as it would only help shape the research.

In order to assess qualitative validity and quality the researcher needed to be sensitive to the context, the data and the socio-cultural environment. In so doing, the interviewer needed to put the interviewee at ease and recognise interactional difficulties in order to produce a good interview and get good data. Additionally, due to it being a purposive sample of adolescents who are traditionally expected to be difficult to access and engage, it was necessary for the researcher to remain patient. The researcher had to ensure the interview was attended to closely so to pick up any cues as it needed to be coherent and transparent for the reader to understand what was being said. The research could therefore be replicated to increase reliability (Smith et al., 2009c).

***Data analysis***

Each interview was transcribed verbatim to confirm accuracy. Lines were numbered and wide margins were left on either side for coding ease. Additionally a space was left between each turn in conversation. Analysis happened only after all three interviews had occured so to prevent the interviewer influencing subsequent interviews. Analysis occurred inductively and line-by-line. The transcript was re-read whilst listening to the audio. Text which was thought to be important was underlined with some initial, reflective notes made as thoughts arose to bracket them off as well as noting anything of interest in the left margin. Descriptive, linguistic and conceptual comments were made with reference to theory sought. After the first transcript was read, emergent themes were identified from the initial notes and written in the right margin. The next transcript was analysed in the same way. Once all three transcripts were analysed, connections were looked for across the transcripts by comparing the separate lists to identify common themes. Abstraction was used to form 'superordinate themes' to group together emergent themes. Finally, this was input into a Word file with verbatim interview excerpts in order to demonstrate where the evidence was found (Smith et al., 2009c). The three emergent themes are presented in Table 1.

## Results

***Themes arising***

***Better control of emotions/reactions***

Each participant reported struggling with controlling their emotions prior to participating in the programme and reported bad behaviour as a consequence. Being able to control their emotions and reactions was something they now experienced.

> 'I try not to get as angry as quickly and I've learnt how to calm down a bit more than before… even though I am a loud person I've learnt how to use it in the right way… a positive not a negative way…' (p.7, 211–213).
>
> 'in a situation where I'm not happy I no longer become angry instead I stay calm and try to remain calm…' (p.14, 511–512)… before in an argument I probably would have had a fight but now I know how to control myself so yeah (p.14, 514–515).

The participants spoke of how they had matured which had led to self-discipline and suggests growth and development.

> 'Now I'm much more mature about the arguments that we have compared to before.' (p.1, 19–20).

The participant's even reported experiencing praise from family, friends and teachers about their behaviour and emotional control.

> 'Teachers, friends and family have all said my behaviour has changed in a positive way' (p.15, 547) and 'my friends have told me that they have seen a difference in how I handle situations more calmly and I get less angry and I walk away from bad situations (p.3, 97–98).

There was even some insight that being angry all the time has an effect on your feelings and emotions and how thinking more positively has the opposite effect.

> 'it makes me feel like a better person because when you're angry all the time thats when I feel like all the negative things come into your mind because you're just an angry person naturally so but if you are like a naturally positive person you're like calm, it helps you with situations and everything and softens your mind as well (p.7, 215–218).

There was also some further insight into how one's reactions affects others.

> 'I feel like people can understand me better now because I'm calm. Before when I was angry I just used to shout and be aggressive so people didn't really listen to what I was saying' (p.7, 233–235)…. and were kinda scared or intimidated by the way I approached them now I approach them in a calm way so that they feel like I am coming to them in a respectable way (p.7, 245–247).

**Table 1: Overview of experiences subsequent to programme.**

| Superordinate theme | Subordinate themes |
|---|---|
| 1. Better control of emotions and reactions | 1.1 Able to stay calm |
| | 1.2 Able to see things from others perspectives and think about consequences |
| 2. Increased experience of 'positive' emotions and thoughts | 2.1 Increased self-belief |
| 3. Identification of purpose and meaning to life | 3.1 Identified strengths and applied them to life/ambitions goals |
| | 3.2 Identified that supportive relationships are valuable |

***Able to see things from others perspectives and think about consequences***

All the participants reported experiencing a newfound level of maturity and selflessness that were not present prior to participating in the programme.

> 'I think about the effect of what I'm going to do and how it will hurt others… before I never used to care about the consequences and used to be selfish… now, instead of thinking about myself, I see everyone around me and see things from other people's perspectives… if I was going to do something I wouldn't just do it for my own purpose I'll think oh, will it be helping this other person' (p.14, 517–519 and p.15, 549–550, 552–553).

This maturity is further addressed when referencing arguments and how since participating in the programme their ability to resolve arguments had improved due to becoming aware of what was worthwhile.

> 'When I argue with people, I see that I'm much better at resolving arguments and being mature about situations. Things like where I would've stood there and fight, I now walk away and think, no, it's not worth it' (p3, 71–73).

Consequences of one's actions was something that was additionally highlighted by the participants.

> 'But now it's like if someone said that to me, I'd say do you really wanna do that? Think about the consequences! I think ahead of my actions now, what it actually means (p.9, 298–299)…. Before, I got arrested for assaulting a police officer even though i didn't mean to after i was thinking in my head, it can't be that bad can it?! I didn't really think of the consequences whereas now if I done that I'd be scared because I know the consequences of that. The effects of criminal record, people judge you for it… (p.10, 325–328).

One participant went so far as to say that being part of the programme allowed her to see the error of her ways and that another way was possible, referring to her 'possible-future-self' (Maldonado et al., 2008).

> 'It made me see another perspective and made me realise that where I was going wasn't good so do a U-turn' (p.6, 186–187)

A lot of insight and perspective was gleaned by the participants which made them see things from a different mindset.

> 'If something bad happens to me I don't see it as a way of turning off. I used to but now I don't… I feel like it's a way of making me stronger into something I actually want to be so as it comes like, use it as a way to help motivate myself instead of putting myself down and saying because this happened to me I'm not going to do this and thinking why do always bad things happen to me? Instead I take it on board and think, okay maybe this happened to me for a reason and start considering the factors around it' (p.7, 223–231).

This insight was further understood by the realisation that everyone is on their own journey and rather than compare with others, accept.

> 'I used to think, why does everyone else have a happy life? I'd learnt to understand that everyone has their own tests in a different way… some people's tests may come later on in life or just not as harsh as others (p.8, 251–253)… then again if it wasn't for all the stuff in my past, I wouldn't be who I am today thanks to that it's made me who I am (p.9, 282–283).

***Increased experience of positive emotions and thoughts.***

All participants reported experiences of positive emotions and thoughts, It made me feel positive really positive' (p.14, 522) which impacted their perceptions of the present, future and of others.

> 'I think I appreciate things much more… if my dad bought me something I'd feel really grateful… plus I see that I have a hope of having a bright future, before

> I never used to think that…' (p.4, 113–116, 119–120).

Positive emotions such as hope and gratitude were all reported as having been experienced by the participants describing themselves as now more positive people.

> 'I'm a more positive, more aware, less selfish person' (p.16, 572).

This more positive outlook led one participant to even reflect on her past and see 'that some good has come out of it….' It could be interpreted that by learning how to think more positively through the programme, the participants were able to reframe their worldview and see things through different tinted glasses.

> 'Even though bad stuff has happened to me, I can now see that some good has come out it, it's shaped me… It made me look at more of the positives, like how I used to think of the negatives, it made me bring up the positives, even though it was hard to think of positives, to think that there is a positive thing in every situation' (p.6, 189–191, 193–194).

***Increased self-belief***

All participants reported experiencing increased self-belief and confidence subsequent to the programme.

> 'I think its the thinking thing like, I know what I want to become, I know what I want to do, I know why I come to school, I know what I want to get out of everything now' (p.3, 77–78).

There was also a newfound appreciation that the effort one puts in, one gets out in accomplishment.

> 'I know that I am good at stuff… I know that I'm doing well… what I'm putting in is having an effect on the grades that I'm getting. In French I got an A* whereas before I got a B which is a big jump' (p.13, 533–535, p.16, 557–559).

This confidence in their competence led to a change in the perception of their 'possible-future selves' (Maldonado et al., 2008).

> 'this is what I wanna do, this is what I wanna get and I am going to get it… like the belief in my goals… I think I can do well… before it was like, no way, never, no chance and now it's, yeah I could, I just have to put the effort in… my self-belief is getting better each day' (p.2, 52–53, p.3, 83–87).
>
> And: 'I want to work hard and get everything that I want to get and focus on school… I want to get good grades and do well at school and a good job… I'm going to achieve it… I'm going to work in geology… (p.16, 576–579).

One participant previously had 'being a criminal' as their ambition but subsequent to the programme, is driven to work within the criminal justice system.

> 'before, they were negative, not like, I want to work in prisons, more like, I want to be behind the bars, now I'm more driven to them [ambitions] and instead of me getting locked up, it being me doing the locking up!' (p.6–7, 177–178 & 201–203).

Being successful and achieving was something all the participants desired but there was no belief.

> 'I've always wanted to be, like successful but I didn't really believe it and I didn't know my strengths and weaknesses, no I knew my weaknesses but not my strengths and I couldn't believe stuff, I couldn't believe what I was being told' (p.14, 491–493).

This suggests for all participants that being on the programme helped to increase their belief in their possible future-selves (Maldonado et al., 2008), which led them to forming realistic goals to work towards which is further evidenced by:

> 'I see that I have a hope of having a bright future, before I never used to think that' (p.4, 119–120).

***Identification of purpose and meaning to life***

Within the interviews the participants began to allude to the fact that they had identified the role of goals, purpose and meaning in life and how this affected their motivation to attend school and concentrate whilst there.

> 'I seem more happier in school and I like school more, I enjoy it more or seem to and I care about my work more because If you're coming to school and you don't know what you wanna get at the end of it, you don't really care, you're just here, but when you know what you wanna do, you're more focused and you have that thought in your mind, I have to get this good grade for what I want to do so I need to focus' (p.3, 102–106).

They even spoke of how they found meaning in having coaching.

> 'no one forced me to come and that must've meant it meant something to me for me to keep on coming' (p.2, 44–45).

This identification of purpose and meaning led the participants to have a change in the importance of their priorities which affected their daily life routine.

> 'Now I revise every evening… before I used to wake up, go school, be rude and I wouldn't focus on lessons and then on the weekend I would go out partying and wouldn't come home till the next day. Now, it's go school, focus, ask questions, take down notes and then come home and revise!' (p.17, 589–592).

One could interpret deeper to find that a lot of the partying and trouble making had been a distraction and escape from reality.

> 'I found a way to escape reality… like now I've realised that that's not a way to help you it just makes it worse… because when it comes back to hit you it hits you harder in the face but if you take it as it comes then it's kind of better because you know what you're dealing with' (p.9, 307–310).

Identifying purpose and meaning filled the void so that they no longer felt the need to always be out or at someone else's home.

> 'Do you wanna come for a drink up on Saturday? Should we go out and cause trouble… beat people up?' (p.9, 305–306)… sometimes I wouldn't even come home, I would just go to someone else's house… now I'm always at home! That's the best place to be!' (p.1, 338–341).

***Identified strengths and ambitions***

All the participants reported the experience of identifying their strengths within the programme and how this had benefitted their perception of themselves.

> 'It helped me like identify and know my strengths and understand what to do and have a positive attitude… also how to improve as a person… and use what I have to help me… (p.14, 504–505).

Becoming aware of their strengths enabled them to believe in their ambitions.

> 'I have ambitions now.' (p.2, 57) 'I want to pass my GCSEs… and I go college and I go uni I want to become an accountant (p.2, 64–65).
>
> And 'Now I'm more like my ambitions… I'm more driven to them… and turning my ambitions round and thinking of the positive (p.7, 201–202)… I want to be the best of the best. I want to be at the top of the FBI (p.13, 454)… being the sort of person who goes into the prisons and advises young people and help them rehabilitate (p.13, 456–457).

The programme also identified to one of the participants how her strengths and skills could be used in more constructive ways thus helping others to not experience the same amount of suffering that she had.

> 'I now know that I'm a good leader and instead of using that on the streets to become a good gang leader, I use it in actual life, like a role model to younger people because I don't want people to experience what I have experienced' (p.12, 442–444).

***Supportive, loving relationships are valued***

All participants reported the importance of having supportive relationships and how they can make such a huge difference to the quality of their life.

> 'just having that guidance there, that coaching, having that person tell you that you are not worthless, you're amazing, your work is brilliant… you are going to make something of yourself, that's what helped me, the little comments, the

> 'thank you's, it showed that they actually appreciated the stuff that I've done' (p.13, 465–471).

One participant experienced less familial attention growing up and she said that if she did not get the 'guidance/loving' from the coaching she would have ended up 'victim to the streets' (p.10, 345) and getting it from not necessarily your friends but people you grew up with on the streets. You'll get it from older boys, you'll get it from gangs… the wrong attention' (p.12, 415–417).

This demonstrates how imperative early care and attention is.

> 'My mum never used to pay attention… Like if I say I want this she never really used to get it… because of what was going on at home I never used to have a relationship with my mum (p.10, 336–337)… as someone who grew up in Hackney or Brixton where I'm from, you need a family to grow up with otherwise your life is basically on the streets… you need someone to constantly remind you that you're amazing, you need someone to constantly remind you that you're their star, you need loving… (p.11, 405–409).

This suggests what a difference getting positive feedback/praise has on an adolescent (Schonert-Reichl, 2000) 'to be told that I am a bubbly, kind character made me feel nice because no one has ever said stuff like that' (p.12, 447).

Thankfully, the relationship with the mum improved during and subsequent to having the coaching programme:

> 'my mum would say that I have matured and Im actually thinking about consequences now where I didn't before and that Im talking into consideration the fact that she is trying now… we're all trying now… (p.11, 400–402).

The support did not just come from adults, but peers were also reported as a resource.

> 'I'm surrounded by friends who have the same aspirations and are clear on their future, we therefore have similarities and help one another in all situations. When we are revising, we will all be messaging each other, taking pictures of our work… it's really good that we can help one another" (p.15, 526–528, 531, 584–585).
> 'being in school, getting my education, having a relationship with my mum, having friends that I can talk to… that's what makes me happy' (p.11, 397–398).

The participants mentioned how imperative it was to have like-minded friends with common aims/aspirations to integrate with. Belonging to a collective who hold you accountable, encourage you and are your champions was experienced as being important. The participants relied on one another as a support system after having shared an experience together, which mitigated stress and provided security for them (Brown & Grant, 2010).

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine qualitatively what the perceptual life changes at-risk adolescents would experience following a coaching and PPI programme. Three perceptual life changes were identified; better control of emotions/reactions, increased experience of positive emotions/thoughts and ability to identify purpose and meaning to life. This led to increased engagement and accomplishment at school/in relationships and all reporting higher PQoL. This concurs with findings that daily positive life experiences predict higher PQoL (Huebner et al., 2004) and life satisfaction relating to positive personal traits, hope and supportive relationships (Gilman & Huebner, 2003; Oberle, Schnonert-Reichl & Zumbo, 2010). The findings are also consistent with positive education's five foundations of wellbeing (Noble & McGrath, 2008).

Consideration of each theme with review of the literature will now be made. With regards to the theme of 'better control of emotions/thoughts' this concurs with Robson and van Nieuwerburgh's (forthcoming) findings who found increased control over thoughts and behaviour subsequent to a

coaching and positive psychology programme. Csikszentmihalyi (2002) found within his longitudinal research that if we are able to control/master the information that comes in and our interpretations and responses, we can then decide what our lives will be like, despite adversity. This can lead to calmer, mature behaviours similar to what was found in this research.

The second finding 'experience of 'positive' emotions/thoughts' is consistent with Mather and Hulme's (2013) appreciative inquiry findings of positive mind-set/optimism. The 'increased self-belief' subtheme concurs with Maldonado et al. (2008) and Herrera et al.'s (2011) findings of self-efficacy, aspirations, self-esteem and possible-selves of at-risk adolescents. Robson and Van Nieuwerburgh (forthcoming) similarly found that coaching is a potential method of application of positive emotions where confidence and self-belief can increase.

'Identified purpose and meaning' covered the subthemes of strengths, goals, accomplishment and relationships that are consistent with Green et al.'s (2013) coaching findings of goal striving increases. Emmons (1999, 2004) found that goals are related to increased happiness and a sense of meaning/connection so pursuing goals is vital to our functioning, without which we would languish. Likewise, results concur with Van Niewerburgh et al.'s (2011) relationship improvements and study-skills findings and Norrish and Vella-Brodrick's (2010) higher life satisfaction and increases in academic performance.

Seligman (2002) found that having an abundance of social ties differentiated the happiest people from the least happy, which concurs with our finding of the importance of intimate, trusting relationships. Strengths identification, focus and usage emerged as important, which concurs with Steen et al.'s (2005) finding that strength identification and use is associated with happiness and lower rates of depression.

Levels of engagement within school increased subsequent to taking part in the programme. This agrees with Seligman et al. (2009) and Froh et al. (2008). Csikszentmihalyi's (2002) 'theory of optimal experiences' based on the 'flow' concept, proposes that when a person's body/mind is stretched out of its comfort zone to accomplish something worthwhile, it leads to growth/discovery. The findings suggest that these adolescents experienced similarly, which led to a more complex self, both integrated with others and differentiated.

The superordinate-themes of meaning and purpose agree with Csikszentmihalyi (2002) as optimal experiences add to a sense of mastery in determining the content of life. If this is joined into a meaningful pattern it leads to control and happiness. Seligman, Peterson and Parks (2006) found that meaning and engagement pursuit was correlated with higher life satisfaction and lower depression.

Seligman (2002) divided happiness into: positive emotion (pleasant life); engagement (engaged life) and meaning (meaningful life). He subsequently devised the (P) ositive emotion, (E)ngagement, (R)elationships, (M)eaning and (A)ccomplishment) flourishing model to measure wellbeing. This is all consistent with the emergent theme findings. Kern et al. (2014) found that private-school adolescent's wellbeing was multidimensional although there was some overlap between meaning and relationships, which suggests that adolescents may gain meaning from their relationships with others. This was similarly found in this research.

The group setting proved advantageous which supports Brown and Grant's (2010) assertion that groups are valuable due to support and greater accountability. The knowledge that one's sufferings are shared added an important perspective to the 'egocentric' adolescents. The findings agree with Kerka (2003) as the girls disclosed what a difference it made having their assets focused on. This equally corresponds with the finding that at-risk students do best with teachers who adopt a sense of belonging, develop a

strengths-based approach and focus on their positive core (Wierenga, 2008). Furthermore, sharing meaningful stories of virtue was powerful.

Biswas-Diener and Dean (2007) found two variables of key importance for achieving and maintaining subjective wellbeing; goals and social relationships. Happy people have three things in common, positive-thinking habits, health and relationship maintenance. Happiness can be separated further into processes, life conditions and personal choices. Coaching and PPI's give adolescents the tools and insight to realise how to make personal choices so they experience more positivity. Ryff and Singer's (1998) theory of wellbeing states that people are happiest when they are connected, autonomous and capable. This corresponds with the study's findings.

What this suggests is that life satisfaction will have improved based on the perceptual life changes the adolescents are now experiencing following the programme. This has the likelihood of safeguarding against depression as well as increasing wellbeing. Fredrickson (2001) found that positive emotion and broadened thought intensify one another which leads to an upward spiral of wellbeing. There are similarities with Seligman, Rashid and Park's (2006) positive psychotherapy, which focuses on building positive emotions, strengths and meaning in a group setting across six weeks. This is touted as the new way to treat and prevent depression.

## Limitations

Due to the fact that the coaching and PPIs were delivered in a group setting, participants were unable to intensively go into their experiences, which may have affected rapport. Additionally, the qualitative nature of the research meant that the sample was not representative of the population. However, that being said, this research will be enlightening to those practitioners who work with or are interested in working with young people, specifically at-risk young girls to further glean an understanding into how they experience the world. It could also be similarly useful and important to parents or parents to be.

Carrying out research with a group of challenging adolescents meant that a certain degree of drop-out was inevitable. From an initial group of 10, only three completed the programme and, therefore, were the only ones interviewed. Those that dropped out did so for a number of reasons. Some were not ready for coaching and positive psychology and may have been more suitable for therapy. There was also the issue of the adolescents being selected for being 'at-risk' which caused some resentment and defensiveness. Additionally the sessions were run after school, which was one of the reasons given for why some of the girls did not turn up.

Some of the interview questions needed to be re-phrased for the girls to understand and some participants provided brief answers and required additional prompts. The researcher's subjectivity/interpretations based on this sample population is worth noting. The researcher has had experience of being an at-risk adolescent therefore may have reacted when hearing something that she empathised with. This was alleviated by using the actual words from each participant when coding.

## Implications for future research

It is suggested that further study is carried out on a larger sample-population to validate the results so that reliability can be upheld. Further research is additionally required to explore how to incentivise coaching readiness in order to prevent high drop-out rates in 'at-risk' populations. Additionally, it has been suggested that one must be aware of the tyranny of positive thinking, which can make those who feel particularly negative to feel even worse. Therefore, the context, diversity and caveats are of importance when delivering a positive and coaching psychology programme so further tweaking of the programme is required. Furthermore, Lyubormirsky and Layous (2013) assert the

importance of a person activity fit for effectiveness therefore in future research, at-risk young people ought to have the choice of which PPI to use (K. Hefferon, personal communication, 25 June, 2015).

A mixed-methods approach is recommended to demonstrate the empirical effect. This could include quantitative scales pre/post, for example, the 'satisfaction with life' scale (Diener et al., 1985) followed with qualitative open-ended questions.

We propose that doing this type of intervention early on in school will buffer adolescents from depression and anxiety subsequently. It would be worthwhile to have intensive one-to-one sessions with those who are experiencing past/present perceived troubles so that rapport is not undermined.

This is exciting research, which should serve to motivate further, wider applied intervention research in the field as an appropriate next step to deepen understanding.

## Conclusion

Despite technological advances and material luxuries, some people still feel like their lives lack meaning/purpose and there is a sense of unhappiness/boredom. This is because material conditions are secondary and people have not learnt how to control the content of their experience. The difference between someone who enjoys life and someone who gets overwhelmed is interpretation. Epictetus said 'Men are not afraid of things but of how they view them' (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002, p.20). People who learn how to control their inner-experiences will be able to determine their PQoL, which some argue is as close as any of us can come to being happy. This programme provided a small sample of at-risk adolescents with a broadened and positive view of themselves, others and their lives overall. This led to more positive emotion/thoughts, calmer behaviour, more engaged and meaningful relationships, accomplishment, purpose and a greater sense of self-belief. What this suggests is that integrating coaching and PPIs may have a role to play when working with at-risk adolescents. Long-term outcomes might include academic achievement (Waters, 2014), job success and better health (Howell, Kern & Lyubormirsky, 2007). Therefore, further research and the development of an integrated positive coaching psychology framework, similar to the Grounded Theory model by Robson and van Nieuwerburgh (forthcoming) developed for at-risk adolescents, is strongly recommended.

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## Appendix 1

| |
|---|
| 1. Could you describe to me how you perceived your life prior to taking part in the coaching programme? (only if they struggle)<br>PROMT: Environment, home, family, friends, school, aspirations/ambitions |
| 2. If you had to describe what having the coaching programme meant to you, what would you say?<br>PROMT: What words/images spring to mind? |
| 3. How is your life different now than from before you started the coaching programme?<br>PROMT: Relationships, grades, aspirations, hobbies? |
| 4. How do you see yourself as different?<br>PROMT: Different behaviours/thinking/feelings/views/opinions/aspirations? |
| 5. How would your friends/teachers/family say you have changed if at all?<br>PROMT: Behaviour/thinking/feelings/moods |
| 6. How do you see yourself in the future? |

# What does coaching have to offer to young people at risk of developing mental health problems? A grounded theory study

Liz Robson-Kelly & Christian van Nieuwerburgh

***Objectives:*** *This study sought to identify what coaching psychology has to offer young people at risk of developing mental health problems.*
***Design:*** *The study used a semi-structured interview design and self-reflective data analysis within a qualitative approach.*
***Method:*** *Grounded theory was employed to analyse the transcripts and self-reflective data from coaches and young people and to build a series of descriptive and conceptual codes, and in the creation of a theoretical model.*
***Results:*** *The study results in a theoretical model, which suggests the experience of coaching creates a process, a positive relationship and a set of skills where the young person, through growing accountability, awareness and responsibility, develops choice and control over their thoughts, feelings and behaviour. This helps them to deal with their situations.*
***Conclusions:*** *The study results in an initial theoretical model to assist with the application of coaching interventions, targeted specifically at young people at risk of developing mental health problems. It provides a tentative theoretical understanding that requires further research.*
***Keywords:*** *positive education; positive psychology; coaching psychology; group coaching; coaching relationship; adolescence; mental health; intervention and prevention.*

## Introduction

MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS in young people are increasing globally (Kieling et al., 2011). Most recent UK figures from 2005 showed levels of anxiety and depression in teenagers increased by 70 per cent in 25 years (Mental Health Foundation (MHF), 2005) and that one in 10 children and young people have a diagnosable mental illness (Green et al., 2005). However, almost a decade on, problems are still significantly common (Hagell, Coleman & Brooks, 2013). Keyes, Dhingra and Simoes (2010) state current methods of prevention through risk reduction have not reduced the burden of mental illness; they suggest the promotion and protection of mental wellbeing through increasing positive mental health and protection against loss. There is an urgent need, from a public health (Bramesfeld, Platt & Schwartz, 2006), society (Coote, 2012) and economical and moral (DH, 2011) perspective, to understand appropriate interventions that protect (DfCSF and DH, 2008) and develop mental wellbeing of at risk young people.

Positive psychology has taken steps forward into introducing effective interventions in educational environments to improve the mental wellbeing of young people (Miller, Nickerson & Jimerson, 2009). Applications of Seligman's (2011) multidimensional wellbeing theoretical model, PERMA, are being integrated into whole school interventions to improve mental wellbeing (Kern et al., 2014; Noble & McGrath, 2008; Norrish et al., 2013). Coaching Psychology has been proposed to be an application of positive psychology (Madden, Green & Grant, 2011; van Nieuwerburgh & Green, 2014). Coaching psychology has been shown to improve the mental wellbeing of children (Madden, Green & Grant, 2011) and adolescents (Campbell and Gardner, 2005; Green, Grant & Rynsaardt, 2007; Torbrand & Ellam-Dyson, 2015). Pritchard and van Nieuwer-


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burgh (2016) suggest that participating in programmes that integrate these two approaches contributes to an improved perceived quality of life for at risk young people. However, there has, to date, been no research into the effectiveness of coaching psychology interventions specifically targeted for young people at risk of developing mental health problems.

Through this research, the aim is to start to demonstrate what coaching psychology has to offer at risk young people, and to create a theoretical understanding of *'how particular interventions work so that the ingredients can be harnessed'* (Sutton, 2007, p.567) that could shape the way targeted preventative interventions are created and delivered. This qualitative study starts to establish research into coaching interventions for at risk young people, while contributing to the broadening field of coaching psychology research.

## Literature review

### *Positive psychology and mental health prevention*

Positive psychology turns its focus away from the disease framework to one of optimal functioning, wellbeing and human strengths (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Positive psychology programmes, used in educational settings, have been suggested to improve mental wellbeing, social skills and life satisfaction for young people (Proctor et al., 2011; Seligman et al., 2009). Positive psychology interventions are relevant to consider for at risk young people to help them develop positive emotions as an important aspect of mental wellbeing (Fraser & Blishen, 2007; Garcia, Vasiliou & Penketh, 2007; Sin, Della Porta & Lyubomirsky, 2011). The PERMA framework (Seligman, 2011) defined in five domains: positive emotions (P), engagement (E), relationships (R), meaning (M) and accomplishment (A) has recently been suggested to be applicable to the field of positive education (Kern et al., 2014).

### *Coaching, young people and mentalhealth*

Coaching psychology can operate in the boundary between coaching and therapeutic approaches traditionally used in mental health interventions. Coaching has been generally accepted to work with non-clinical populations (Grant, 2007). However, between 25 and 50 per cent of individuals presenting for coaching fell into clinical mental health criteria (Green et al., 2005; Spence & Grant, 2005). Prevalent coaching psychology approaches applied to improve mental wellbeing use a solution-focused, cognitive behavioural coaching methodology (Campbell & Gardner, 2005; Grant, 2003; Grant, Green & Rynsaardt, 2010; Green et al., 2005, 2007; Gyllensten & Palmer, 2005; Palmer & Gyllensten, 2008; Spence & Grant, 2005), suggesting coaching psychology has wider applications than working with non-clinical populations.

One-to-one coaching with adolescents has been proven to be effective in school environments both for holistic life coaching and for academic performance (Campbell & Gardner, 2005; Green, Grant & Rynsaardt, 2007; Passmore & Brown, 2009; van Nieuwerburgh & Passmore, 2012) and moving young people with moderate mental health towards flourishing (Keyes, 2003). On this same spectrum, at risk young people could be considered to be at the lower languishing (Keyes, 2003, 2006) end, that is, they have low mental health without elevated levels of mental illness. The period of languishing is a crucial time to intervene and increase levels of subjective wellbeing (Keyes, 2006) in order to protect mental health and prevent mental illness developing. Coaching psychology, therefore, has potential to move people up the health spectrum of Keyes' (2005) dual mental health model. Demonstrating that coaching could be used as an accessible option to improve mental wellbeing at a targeted early stage by improving health, which could offer an alternative approach to risk reduction (Keyes et al., 2010).

### *Interventions for improving wellbeing.*

The development of relationships (Browne et al., 2004; Horowitz & Garber, 2006; Stewart, Reid & Mangham, 1997), along with

social support from peers (Southwick et al., 2006), social wellbeing (Rath & Harter, 2010) and social connectedness (Bond et al., 2007) have been demonstrated to be essential elements for the mental wellbeing of young people. Noble and McGrath (2008) created the Positive Educational Practices (PEP) framework and Norrish et al. (2013) created Geelong Grammar School Model of Positive Education, which provide models for improving young people's wellbeing. These models, between them, include positive relationships, social and emotional competency, positive emotions, and engagement. Madden, Green and Grant (2011) demonstrated the potential for strengths based coaching to improve the wellbeing of young people transitioning from primary to secondary school. Green, Oades and Robinson (2012) advocate greater integration of coaching and positive psychology in an educational setting for student, staff and whole school wellbeing, and van Nieuwerburgh and Green (2014) suggest coaching is an applied positive psychology that could help develop mental toughness in young people. Pritchard and van Nieuwerburgh (2016) have started to generate interesting findings on how coaching and positive psychology interventions are of benefit to at risk young people. However, more research is required into the validity of these methods and approaches.

School-based, targeted, small group interventions of social and emotional learning (SEL) have proven effective at improving the emotional and social development of adolescents (Barrett, Webster & Wallis, 1999). The UK Resilience Programme, (Challen et al., 2011) did make a short-term impact on mental wellbeing where lasting impact was identified in children whose symptoms of anxiety and depression and needs were greater at the start of the programme. Horowitz and Garber's (2006) meta-analysis also concluded that selective prevention programmes were found to be more effective than universal. This demonstrates that, although positive psychology and social and emotional interventions have demonstrated potential to support at risk young people, it is perhaps the specific targeting of the intervention that is essential to its success. This is explored through the concept of vantage sensitivity (Pluess & Belsky, 2013)

***Coaching relationships for improving wellbeing***

Positive relationships have been identified as an important element of subjective wellbeing (Hefferon & Boniwell, 2011; Seligman, 2011). The role of a positive relationship with a caring, trusted adult is a key factor in mental health promotion and prevention for at risk young people (Browne et al., 2004; Campbell & Gardner, 2005; Roth et al., 1998; Sutton, 2007). What could be defined as 'positive' relationship that is developed through coaching is important to the overall effectiveness of coaching (McKenna & Davis, 2009). De Haan (2008) identified that it is the coaches' qualities and how they contribute to the development of the coaching relationship that are valued by coachees. Further studies have emphasised trust as a vital element in developing the coaching relationship (Gyllensten & Palmer, 2007; Lai & McDowall, 2014; O'Broin & Palmer, 2010; Passmore, 2010), suggesting that the qualities and ability of the coach to develop a positive coaching relationship could have a lot to offer at risk young people.

Young people identify the relationships provided by peer support as essential to the development of their mental health (Fraser & Blishen, 2007; Garcia, Vasiliou & Penketh, 2007; McNeil, Aylott & Mguni, 2012). It could be suggested that encouraging the development of positive relationships through peer support could be beneficial to the mental health of young people. Research into peer coaching and particularly how this encourages the development of positive peer relationships has been shown as highly beneficial to young people (Pritchard & van Nieuwerburgh, 2016; Short, Kinman & Baker, 2010; van Nieuwerburgh & Tong, 2012).

Targeted group coaching with A-level students demonstrates the importance of peer support in reduce procrastination and

avoidance behaviours, specifically for young people identified to have these traits (Torbrand & Ellam-Dyson, 2015). Group life coaching programmes for adults have proven to enhance wellbeing and improve the quality of life (Green, Oades & Grant, 2005; Rolo & Gould, 2007; Spence & Grant, 2005), increase confidence and positive outlook, and challenge social isolation (Grajfoner, 2009). Therefore, group coaching could provide at risk young people with a safe place to experience and develop supportive peer relationships that enhance wellbeing.

This research starts to develop an understanding of the coaching tools and techniques at risk young people find helpful. While also looking at how the application of this intervention including the coaching and group relationship contributes to its helpfulness to at risk young people. This begins to make coaching psychology and positive psychology accessible for vulnerable young people, while at the same time contributing to the wider field of coaching psychology research.

## Method

The aim of Grounded Theory (GT) is to develop an understanding or knowledge base that will develop and inform practice. GT is becoming a useful method for developing an understanding of how coaching works (Elston & Boniwell, 2011; Passmore, 2010; Passmore & McGoldrick, 2009). Strauss and Corbin's (1990) approach to GT, through understanding what works and theory creation, was the method chosen to increase understanding and contribute to developing a way of working that supports young people in improving mental wellbeing, whilst creating a foundation for further research. Furthermore, recognition by education and health sectors (Charmaz, 2006) of the validity of GT as a research method could also contribute to the possible future dissemination and contribution this research could make to other sectors outside of coaching, potentially making a greater contribution to young people and society.

### *Research design*

An important part of the process of creating a grounded theory is to acknowledge assumptions (Birks & Mills, 2011). The research question was constructed in such a way as to remain as broad as possible, within the assumption that coaching has something to offer at risk young people. This assumption has been evidenced by the research into coaching psychology with children and adolescents (Campbell & Gardner, 2005; Green, Grant & Rynsaardt, 2007; Madden, Green & Grant, 2011).

The research took place within the researcher's own coaching practice, a social enterprise which supports vulnerable young people through positive education programmes as defined by Green, Oades and Robinson (2012). This research method involved action research (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010). The young people involved in the study had already worked with the researcher; a helpful approach in this instance, as the young people involved in the research were vulnerable. The relationship between the young people, the organisation, the researcher and coaches contributed to generation of data, while ensuring the participants were safe and ethical guidelines were upheld, both within coaching and research guidelines.

In order to answer the research question, the method of GT requires theoretical sampling, as recommended by Birks and Mills (2011) with vulnerable young people. Although there was little hazard or risk to the young people, due to the research's focus on the experience of the positive coaching intervention, because of the age and vulnerability of the participants, attention was given to ensuring the safety and wellbeing of participants and confidentiality of the data. The participants were between 13- and 17-years-old; they were invited to be involved in the research towards the end of the intervention. Parental consent had previously been obtained for them to participate in the coaching interventions, consent to take part in the study was discussed verbally and signed

consent was provided by the parent and young person. Checks were made to ensure the participants did not feel coerced into taking part. Participants were free to withdraw at any time. The participants involved in coaching programmes had undergone rigorous checks in line with organisational safeguarding policies and procedures. Ethical approval was sought and granted though the Research Ethics Committee at the University of East London (UEL).

The young people were invited following completion of group positive education programmes and individual coaching programmes. To be involved with the research to form a theoretical sample group, the young people were all known to each other so the rapport and relationship between the groups was helpful to the data collection process. Initial iteration of participants was young people of both genders aged 13 to 17 within the research cohort and included those who had experienced symptoms of anxiety and/or depression and those who exhibited self-harming behaviours. One young person was on the autistic spectrum and another had a medical diagnosis of mental illness.

Initial data collection and coding (Birks & Mills, 2011) took place through two focus groups and one semi-structured interview (see Table 1). Semi-structured interview questions (Appendix 1) were developed to focus on the young person's experience of the coaching intervention. The focus groups/interview were conducted by the author who already had worked with the participants through the delivery of the coaching programmes. The focus groups and interview were recorded and transcribed as well as field notes written. The data was coded and analysed using constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), and memo writing, this led to the generation of initial categories.

The data provided several categories and a development of the relationship between them which included the perception of the intervention, application of the intervention, coaching relationship, tools and techniques young people found helpful and how they applied them. A second iteration (see Table 1) of analysis of 80 pieces of self-reflective evaluation forms from 68 individuals that had taken part in the coaching programmes further developed the researchers' understanding of the tools and skills gained by young people and resulted in a matrix of the skills and tools young people gained and awareness of how these are being applied in young people's lives (see Table 3)

In order to discover the coaches' perceptions and experience of the coaching interventions and what they had to offer young people, a third iteration (see Table 1) involving semi-structured interviewing with three coaches was completed. Two of the coaches had facilitated group positive education programmes and individual coaching with young people and one had completed individual coaching sessions. The research conducted in the first two interactions was not shared with the coaches to avoid any influence over their contribution to the study.

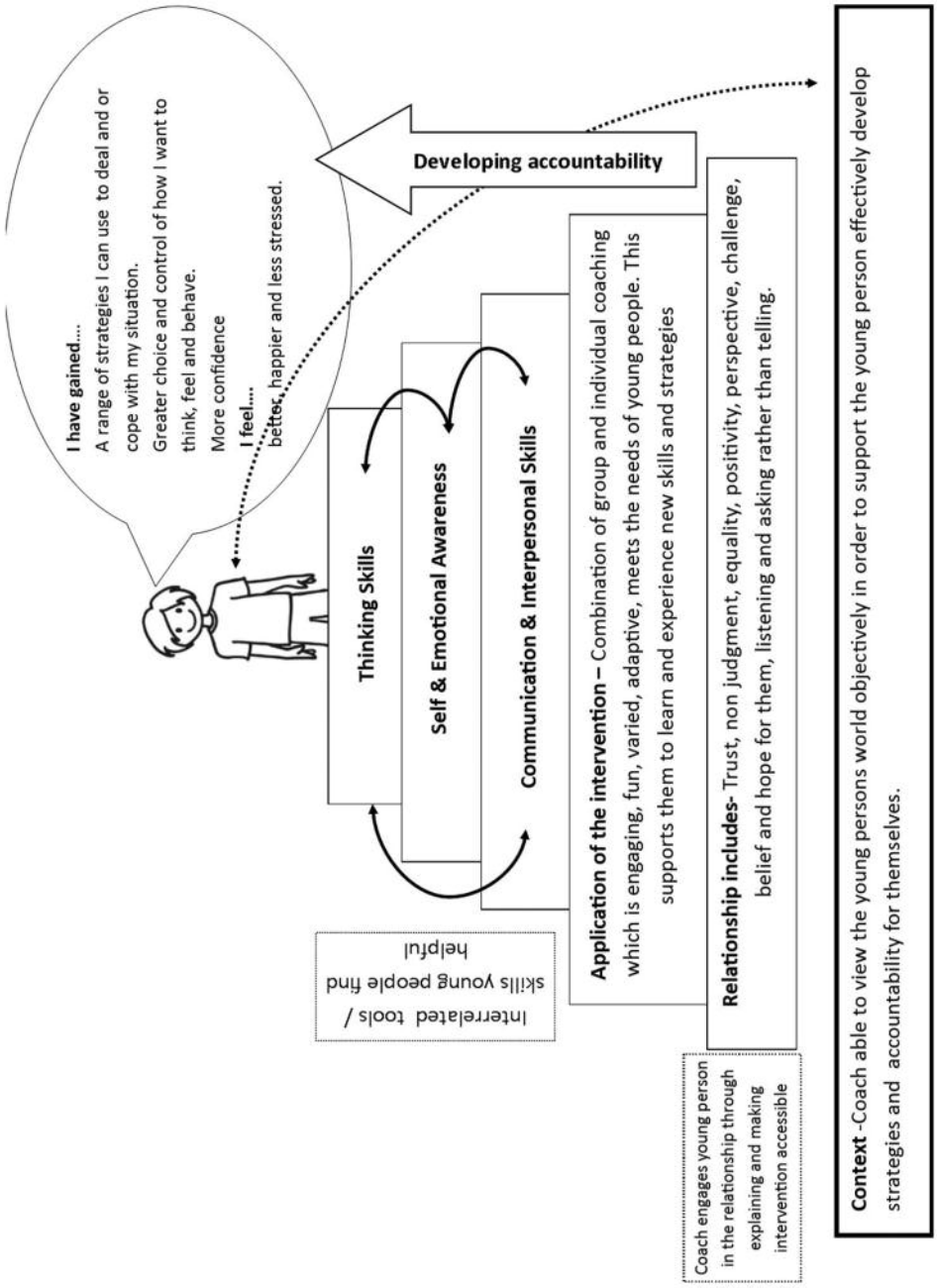
Memo writing throughout enabled the creative process, reflexivity, theoretical sensitivity and objectivity (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This combination of different data sources created a triangulation of data analysis and assisted in the generation of the core categories and the emergence of a theory and tentative model. The tentative developmental model was then shared with six colleagues in the field of coaching who, in most cases, provided minor feedback and felt the model was an accurate reflection of coaching at risk young people. However, two coaches advised that, in addition, the model could potentially show movement through process of change more clearly. This feedback was combined with further comparative analysis and developed the model into one which could be used to engage young people into the coaching intervention through explaining and making it accessible, and resulted in the final model being produced (Figure 1). This model was then shown to three of the young people interviewed in iteration 1, who found the model to be an

**Table 1: Research process.**

| Data Source | Type | Number | Age and Gender |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Iteration 1** | | | |
| Semi-structured interview | Focus Group<br>YP1 YP4<br>YP2 YP5<br>YP3 | 5 | 5 female aged 15 |
| Semi-structured interview | Focus Group<br>YP6 YP8<br>YP7 | 3 | 1 female aged 13<br>1 female aged 14<br>1 male aged 16 |
| Semi-structured interview | Individual interview<br>YP9 | 1 | 1 male aged 15 |
| **Iteration 2** | | | |
| Group coaching<br>self-reflective logs | Written evaluation by<br>young person | 68 | 46 female<br>22 male<br>aged 13 to 17 |
| One-to-one coaching<br>self-reflection | Written evaluation by<br>young person | 12 | 6 female<br>6 male<br>aged 13 to 17 |
| (14 were from the same individuals asked to reflect on two occasions)<br>Creation of tentative coaching tools matrix | | | |
| **Iteration 3** | | | |
| Semi-structured interviews<br>with coaches | Interview<br><br>C1<br>C2<br>C3 | 3 | All female |
| **Completion of tools matrix and creation of model** | | | |
| **Iteration 4** | | | |
| Tentative model sent to feedback from colleagues x 6 | | | |
| **Amended coaching model created, based on feedback and further data comparative analysis.** | | | |
| **Model discussed for fidelity with three of the young people interviewed in Iteration 1** | | | |

accurate representation of their experience of the coaching intervention and that it could have applicability to other young people outside of the study.

Figure 1: A model for coaching young people at risk of developing mental health problems.



## Results

The results suggest that coaching could have a considerable amount to offer young people at risk of developing mental health problems. Through the process of constant comparison, the categories emerged; these consisted of three main categories: context, application of the intervention, and outcome of the intervention, that is, what coaching offers at risk young people (see Table 2). Each of the three categories is subdivided into sub category themes and sub themes. These findings could provide a theoretical understanding of the phenomenon that could support wider research and support the development of coaching programmes and interventions that help vulnerable young people.

### Tools and techniques used to support at risk young people.

The study demonstrated that the participants in this study enjoyed a varied approach which is made accessible for them. Having a range of tools, techniques and a place to experience them, through a group or with a coach, offers young people a range of strategies to use in their individual situations. The participants in the interviews and the self-reflective feedback referred to specific tools and how they helped them. These tools and skills fell into three interrelated categories, communication and interpersonal skills, self and emotional awareness and thinking skills. Table 3 demonstrates the tools and techniques and how these strategies are applied by young people.

The results suggested that part of the process of engaging young people in coaching interventions involved 'explanation'. The findings from this study have resulted in an accessible model, which could be used to help explain what coaching is (see Figure 1), highlighting a potential use for the model beyond this study. When the model was shown to three of the young people interviewed for the study, they expressed how it could be helpful in explaining coaching to them while providing a focus point to help build the coaching relationship so they don't feel 'pressurised'. C3 referred to using steps as a way to explain various different ideas to young people such as 'how layers of trust build up'. Using steps in the model came out of the data and also demonstrated the way the skills and knowledge build on each other once the coaching relationship is in place. The process of moving through the steps and developing skills and strategies helps young people improve communication, interpersonal skills, self and emotional awareness and thinking skills. The context is

Table 2: Categories in brief.

| Main Categories | Sub Categories |
|---|---|
| Context | For Coach<br>For Young person |
| Application of the intervention | Engagement<br>Practical application<br>Individual coaching<br>Group coaching<br>Skills<br>Relationship |
| Outcomes of the intervention | For self<br>For others<br>Choice<br>Communication |

not part of the steps but something that both the coach and young person are aware of. The coach and young person are aware that the young person is responsible for applying the relevant skills and strategies to the context they are in. This may be an immediate application in the future or to help others.

## Discussion

The results suggest that, theoretically, coaching psychology has much to offer young people at risk of developing mental health problems. The study indicated coaching interventions are generally seen by young people and coaches to be *'helpful'*, *'enjoyable experience'* and skills learnt *'useful'*. The study suggests that young people benefit from the process of coaching, the experience of the intervention, the coaching relationship and the skills they develop. Taking part in a group, individual and coaching positive education programme (Green, Oades & Robinson, 2012) was seen as helpful for developing communication, interpersonal skills, strategies and the confidence of vulnerable young people, findings also discovered by Torbrand and Ellam-Dyson (2015). This type of intervention can equip young people with a range of helpful strategies: improved emotional and self-awareness, which results in greater sense of choice and control, increased confidence and feeling 'happier'. Pritchard and van Nieuwerburgh (2016) also discovered similar outcomes for the young people in their study. These acquired skills and strategies can help young people deal with or cope with the challenging or difficult situations they might be in.

The study offers further understanding of the integration of coaching psychology and positive education as a potential application of positive psychology, enabling young people to experience and develop skills which align with four out of five domains of Seligman's (2011) PERMA model. Throughout the discussion, coaches will be referred to as C1, C2 and C3. Statements made by young people in the focus groups and interviews will be referred to as YP; each young person has been given a number 1 to 9.

### The context

All three coaches in the study showed that they were aware that the context of the situation is something that could influence and impact on their ability to effectively coach at risk young people. A balance is maintained by the coaches between need for support and managing the coaching process and relationship. In order to support the young person most effectively, the coaches were *'able to see the world through their eyes and remain detached from it to support them with a mix of empathy and objectivity'* (C1). The study suggests the ability to remain objective is necessary for coaches to support at risk young people *'it could be easy to get lost in the problem story and what is happening'* (C1). The coach offers an opportunity help the young person with *'ownership, accountability, responsibility so they learn to trust themselves and their own judgements'* (C3) this is something that the coach establishes with the young person.

### Engaging young people into the coaching relationship

Young people's prior perceptions of the coaching intervention range from fear of the unknown, apprehension, concern, to *'worth a try'* (YP3). Coaches facilitate engagement through *'building that relationship'* (C3) explaining in accessible ways and developing a shared understanding with young people *'we can work through what it is and isn't together, set a way of working'* (C1). A technique also employed by Campbell and Gardner (2005).

The study suggests that being engaged into the coaching process starts building trust (O'Broin & Palmer, 2010), which the data suggests is important for at risk young people *'we got to know each other which made us trust you more and want to open up more'* (YP1). The word 'trust' came up 23 times in the coaches' transcriptions. Trust is seen as a factor in mental health problem prevention by Sutton (2007) and Browne et al. (2004). Coaches are aware that their coaching rela-

tionship might be one of the few trusting relationships an at risk young person has had *'They may have trusted people in the past that has seriously let them down especially adults or a peer'* (C2). This is something to value and develop, *'it might take a teen longer to trust you than an adult'* (C2), *'Building that relationship, being trusted'* (C3). Passmore's (2010) GT study also identified trustworthiness as an attribute of the coach, and O'Broin and Palmer (2010) and Gyllensten and Palmer (2007) also highlight trust as a vital component of an effective coaching relationship.

## The coaching relationship

The relationship between the group and coaches developed through the intervention was seen as helpful, friendly and comfortable *'you could see people getting happier… so you feel comfortable'* (YP2), giving young people a chance to 'know' it is helpful and safe to 'open up', *'you can see other people being relaxed around them so you know it's ok to say stuff you don't have to keep it all in'* (YP1).

The study suggests the coach's relationship with the young person provides an opportunity for young people to experience positive relationships, Coaches referred to the relationship as 'critical' to the success of the intervention (de Haan, 2008; Grant & Spence, 2011; McKenna & Davis, 2009) and something both the young people and coaches were aware of, both emphasised the importance of spending time building a relationship and a shared understanding.

The coaching relationship is viewed positively by all participants, in addition to objectivity and trust, the study shows the coaching relationship also includes equality, positivity, listening, questioning skills, belief in the young person, non-judgement, openness, (Lai & McDowall, 2014) all of which creates a comfortable, engaging and safe space for young people *'we talk a lot because we're comfortable'* (YP1). In order to create this type of relationship, coaches in this study demonstrate certain traits, which include an adaptive, integrative approach, a range of styles to fit the young person's needs, friendliness, empathy and challenge. The study highlighted that coaching offers the chance for at risk young people to experience having a positive, supportive relationship with a trusted adult (Campbell & Gardner, 2005). The study suggests this is the very least coaching offers along with a chance to learn a range of tools and strategies and experience trying them out.

## Application of the intervention

Firstly, the study demonstrated that this type of intervention offered the participants an opportunity to meet and be with people that are *'similar to you','so you don't feel alone',* a similar finding also discovered by Torband and Ellam-Dyson (2015). Developing positive relationships through social support and group coaching is something Grajfoner (2009) has suggested as supportive in managing mental health problems. Sin, Della Porta and Lyubomirsky (2011) propose that positive psychology interventions bring more success when a person has a supportive social network, highlighting that participating in group coaching programmes provides a helpful opportunity for young people to experience and develop positive relationships and social networks.

Through the intervention, young people develop and experience strategies that help them feel confident. The intervention also provided a place to try out them out, providing a *'chance to look at people and other strategies people use'* (C1), *'you would have been listening in… they would have opened your eyes 'cause it does help an awful lot'* (YP7). For young people the data suggests that having some evidence, seeing and knowing it is working encourages them to try out self-changing strategies (de Haan, 2008).

In addition, experiencing and trying out new perspectives and ways of thinking in a safe, positive and supportive environment gives young people *'a chance to remove yourself from situations to think about the solutions'* (YP3) giving them a place to *'work out different coping strategies and a way to deal with the things in their life'* (C2).

The coaching intervention offers a place to experience positive emotions (Frederickson, 2009). Fun, awe, hope, passion, pride and interest were all referred to in the study, indicating coaching as a potential method of application of the positive emotion as a tool for developing mental wellbeing in young people (Kern et al., 2014; Norrish et al., 2013; Pritchard & van Nieuwerburgh (2016). The sessions were interactive and varied involving games and different types of activities to remain an engaging experience to be involved in, again aligning with Seligman's (2011) PERMA model.

The study suggests individual coaching sessions offered a more personalised way of helping young people, which was seen as more transformational by coaches interviewed. However, some young people preferred group interventions. The appropriateness of individual or group coaching is a case of personal preference and learning style for individuals. However, all the young people and coaches interviewed said that a combination of a group positive education programme and individual coaching, in order to gain the benefits from both styles of approach, had been the most effective intervention, *'when you've had a group and you go and do really good work with them on a one to one, that's when the penny drops and they run with it'* (C3). *'Our shining example was X and that was 10 sessions of coaching and the group coaching, as much as I was saying the group doesn't give them change what it does give them is confidence'* (C2). *'From the group work I learnt there is other people like that and the confidence… and then from here (individual session) I learnt the motivation strengths thing'* (YP9).

## Interrelated tools and skills young people find helpful

Table 3 lists the specific tools and techniques used in the coaching group and individual sessions. These align with other positive psychology and coaching interventions with young people (Campbell & Gardner, 2005; Green, Grant & Rynsaardt, 2007; Madden, Green & Grant, 2011; Pritchard & van Nieuwerburgh, 2016; Rolo & Gould, 2007; Short, Kinman & Baker, 2010: Torbrand & Ellam-Dyson, 2015).

## Developing accountability

Findings from this study show young people are aware that the tools and techniques developed are something they apply themselves *'I can now have situations and decisions that I can now use to cope with things'* (YP6), *'they realise the ownership is on them to go away and implement the things they have spoken about'* (C3). The skills and knowledge learnt are seen as useful. Young people felt that even if what they had learnt was not useful now it would be 'useful in future' or helpful for other people to know and that they would be able to help others by having access to this knowledge. This highlights that coaching at risk young people could create a ripple effect and that the strategies learnt could be applied later in life, again an area for further research.

## What the young person gains through coaching

The study suggests experience of coaching creates a process, a relationship and a set of skills where the young person, through growing accountability, awareness and responsibility, develops choice and control over their thoughts, feelings and behaviour, which results in increased confidence. Clough and Strycharczyk (2012) propose control, both emotional and over their life, along with confidence, are components for developing mental toughness. This would suggest that coaching interventions for vulnerable young people could help to develop these components of mental toughness.

Perceived control over environmental factors was a result of Spence and Grant's (2005) study, the same phenomena appeared in this study. The word 'deal' appears 31 times in the data and 'cope' 13 times. Young people and coaches both reported that young people are more able to 'cope' and/ or 'deal with situations' as an outcome of the coaching interventions.

**Table 3: Coaching Tools Matrix.**

| Themes | Tools and Techniques | What this offers young people |
|---|---|---|
| Communication and Interpersonal Skills | *Tools*<br>● Body language<br>● Communication skills<br>● Understanding types of behaviour<br>● Other people's perspectives<br>● Feedback and compliments<br>● Relationship with coach or group | *Application*<br>● Learning to share problems<br>● Communicating more effectively<br>● Understanding other's points of view<br>● Making more friends<br>● Accountability for how they behave towards others<br>● Not feeling alone<br>● Increased confidence<br>● Helping others apply skills, e.g. offering advice, sharing positive strategies |
| Self and emotional awareness | *Tools*<br>● Understanding confidence<br>● Recognising strengths<br>● Honesty<br>● What's going on in their worlds, e.g. wheel of life tool<br>● Trust building activities<br>● Comfort Zones<br>● Labelling, e.g. how the labels impact them<br>● Responsibility<br>● Understanding and labelling different feelings and emotions.<br>● Responsibility for feelings<br>● Stress management<br>● Experiencing and recognising positive emotions | *Application*<br>● Able to recognise strengths and positives in self<br>● Feeling more confident<br>• Participating more<br>● Feeling better, calmer, less stressed<br>● Feeling happier<br>● More honest<br>● Trusting self and others<br>● Believing in self<br>● Improved positive self-image<br>● Taking responsibility for self<br>● Understanding, controlling and expressing feelings and emotions<br>● Thinking before reacting<br>● Opening up<br>● Using coping strategies such as breathing, relaxation or time out<br>● Being in control |
| Thinking Skills | *Tools*<br>● Awareness of thoughts and thinking<br>● Recognising positives, e.g. what went well<br>● Gaining perspective and reality checking<br>● Challenging and changing unhelpful thinking, e.g. reframing or scaling<br>● Goal setting<br>● Distraction techniques for unhelpful thinking, e.g. thought stopping | *Application*<br>● Picking out positives in situations and self<br>● Changes to thinking<br>● Being more positive<br>● Believe in self<br>● Setting own goals<br>● Being motivated<br>● Changes to behaviour, such as increased engagement, talking more and taking action |

There is an understanding from the coach and the young person that the young person has to do the work to change their situation or, if that is not possible, manage how they deal with it, which fits De Haan's (2008) relational coaching theory, building the components of control and confidence (Clough & Strycharczyk, 2012), while offering an alternative to prevention through removal of risk factors (Keyes et al., 2010). This also helps develop a sense of accomplishment, also part of the PERMA model, *'I've got more motivation to proceed on in life'* (YP9), *'I set my goal for the day that's gonna make me happy'* (YP1), *'it makes you feel more positive about the future'* (YP4). This suggests that although accomplishment is not something directly referred to in this study it appears to be something the young people experience through applying the skills and strategies learnt through the coaching intervention.

The 'meaning' domain from the PERMA model does not arise from this study, Kern et al. (2014) proposed that how adolescents develop meaning requires further understanding. They suggest that adolescents may gain meaning through their associations with others and that meaning overlaps with relationships for young people. Pritchard and van Nieuwerburgh (2016) start to build on this theory through their findings that relationships are valuable to young people's ability to identify purpose and meaning to life This indicates that the coaching relationship and developing interpersonal skills through learning and experiencing skills and strategies through the application of intervention is a chance for young people to develop meaning as well as relationships, essential for developing multidimensional wellbeing and something that requires further research.

## Limitations

The study has a number of limitations that should be taken into consideration. The study produced a considerable amount of data from a range of sources, including a theoretical sample of vulnerable young people and self-reflection questionnaires, which were not designed for the purpose of the study and were part of the intervention itself. Therefore, the data might hold more detailed information that could share further insights into what coaching has to offer at risk young people. The research questions and subsequent interview questions made an assumption that coaching had something to offer at risk young people. However, two of the semi-structured questions paid specific attention to any limitations or negative aspects that could affect young people through coaching 'Was there anything you didn't like?' and 'Was there anything unhelpful?'. Most responses to this was no or nothing was unhelpful, although one young person did express that the journey of becoming more self-aware can be uncomfortable process *'why couldn't I notice these on my own, you feel… a bit ashamed of yourself'* (YP1). These findings were also discovered by Torbrand and Ellam-Dyson (2015) offer a potential area for further research.

The study was an action research study, some of the participants the researcher had coached previously, therefore, it is possible that they may have been trying to please the researcher; however, the use of constant comparison with written data, coaches' interviews and young people's interviews have allowed the theory to emerge from a range of sources, helping strengthen the development of the theory.

The model is a simple representation of a complex process which, although useful in making the theories accessible, it could be seen as over simplified and not explaining the multidimensional complexities of the coaching experience, skill and process. The research was new to the use of grounded theory and followed a less prescriptive, realist approach (Glaser, 1992), which has not allowed for the constructivist approaches to GT (Charmaz, 2006). It is a hope of the researcher that this pragmatic, simple approach could contribute to the field of coaching psychology, with potential for further research methods including qualitative studies in future.

## Further research

The resulting theoretical model requires further testing with different populations, including young people who are not at risk of mental health problems, to develop transferability for wider application. Elements of the model could be analysed through quantitative research, for example, to demonstrate quantifiable improvements to wellbeing and if they are sustained over time. Pritchard and van Nieuwerburgh (2016) start to build on this theory through their findings, which significantly overlap with this model. Various aspects such as the group coaching or individual coaching elements of the intervention require further comparative research to discover if it is the group, the peer support, the professional coach or the combination of all that is the ideal intervention for at risk young people and how these compare with therapeutic or non-coaching social approaches such as counselling, mentoring or youth development programmes.

This study generates a theory that suggests that coaching in this instance could be an applied positive psychology. However, as intervention was an integration of coaching psychology combined with positive psychology, further study of the individual elements would be useful to compare whether it is the coaching or the positive psychology which proved helpful to at risk young people. Further understanding of the model is necessary to discover if it is pertinent to wider applications of coaching such as with families (Allen, 2013), parents (Bamford, Mackew & Golawski, 2012) and schools (Green, Oades & Robinson, 2012; Norrish et al., 2013), or simply a starting point for further research into coaching for young people at risk of developing mental health problems.

## Conclusion.

This study has resulted in an initial model of understanding of what coaching could offer young people at risk of developing mental health problems based on the experiences of the young people involved in this study. Excitingly, these theoretical findings are also synergistic with the closest related qualitative studies by Pritchard and van Nieuwerburgh (2016) and Torbrand and Ellam-Dyson (2015). A suggested application is that this model could be used as a framework to check current interventions or applications of support for young people. More broadly the model could be used as a resource explain coaching to coaches, trainee coaches or young people. This has wider relevance for coach training programmes especially for coaches who are interested in working in youth or education sectors, whilst also having wider applications for developing practical applications of coaching skills for people that work with young people including educators, pastoral support, youth workers and others around them such as parents and peers. The creation of this theoretical model has generated helpful insights into how coaching works with these particular vulnerable young people which could suggest wider transferability of the model and various aspects within it.

It is a hope of the authors that this study is a starting point for further research, providing useful suggestions for developing coaching interventions and practical applications, that could support vulnerable young people to improve mental wellbeing and prevent mental health problems developing.

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## Appendix 1

**Semi-structured interview/focus group questions**

What did you think when you found out about the referral for the coaching programme from (school, youth worker, etc.)

Did you like the coaching programme?
- What did you like?
- What have you found helpful?

Was there anything you didn't like?
- Was there anything unhelpful?

Have you used anything you learnt from the coaching programme?
- How did you use it?
- How has that helped you?
- What are the top three things you learned that helped you?

Has what you learnt impacted on your life?
- In what way?
- Have you noticed anything is different/ changed?
- Has anyone else noticed any changes, friends, school, or family?

What would you tell other people about the programme?
- Friends
- Family
- Teachers

What sentence or word would you use to describe the programme?

How does the coaching programme compare to any other support you might have had?

What would you like your support services to be like?

# The preventative impact of management coaching on psychological strain

Ashley Weinberg

***Objectives:*** *The positive impact of coaching on a range of outcomes, including the well-being of those in receipt of it, has been highlighted by a number of published reviews (e.g. de Haan & Duckworth, 2013) and meta-analyses (e.g. Jones, Woods & Guillaume, 2015). The objective of this study was to assess the potential for coaching to act as a primary level intervention preventing deterioration in psychological health during organisational change.*

***Design:*** *A quasi-experimental longitudinal study was conducted using separate samples of managers (46 in the intervention groups and 30 in the control group) who either volunteered to receive coaching or were directed to do so by their employer.*

***Methods:*** *Psychological health (assessed using GHQ-12) and psycho-social aspects of the work environment were assessed pre- and post-intervention.*

***Results:*** *Symptoms of poor psychological health significantly increased in the control group, but not among managers in receipt of coaching. A significant negative relationship was noted between increased symptoms of strain and the number of coaching sessions attended.*

***Conclusions:*** *Consistent with the Conservation of Resources Model, the results indicate that coaching can have a protective effect on psychological health, however, its impact may be influenced by the number of coaching sessions and organisational factors.*

***Keywords:*** *coaching; stress; preventative intervention; Conservation of Resources (COR); managers.*

COACHING has grown in popularity in the last 20 years to become a global phenomenon, generating in the region of $2bn annually (International Coach Federation, 2012) and purports to deliver 'enhancement of life experience and goal-attainment' (Grant, 2003, p.254) for clients in work and non-work contexts. However, despite an emerging consensus that coaching is effective (e.g. Theebohm, Beersma & van Vianen, 2013), comparatively little is known about the action of the mechanisms underpinning its positive impact on coachees (de Haan & Duckworth, 2013). It is therefore not only necessary to continue to address the relatively limited number of studies into the efficacy of coaching (Briner & Rousseau, 2011), but also to consider the nature of its impact on individuals in receipt of it. It is argued here that coaching can represent a primary level approach enabling individuals, in this case managers, to develop skills which can guard against future pitfalls. Whilst there is evidence highlighting the beneficial impact of coaching as a stress management intervention, no research of which the author is aware, has investigated the preventative impact of coaching on managers' own experiences of stress. This study explores this gap in the literature by examining the novel perspective of management coaching as a preventative intervention protecting managers against increasing 'psychological strain', which here refers to the outcomes of the stress process by which individuals manifest recognised symptoms of poor psychological health (Weinberg & Cooper, 2012), for example, losing sleep through worrying, struggling with decision making, feelings of unhappiness. In this way, psychological strain is configured towards the negative end of a continuum describing individual wellbeing.

## Coaching and the conservation of resources

The under-representation of coaching as a primary level approach may be due to the


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absence of previous linkage between coaching as a preventative strategy (protecting against psychological strain) and future outcomes for managers' psychological health. Such a theoretical basis is examined here. Coaching is defined as 'a form of leadership development that takes place through a series of contracted one-to-one conversations with a qualified 'coach'… that results in a high occurrence of relevant, actionable and timely outcomes for clients' (de Haan & Duckworth, 2013, p.7). As such coaching aims to engender in coachees advanced planning and goal setting, designed to strengthen the individual's ability to withstand future challenges. This approach has clear resonance with the concept of building resilience which is seen as having a preventative and thereby protective effect for individuals in the workplace. The Conservation of Resources (COR) model (Hobfoll, 1989) provides a directly relevant theoretical framework by highlighting the importance of an individual's 'resource pool… [that] serves both to shelter them from future losses and contributes to enhanced status' (Hobfoll, 1989, p.520). In this way personal investment of time by participating in a coaching programme can be seen as a means of augmenting one's resources. Recognising that the transactions of daily life provide demands as well as resources, the COR approach emphasises the potential for resources to become depleted when threats are real or anticipated. As such COR theory can support hypotheses of a preventative effect for individuals where their resources are boosted, as the intervention – in this case coaching – would logically result in limiting the losses created by mounting situational demands, with protective implications for individual wellbeing. However, where resources remain threatened, are lost or indeed gains are sacrificed, then deficits such as psychological strain are likely to result (Westman et al., 2005). The potential for coaching to 'augment and replenish workers' resources' (Shirom & Ezrachi, 2003, p.93) is particularly illustrative of COR theory given the priority it attaches to personal level interventions in an organisational context. However, examples in the workplace literature of such resource enhancement are rare. Notably a pretest-posttest field experiment by Chen, Westman and Eden (2004), which comprised a four-hour workshop-based intervention preparing employees for the introduction of a new IT system, did utilise COR theory and found that over the time of the intervention burnout levels remained the same for its recipients, whereas symptoms of psychological strain increased in the control group. The demonstration of such an outcome with a sample of workers fearing a loss of control over their jobs, highlights the potential for COR theory to be predictive about other preventative interventions, such as a coaching initiative offered to managerial employees handling restructuring (including job cuts) within their organisation. The current investigation recognises that 'the threat of resource loss stemming from COR theory enhances the comprehension of anticipated stress and its outcomes' (Westman et al., 2005, p.211) and can facilitate employees' steps to tackle stressors such as negative changes at work.

It is clear that COR theory predicts the potential for impending workplace change to impact negatively on employees' psychological health, however this is not the only potential threat to the personal resources of individuals working in an environment characterised by financial uncertainty. For example in a sector or organisation unused to cutbacks, those in managerial roles face the double threat to their psychological wellbeing posed not only by job insecurity but also by the increased likelihood of having to behave quite differently from previously towards those for whom they have responsibility. The COR model would predict that symptoms of strain will result from combating the dissonance they feel, unless action is taken to resolve the situation. Whilst leaving the organisation is one potential option for individuals, the opportunity to enhance

resources by undertaking training or receiving support such as coaching beneficial to conducting their role represents another. In this way coaching holds promise for boosting their resources.

## Coaching and manager wellbeing

This begs the question of how coaching might confer any protective psychological benefits on those in receipt of it (Theebohm et al., 2013). There is consensus that coaching facilitates a manager's 'collaborative goal setting to construct solutions' (Stober & Grant, 2006) and seeks, 'to improve his or her professional performance and personal satisfaction' (Kilburg, 2000). Whichever perspective the coach may take in their work with managers as clients (Peltier, 2001), these aims appear aligned with improving managers' sense of control, competence and affective experiences at work (Gray, Ekinci & Goregaokar, 2011). All of these are construed as important factors in determining their experience of positive psychological health (van Horn et al., 2004; Warr, 2007) and as such may underpin the success or otherwise of coaching as a preventative intervention designed to maintain or even boost pre-existing levels of wellbeing (Boyatzis, Smith & Beveridge, 2013).

The starting point to the coaching intervention of a 360-degree appraisal, which invites ratings of the individual manager's performance and behaviour from other stakeholders at work, may present a challenge in itself to participants as it is made explicit how their behaviour is perceived by others (Rogers, Rogers & Metlay, 2002). However, the collaborative and potentially nurturing environment of the coaching interaction, which includes feedback on such findings delivered by appropriately trained practitioners, is designed to provide an opportunity for growth rather than a threat (Kilburg, 2000). For those participating in a management coaching programme, there are increased opportunities to reflect on their practice of management, with specific reference to workplace events, incidents and difficulties. In addition these are likely to relate to a range of workplace issues in the short- and long-term, such as relationships at work and career progression respectively. The time in subsequent coaching sessions for managers to contemplate their own behaviour and potentially address identifiable shortcomings can help to prepare them for dealing with workplace challenges. Focusing on a manager's behavioural style and aspects of their performance in a psychologically 'safe' environment, with a view to improving their functioning, could be expected to impact positively on their sense of competence and self-efficacy with the potential for accompanying benefits for their psychological health (Stober & Grant, 2006). It can, therefore, be argued that through the process of considering problems, role-playing potential solutions and highlighting areas for growth, coaching can help to engender enhanced levels of control. In turn this would be likely to serve managers well in a challenging work environment by increasing levels of resilience (Grant, Curtayne & Burton, 2009).

This is consistent with growing evidence about the impact of coaching that has shown the likely benefits it can bring to managers including improvements in environmental mastery (Spence & Grant, 2007), hope (Green, Oades & Grant, 2006), problem identification and enhanced problem solving (Carey, Philippon & Cummings, 2011). These may be anticipated to have a positive influence on healthy functioning by maintaining personal resources (as predicted by COR theory) and consistent with this, coaching has been found to have a beneficial effect on work-related satisfaction (Grant et al., 2009). However, Grant et al. (2009) obtained mixed results about the impact of coaching on symptoms of psychological strain: one out of two groups in receipt of coaching recorded a decrease in scores representing depression and stress, while neither showed a decline in anxiety. Gyllensten and Palmer (2005) similarly found mixed results in a smaller-scale study, while Duijts,

Kant, van den Brandt and Swaen (2008) recorded a decline in symptoms of burnout, but not self-reported sickness absence following coaching for employees considered at risk of taking sick leave.

Against this ambiguous backdrop of findings about the impact of coaching on levels of depression, anxiety and stress, Grant et al. (2009) recognised the need to partial out measures which assess both positive psychological health and negative strain and indeed Grant, Green and Rynsaardt (2010) found positive outcomes for both sets of measures. However the review of effect sizes by Theebohm et al. (2013) does not appear to distinguish between measures which focus on positive or negative health experiences. Overall encouraging effect sizes for the composite category of wellbeing following coaching have been noted ($g$=0.46, 95% CI 0.28–0.62, $p$<.001; Theebohm et al., 2013), including within the relatively small number of studies which have utilised control groups ($d$<0.5; de Haan & Duckworth, 2013).

Additionally findings about the impact of coaching are complicated by difficulties which overshadow the research agenda in coaching. Arguably these are linked to excessive expectation about conducting ideal designs (Grant & Wall, 2009), such as randomised control trials in real workplaces which cannot be readily isolated from their ever-changing organisational contexts (De Haan & Duckworth, 2013). This situation underlines the continuing need for quasi-experimental approaches to inform the knowledge base by providing opportunities to strengthen causal inferences, yet such studies have been rare in organisational research (Grant & Wall, 2009). The present study recognises the limitations in obtaining 'optimal' experimental research conditions, given there is often a need to recruit volunteers to organisationally sponsored initiatives, such as the introduction of a new coaching programme. The first stage of the current study features volunteer participants as well as a non-participating control group, and contrasts these with responses obtained from non-volunteers who were subsequently mandated by their organisation to receive coaching. By including both volunteers and non-volunteers it is intended that this approach addresses an organisational reality, as well as contributing to what appears to be missing from the emerging literature, that is, a demonstration of how coaching might play a preventative role against the development of increased symptoms of psychological strain among coachees in managerial roles. This paper sets out to evaluate evidence for such an impact in an uncertain work environment where downsizing is ongoing. It is hypothesised that coaching will prevent an increase in symptoms of psychological strain among managers in receipt of it, while managers in a non-coached control group will report increased levels of psychological strain.

## Method

### *Organisational context*

The university where this longitudinal study was conducted is a higher education institution in the UK where an increasingly top-down approach to daily academic work has meant an increase in administrative tasks performed by academic members of staff as well as increased workloads (Banister, 2013). There had also been changes in academic roles to reflect a shift in ethos consistent with changes nationally towards this more managerial approach (Deem & Brehony, 2005).

### *Design*

The management coaching initiative was implemented in the same university over a three year period. Initially voluntary participation of managers was sought for a management coaching initiative – this provided the first of two coaching cohorts involved in the study. A control group of non-participating managers was also recruited and constituted the control group for the study. The second coaching cohort was recruited to the study following an organisational mandate for the participation of managerial employees in coaching, as the intervention was

subsequently rolled out across the organisation. This meant that the study included three groups in total: a control group which received no coaching, a coaching group of managers who volunteered to receive coaching and a coaching group of managers who were mandated to participate. This three-group design permitted elements of control for the independent variable of coaching and also for any volunteer effect which could reflect individual differences in participants in relation to willingness to participate.

The coaching programme was established in conjunction with the senior leadership team and human resource management department of the organisation and evaluated within the framework of a longitudinal study assessing managers' psychological health and aspects of their working environment at baseline (Time 1) and follow-up (Time 2). This permitted a mixed design in which pre- versus post-intervention within-participants comparisons were possible, as well as between-participants comparisons across the coaching and control groups as described above.

***Participants***

Managers were defined as those carrying line management responsibility for one or more employee(s) and these were drawn from all functional groups within the organisation, including academic and administrative employees. Over the life of the project, 76 managers in total completed the pre-post research measures, including 46 who participated in the coaching interventions and 30 who constituted the control group. Fourteen managers from across the organisation volunteered to take part in stage 1 of the coaching initiative (coaching cohort 1) and 30 managers were recruited at this time to the control condition, that is, a total of 44 managers from a population of 120. At stage 2 which began approximately 18 months after the end of the stage 1, managers were mandated to participate in coaching which meant the recruitment of a control group at stage 2 was not possible. 32 out of 107 managers (coaching cohort 2) completed research pre- and post-coaching measures during this stage. Using the effect size for affective outcomes reported by Jones, Woods and Guillaume (2015; $d$=.46), the power of the sample size participating at baseline and follow-up in the intervention groups was calculated as .87.

Statistical tests were conducted in order to determine the comparability of the demographic variables of those groups in receipt of coaching and of the control group (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Demographic variables for coaching and control groups.**

| | Coachees (stage 1) *N*=14 | Coachees (stage 2) *N*=32 | Control (stage 1) *N*=30 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender (women) | 57% | 53% | 67% |
| Marital status (married/cohabiting) | 79% | 78% | 63% |
| Parental status | 71% | 56% | 50% |
| Age (years) | 50.1 | 50.0 | 43.8** |
| Time in job (years) | 3.2 | 4.4 | 4.1 |
| Length of service in organisation (years) | 7.4 | 12.4 | 14.3* |

*$p$<.05; **$p$< .01

No significant differences across all groups were found in terms of gender, marital or parental status. No differences were found in the demographic profile of the two groups in receipt of coaching. Members of the control group were on average younger than managers in either of the coaching cohorts and had worked for the organisation for less time, but there was no significant difference in the mean length of time the participants in any of the groups had worked in their current job role. Given that on average participants in all groups had been in the organisation for at least seven years and in their current managerial job role for comparable periods, it was considered that the demographic differences were unlikely to have had a meaningful impact on their exposure to the aspects of the workplace being assessed in this study.

***Coaching intervention***

The model for the intervention followed that used in many organisations (e.g. Grant, 2003) using a solution-focused approach which commenced with managers participating in a 360-degree appraisal and receiving feedback from a trained coach. Coaches included a work psychologist and experienced human resource managers internal to the organisation who had completed UK-based coaching qualifications. Orientation workshops were held to give participants information about the coaching process and its relevance to individual development and to provide opportunities for queries to be addressed. During the first stage of the intervention 14 managers were given six one-hour sessions with their coach over a six month period. For the second coaching programme, a maximum of three sessions was offered to participating managers (seven managers attended one to two sessions, 25 attended three sessions). The research measures described above were circulated independently of the coaches at baseline and at follow-up.

Two comparable 360-degree measures were used which were very similar in nature and provided a basis for coach-client discussion so that the same approach to coaching was retained throughout. In stage 1, the Inventory of Management Competencies (IMC; SHL, 1999) was used and in stage 2 the Transformational Leadership Questionnaire (TLQ; Alimo-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe, 2001) was employed. The IMC assesses 12 competencies within four clusters. The managerial cluster comprises leadership, planning and organising, quality orientation and persuasiveness. The professional cluster consists of specialist knowledge, problem solving and analysis, oral and written communication. The entrepreneurial cluster covers commercial awareness, creativity and innovation, action orientation and strategy. The personal qualities cluster considers interpersonal sensitivity, flexibility, resilience and personal motivation. Similarly the TLQ assesses four dimensions including personal qualities and values (honesty, consistency and integrity), as well as the skills required in leading and developing individuals (enabling, concern, accessibility and change-minded), shaping the organisation (decisiveness, inspiring others, supporting a developmental culture and focusing team effort) and in general leadership (building shared vision, networking, problem-resolution and facilitating change sensitively). As expected managers rated themselves and were also rated by their own line manager, direct reports and peers (Rogers et al., 2002), with care taken to retain anonymity of responses.

Independent of the number of coaching sessions on offer, the initial coaching session gave participating managers the opportunity to discuss the results of the 360-degree feedback and to reflect on any disparities between self and others' ratings, as well as key themes relating to individual strengths and identifying areas for potential development. Subsequent coaching sessions served to establish, monitor and evaluate individual progress in relation to the actions planned and taken, as outlined by the Goal-Reality-Options-Way forward model (GROW:

Greene & Grant, 2003; Whitmore, 1992). These also gave managers the opportunity to consider their ongoing working practices, encouraging reflection on the antecedents, behaviours and consequences of work-based experiences to provide the basis for agreeing goals and expectations for personal development, as well as for handling challenges in the workplace.

***Measures***

At both stages, data on demographic variables including age, gender, marital and parental status, length of time in current post and length of service with the organisation were gathered by self-report.

At the baseline and follow-up of both coaching interventions (and at equivalent time periods for managers in the control group), participating managers were invited to complete a standardised measure of symptoms of psychological strain, that is, the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12; Goldberg & Williams, 1988), which includes items on experiences of sleep problems, difficulty making decisions, ability to enjoy daily activities, loss of confidence, feelings of unhappiness. This has been used in many studies of psychological health in non-clinical populations including within occupational settings. The Likert scoring method for the GHQ-12 was adopted for the purposes of statistical analysis (where 1=no difficulty, 4=maximum difficulty); internal consistency and test-retest reliability have been found to be good (Wall et al., 1997). In order to additionally consider scores of clinical interest, the GHQ scoring method was used and a caseness threshold of 3/4 utilised (see Goldberg & Williams, 1988).

The Objective Measure of Workplace Environment (OMWE; Weinberg & Creed, 2000, 2002) was devised for use in UK public sector settings. The OMWE is a 24-item questionnaire used to assess the frequency with which individuals encounter difficulties with aspects of the work environment, for example, safety in the physical environment, workload, skill use, relationships with colleagues, opportunities for promotion as well as organisational change. The OMWE also includes items likely to be directly influenced by managerial behavior, for example, 'decision making which affects your job', 'relationships with your immediate line manager', and 'feedback about your performance'. Responses were recorded on a six-point Likert scale to indicate 'how often you have experienced difficulty' in a given area of work, with scores ranging from 1=never, to 6=very frequently. Higher scores indicated more difficulties.

Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated for the OMWE at baseline (.94) and follow-up (.92). Parametric assumptions were met for complete data sets for both GHQ and OMWE data at baseline. For the purposes of regression analysis, normality of the follow-up GHQ data was achieved following removal of two outliers which represented scores in the order of four standard deviations above the group means (one from the control and one from the second coaching groups; Dancey & Reidy, 2002).

## Results

It was hypothesised that participation in coaching will prevent an increase in symptoms of psychological strain among managers, while managers in a non-coached control group will report increased levels of psychological strain. To ensure comparability of the three participant groups at baseline, one-way ANOVAs were conducted on the psychosocial dependent variables. To assess any impact of the coaching intervention on these, data were analysed using a 2 x 2 split-plot ANOVA comprising one between-subjects factor (group) and one within-subjects factor (time). Planned comparisons using paired sample t-tests were used to ascertain any changes within each participant group over time. A linear regression analysis was used to identify predictors of GHQ-12 score at follow-up.

### Baseline comparability of participating groups

Comparisons between the three groups at baseline revealed no differences in the GHQ-12 scores or on 22 out of 24 of the OMWE items. Difficulties in morale were reported more often by managers in the control group ($F(2,73)=4.42$, $p<.05$), as were problems related to the organisation of work in their office or department ($F(2,73)=4.61$, $p<.05$); no differences in either of these variables were found at follow-up. Mean ratings of difficulty on or above the OMWE item mid-point of 3.5 were noted in relation to workload (all three groups), time conflict (all three groups), resources (all three groups), morale (coaching cohort 1 and control group), decision making (control group only) and organisation of work in office/department (control group only).

### Psychological wellbeing

A split-plot ANOVA for GHQ-12 scores did not show a significant time (Time 1, Time 2) by group (coaching cohort 1, coaching cohort 2, control group) interaction effect, $F(2,73)=2.31$, ns, $\eta^2=.06$, indicating that those groups in receipt of coaching did not report significantly lower psychological strain than the control group at follow-up. Planned contrasts confirmed there were no significant differences in GHQ-12 scores from baseline to follow-up among those in receipt of coaching, cohort 1: $t(13)=.82$, ns (a decrease in the mean score by 1.82 scale points), or cohort 2: $t(31)=-1.32$, ns (an increase in the mean score by 1.47 scale points), however there was a significant increase in GHQ-12 scores in the control group, $t(29)=-2.11$, $p<.05$, $r=.13$ (an increase in the mean score by 2.20 scale points), at follow-up.

A similar pattern of results was found in relation to GHQ scores of clinical interest (often referred to as 'caseness'). No significant association was found between the number of GHQ scores exceeding the 3/4 threshold and time of completion (Time 1, Time 2) for coaching cohort 1, T1: $N=5$, T2: $N=4$, $\chi^2$ (1)=.28, NS, or for coaching cohort 2, T1: n=8, T2: n=12, $\chi^2$ (1)=2.84, NS. However, in the control group, there was a significant association between time and caseness, T1: $N=8$, T2: $N=11$, $\chi^2$ (1)=6.90, $p=.009$.

### Psychosocial aspects of the workplace

A split-plot ANOVA for total OMWE scores did not show a significant time (Time 1, Time 2) by group (coaching cohort 1, coaching cohort 2, control group) interaction effect, $F(2,61)=1.14$, ns, $\eta^2=.04$, indicating that those groups in receipt of coaching did not report significantly less frequent difficulties at work than the control group at follow-up.

**Table 2: Means and standard deviations for key variables.**

| | Time 1 | | Time 2 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | M | SD | M | SD |
| GHQ-12 | | | | |
| Coaching cohort 1 | 12.43 | 5.06 | 10.57 | 6.26 |
| Coaching cohort 2 | 11.75 | 4.13 | 13.22 | 5.41 |
| Control | 12.33 | 5.31 | 14.53* | 6.12 |
| OMWE | | | | |
| Coaching cohort 1 | 66.62 | 19.09 | 69.77 | 20.00 |
| Coaching cohort 2 | 65.75 | 15.13 | 69.89 | 21.07 |
| Control | 70.30 | 22.94 | 68.30 | 16.86 |

GHQ-12=General Health Questionnaire; OMWE=Objective Measure of Workplace Environment.
Note: * denotes statistically significant difference between Time 1 and Time 2; p<.05

No differences were found in the pre-post comparisons of the OMWE overall means or items for the control group or coaching cohort 1. However significantly more frequent difficulties were noted at follow-up by coaching cohort 2 for relationships with their senior manager, $t(27)=-2.65$, $p<.05$, $r=.45$, job promotion, $t(30)=-2.06$, $p < .05$, $r=.12$ and with fair treatment, $t(31)=-3.14$, $p<.01$, $r=.24$. Despite these increased ratings, each of the mean ratings for these variables remained below the OMWE scale mid-point at follow-up.

At follow-up difficulties with workload, time conflict and resources continued to attract ratings of 3.5 or above from each of the coaching and control groups, and additionally for the control group in decision making and morale. However no differences were found in OMWE overall means or items between control and coaching groups at follow-up.

## Predictors of psychological wellbeing

In order to further explore the role of coaching in preventing increased symptoms of psychological strain, the relationships between aspects of the work environment, coaching and psychological wellbeing were investigated (see Table 3).

Given the significant correlational relationships, linear regression analyses (enter method) were conducted with GHQ-12 scores at follow-up as the dependent variable. Firstly this was conducted using the number of coaching sessions as a predictor variable (minimum=0, maximum=6); GHQ-12 scores at T2 were significantly associated ($\Delta R^2=.05$) with the number of coaching sessions attended, $F(1,73)=5.25$, $p=.025$. Furthermore GHQ-12 scores at T2 were significantly associated ($\Delta R^2=.13$; $F(2,67)=5.83$, $p=.005$) with a model comprising OMWE scores at T1 ($ß=.30$, $p=.011$) and the number of coaching sessions attended ($ß=-.22$, $p=.057$).

## Discussion

As hypothesised, exposure to coaching did prevent an increase in psychological strain, but only for the voluntary coaching cohort. Additionally the time devoted to addressing the difficulties faced in the job, that is, through coaching sessions attended, highlighted that increased exposure to coaching was significantly linked to lower levels of psychological strain. It would appear that the effect documented in this study does not conform simply to the idea that 'coaching is good for your mental health', but instead with the possibility that 'a lack of coaching, or being obliged to receive it, can be bad for your mental health'. This is only partially consistent with the operation of an effective

**Table 3: Correlational relationships between the major variables.**

| | OMWE at T1 | Number of coaching sessions |
|---|---|---|
| GHQ-12 at T2 | .36** | –.24* |
| OMWE at T1 | – | –.09 |
| Number of coaching sessions | – | – |

* $p<.05$ ** $p<.01$

preventative intervention as hypothesised and raises potential issues for the implementation of coaching in organisations. However, findings related to the role of coaching in limiting university managers' experiences of psychological strain suggest that it may confer advantages for individuals who are facing considerable workplace challenges.

It is worth considering how the results presented here may substantiate such a view before reflecting on how such an effect might operate in practice. The stability achieved on the measures of psychological strain recorded by both cohorts of managers in receipt of coaching, that is, no significant change, compared to a statistically significant increase in the control group, may be indicative of its protective role for managers in turbulent times. This finding is consistent with the prediction underpinned by COR theory. Alternatively one might consider that those managers who were able to engage with the coaching initiative were better positioned to do so, in terms of psychological health, simply having the time to do so or indeed their attitude towards coaching. Considering these possibilities in turn, the lack of difference in GHQ scores at baseline militates against the first of these interpretations. Secondly a 'lack of resources' may have militated against participation in the coaching programme for those who constituted the control group, however both coaching and control groups reported a similarly high frequency of workload problems which suggests no difference in having time to participate in coaching sessions. Thirdly, managers' attitudes towards coaching may be inferred from the action of volunteering (or not) to participate in coaching, which this study attempted to control for.

Against the background of a university sector undergoing considerable change – which includes threats to funding and downsizing – as well as experiencing raised levels of psychological strain (Kinman & Jones, 2003), it is logical to assume that employees with managerial responsibilities stand to benefit from the type of support in doing their job which coaching can provide. However in this study, the only reduction in psychological strain was recorded in the group of managers who volunteered, while those mandated to take part reported a non-significant increase in symptoms. This finding gives rise to two alternative explanations. The first of these observes that being obliged to participate in coaching does not necessarily lead to a reduction in psychological strain and as such may highlight potential difficulties for managers' perceptions about control over their work and how their employer is supporting them in performing their duties. The second possible explanation focuses on the difference in the maximum number of coaching sessions offered to managers which was lower for the mandated cohort and may have limited the potential positive impact of coaching on psychological health. However a recent meta-analysis has found no moderating effect of the number of sessions on the overall effectiveness of coaching (Jones, Woods & Guillaume, 2015). Nevertheless both interpretations could accord with a COR interpretation, in which either the prospect of the removal of control may constitute a threat to individual wellbeing or there is a need to ensure sufficient coaching (and thereby individual) resources are available to managers to facilitate the maintenance of wellbeing, which is itself only one of a range of outcomes of coaching. It is suggested that further research is required to investigate the differential impact of exposure to coaching on its various outcomes.

## Unintended consequences

The findings also suggest that there is the potential for unintended outcomes of management coaching which may follow from an increased awareness and recognition of less desirable managerial practices in others. This could explain the increased ratings of difficulties with job prospects and senior managers at follow-up (resulting in slightly raised OMWE scores for both coaching cohorts). Coaching also offers enhanced opportunities to consider career develop-

ment and it is foreseeable that in a difficult organisational context, these may have contributed to significantly increased ratings at follow-up of challenges over promotion and problems with fairness among managers in receipt of coaching. Whilst it is possible that the shifting organisational context alone is actually to blame for the deterioration in coachees' ratings of these aspects of the workplace, no parallel differences were found among the control group drawn from the same organisation. The impact of coaching on managers' expectations and their psychological contract is therefore worthy of further investigation.

**Research limitations**

Considerable efforts were made to ensure that effective methodological controls were in place as randomisation of participants was not possible in this organisational context, equally this meant that it was not possible to recruit a second control group contemporaneous with the second coaching cohort. It is conceivable that participating managers responding to requests to complete research measures were subject to some degree of volunteer effect, although the use of a control group was intended to account for this. Whilst there were clear advantages in having managers in both coaching and control conditions who worked for the same organisation and who were subject to common sources of work pressures, it would be useful in future research in this area to sample a range of organisations so as to provide additional controls. Few differences in workplace variables between the coached and control groups at baseline were noted, however it is also possible that managers in this study experienced personal factors outside of work which may have impacted on their psychological health (Weinberg & Creed, 2000).

The relatively small sample size is not unusual in studies of coaching, nor is it unexpected in applied research of this kind (Randall et al., 2005), although again participation from more than one organisation would help to increase samples sizes in future studies. This highlights the relevance of statistical power in such studies. Given the publication of effect sizes obtained through coaching in recent meta-analyses (e.g. Jones et al., 2015; Theeboom et al., 2013), it is now possible to calculate power with greater certainty when planning participant recruitment. In relation to psychological health, clinically relevant scores, such as those indicated by use of thresholds attainable using measures such as the GHQ, may help to highlight benefits which go beyond differences in mean scores. These developments could also have important implications for boosting sample sizes by demonstrating to organisations that coaching and research into it are worthy of pursuit for a range of positive reasons, as well as encouraging researchers to be open to appropriate and creative use of quasi-experimental approaches (see Grant & Wall, 2009), which in turn require attention to process evaluation during such projects (see Randall et al., 2005).

**Practical implications**

This study has illustrated the potential for management coaching to prevent a significant increase in psychological strain during a period of challenging change (Kinman & Jones, 2003). Furthermore lower levels of psychological strain were related to managers' increased engagement with the coaching programme, as indicated by the number of sessions attended. However the impact on voluntary and mandated participants suggests further research into the efficacy of coaching – encompassing both intended and unintended outcomes – is needed to ascertain whether it holds potential pitfalls in improving individual resilience. Consistent with factors underpinning the COR approach, it is advisable for organisations to consider how employees may perceive the introduction of interventions – including those intended as having a positive impact. Nevertheless the potential value of coaching in sectors which feature sources of threat to the individual and the organisation should

not be underestimated. In addition to ensuring their economic survival, modern organisations, including universities, face the challenge of keeping their employees healthy and able to function effectively. The role of managers in this is likely to be significant and is particularly emphasised in such challenging organisational times. Given the outcomes of this study, management coaching deserves greater scrutiny as a primary level intervention, which during a change process carries potential benefits for wellbeing by preventing deterioration in psychological health at the individual level.

## Acknowledgements

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*Report*

# Special Group in Coaching Psychology News

Dasha Grajfoner

ON BEHALF OF THE Special Group in Coaching Psychology Committee I would like to wish you all a prosperous, content and healthy 2016. As I am entering my second year in the role of Chair of the SGCP I would like to say hello to our members, who have been a part of our Group for some time and a warm welcome those who have recently joined us.

In the time of writing our 5th European Coaching Psychology Conference in December is still very much on my mind. The event was diverse in terms of topics and speakers. We had delegates and speakers from more than 20 different countries and from diverse backgrounds – psychologists and non-psychologists. A big thank you to everyone who helped shaping the event and made it great success. We strived to design the conference around our strategic plan and the preferences our members expressed in the last survey.

To begin with I must mention our thought-provoking and inspiring keynotes. Dr Helen Turnbull, who came all the way from Florida, spoke about stereotyping, inclusion and diversity at workplace. Her views on unconscious biases resonated with many practitioners who work in organisations and in private practice. Roger Steare, co-author of Moral DNA, highlighted a number of value based issues that are relevant for both leadership and coaching. Donna Willis summarised the highlights of the first day and welcomed our new delegates on day two. Dr Suzy Green, the founder of The Positivity Institute, spoke about the integration of positive and coaching psychology. Her projects on the application of positive psychology in schools demonstrate the benefits of flourishing as a part of educational process. Last, but not least, keynote speaker Dr Tatiana Bachkirova gave a challenging talk on coaching and self identity and masterfully highlighted the elements of professional identity that we must consider when planning and developing research, training and practice of coaching psychology.

The conference round tables and streams reflected the SGCP strategic plan and the areas of priority for the next five years. Last year I wrote about inclusivity within the SGCP and our diverse membership, our collaborations with other BPS Branches and, of course, inclusivity and collaborations with other professional coaching bodies. At the Conference we held the BPS Chairs meeting, very valuable round table of the past SGCP Chairs, where we looked at the vision and contributions of individual past Chairs. We also had a fascinating roundtable discussion on collaborations between different coaching bodies, with representatives from ICF, AC, ISCP and SGCP amongst others.


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By popular demand we had four streams: Leadership, business and executive coaching psychology stream; Positive psychology coaching stream; practice oriented Tools and techniques in coaching psychology; and finally scientist practitioner stream Learning in action. The latter stream included Coaching Psychology Research Network meeting to highlight current research developments in coaching psychology and our plans to strengthen this part of the SGCP activities.

It was my pleasure to present the 2015 Award for distinguished contribution to coaching psychology, which went to our colleague Margaret Macafee for her work with Peer Practice groups. Watch the space for more information on Margaret's future plans.

Finally, on behalf of the SGCP Committee I must again express my gratitude to both, now past, editors Dr Siobhain O'Riordan and Professor Stephen Palmer for their stellar contributions and efforts they have invested in *The Coaching Psychologist* and the *International Coaching Psychology Review* respectively. Their work, over the years, has strengthen and prepared both publications for the exciting challenges ahead in the next decade.

**Dr Dasha Grajfoner**
Chair of the Special Group in
Coaching Psychology
Email: sgcpchair@bps.org.uk

*Report*

# Interest Group in Coaching Psychology News

Vicki de Prazer

THE TERM OF OFFICE for the previous Coaching Psychology Interest Group National Committee expired with our AGM in early November 2015.

I am delighted to take on the role of Convener assisted by Vicki Crabb as Secretary and Tamara Baker as Treasurer. Along with my National Committee colleagues, we are looking forward to continuing the relationship building, collaboration and communication around ideas, projects, research, innovation and professional development with the ICPR community.

At our Strategic Planning Day following the AGM, we re-committed to our vision, 'Excellence in Coaching', as well as to our mission of further exploring and expanding the contribution of psychology to best practice coaching – within all areas of coaching.

### 2016 ICCP not being held

As many of you would be aware, from 2004 to 2010, the CPIG National Committee has held a biennial major coaching psychology symposium – that evolved to CPIG hosting an International Congress on Coaching Psychology (ICCP) in Manly 2012 and a second in Melbourne November 2014.

The Manly and Melbourne ICCPs have been a major vehicle for the CPIG National Committee in pursuing the above goals and offering best practice professional development. Although we were due to hold a third ICCP in 2016, the APS has requested all APS Colleges, Branches and Interest Groups defer holding independent conferences and instead contribute to the APS 50th anniversary Congress.

*'The first ever APS Congress is set to be a major showcase for Psychology in Australia. Themed 'United for the Future' the 2016 APS Congress culminates as a show of unity and strength of the profession celebrating growth of all the constituent sectors of psychology within Australia over the last 50 years.*
*The programme will contain richness of content, developed in collaboration with all Colleges, Divisions and Interest Groups of the Australian Psychological Society. It is the must attend professional event in 2016 for all Psychologists and allied professionals.'*
http://www.2016congress.com.au/

13–16 September 2016


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The CPIG National Committee is working toward a strong profile at the APS Congress.

Given that there will not be an ICCP in 2016 in Australia, the CPIG National Committee is exploring innovative options to support, inform and engage our members over the next two years. We will focus our efforts on offering presentations and workshop with Australian and International speakers in major capital cities across Australia. We also want to ensure we are making optimal use of technology to reach an audience beyond these cities and to share cutting edge research and insights with all our members.

**Considering making a contribution to the *International Coaching Psychology Review*?**

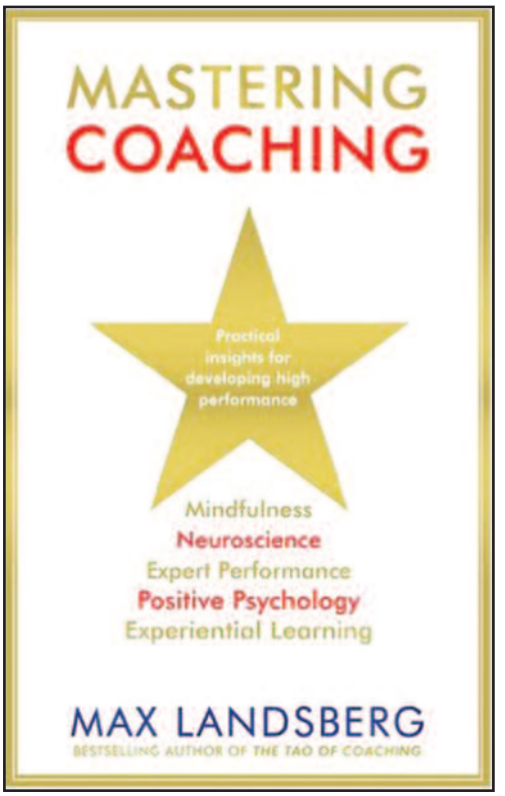
Finally, I ask you to consider contributing to the *ICPR*. The value of this publication is dependent on its contributors; I encourage you to make contact either with myself or with our Australian *ICPR* editor, Professor Sandy Gordon at sandy.gordon@uwa.edu.au. We would warmly welcome your inquiry.

I wish you all a productive and enjoyable 2016,

**Vicki de Prazer**
National Convener
Email: vicki.deprazer@canberra.edu.au

# Book Review

***Mastering Coaching: Practical insights for developing high performance***
**Max Landsberg**
Profile Books Ltd, 2015
ISBN: 978-1-78125-407-3
***Reviewed by Julie Allan***




The subtitle for *Mastering Coaching* is 'Practical insights for developing high performance', and the author recommends it primarily for those who have been applying 'the core skills' of coaching for some years. The word basic might easily have replaced core, given the skills mentioned, however, the challenge of crafting an inviting, usable text of value to the skilled has been thoughtfully approached. Inexperienced coaches may find value in the knowledge base, although the tools or strategies are of course not, of themselves, recipes for success. Coaching psychologists may find most of the psychological underpinnings familiar, but they will find psychology treated with appreciation, if highly selectively, and its relevance to impactful coaching made clear.

Landsberg chose the 14 chapter topics by combining his own experience and reflection with the invited thoughts of fellow coaches, and suggestions from clients and interested professionals. He has then addressed each area in a thorough way that draws on theory and experience to provide an engaging and practical read. The chapters are arranged in three sections: underpinning theory, techniques or approaches, and examples of relevant situations or assignment types. The chapters have quotes at the beginning and a very helpful summary of the topics approached.

In Part 1, Landsberg reviews five relatively popular areas in coaching psychology, giving a chapter to each. These succinct chapters provide a historical overview, key concepts and references, and examples of use – with a measured approach to issues of utility and hype. The areas are: Neuroscience, Sports psychology, Positive psychology, Mindfulness and Experiential learning. Readability and practitioner relevance are addressed using tables and boxes of tools and tips, with an element of scholarly overview in appendices. For example, in positive psychology, tables include 'selected tools for building positive relationships' as well as 'selected influences and actors in positive psychology' – where names from Assagioli through James, Seligman, Deci and Ryan, Boniwell and Linley can be found, with references provided. One of the appendices gives an approachable summary of key elements of brain function, so that the Neuroscience chapter can focus on implications for learning and behaviour relevant to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performance. Each chapter has a summary page of key points. If you are schooled in any of these areas you may find the language imprecise but deeper knowledge won't detract from consideration of the challenges and opportunities of application.

Part 2 houses five chapters on specific techniques or approaches, with each explained and illustrated through stories or vignettes. These are: Expert performance, Six steps to mastery, Jim Collins's Hedgehog model – which is a Venn diagram that overlaps passion, expertise and sustainability – McKinsey's adoption of three time horizons (right now, medium term and future orientation), and the use of psychometrics. The six steps to mastery chapter is interestingly novel, with Landsberg's take on lessons from the Old Master artists. In the case of psychometrics there is an overview of some of the most commonly used, with notes on purpose, reliability and validity. Again, there is room to criticise rigour from an academic perspective, and the topics are an eclectic mix, but references are provided.

Part 3 looks at four situations that many coaches will have faced and explores what it might mean to be effective as a coach for these contexts, including the nature of the challenges and options for ways forward. Role transitions, 360-degree feedback, board effectiveness and GenY/generational differences are the areas chosen. Coaching psychologists skilled in any one area will probably find some of the material basic – an explanation of how to conduct a 360-degree debrief/coaching using GROW, for example. However, these chapters do give lots of very applicable options for working, grounded in experience and research, and it doesn't harm to revise some good practice fundamentals.

The benefit of *Mastering Coaching* lies not in the depth of each chapter – there will always be greater experts in any individual area – but in the thoughtful approach brought to a breadth of material. Landsberg acknowledges areas of omission – adult development and narrative, for example, and asks for suggestions for the next edition. Those working in adult learning, as coaches and coaching psychologists do, need to have encompassed at least the first of these, so it will be interesting to see if Landsberg takes up the challenge in future. Other core areas that have fallen out of scope are supervision/praxis consultation and ethics, which don't specifically have a space here. The author suggests that application to self is one way of using the material, so perhaps a window for supervision there.

Overall, *Mastering Coaching* seems to support Megginson and Clutterbuck's 'systemic eclectic' stage of coaching maturity (quoted on page 10 of the book): 'an intelligent and sensitive ability to select a broad approach and – within that approach – appropriate tools and techniques that meet the particular needs of a particular client at a particular time'.

**Julie Allan, C.Psychol**, is a coaching psychologist (BPS register and AFISCP) and an APECS registered executive coach. She is also an HCPC registered occupational psychologist, supervisor for coaches and consultants, and the author of book chapters on coaching and supervision.

## Notes

**4. Online submission process**

(1) All manuscripts must be submitted to a Co-ordinating Editor by email to:
Roger Hamill (UK): icpreditoruk@gmail.com
Sandy Gordon (Australia): sandy.gordon@uwa.edu.au

(2) The submission must include the following as separate files:

- Title page consisting of manuscript title, authors' full names and affiliations, name and address for corresponding author.
- Abstract.
- Full manuscript omitting authors' names and affiliations. Figures and tables can be attached separately if necessary.

**5. Manuscript requirements**

- Contributions must be typed in double spacing with wide margins. All sheets must be numbered.
- Tables should be typed in double spacing, each on a separate page with a self-explanatory title. Tables should be comprehensible without reference to the text. They should be placed at the end of the manuscript with their approximate locations indicated in the text.
- Figures can be included at the end of the document or attached as separate files, carefully labelled in initial capital/lower case lettering with symbols in a form consistent with text use. Unnecessary background patterns, lines and shading should be avoided. Captions should be listed on a separate page. The resolution of digital images must be at least 300 dpi.
- For articles containing original scientific research, a structured abstract of up to 250 words should be included with the headings: Objectives, Design, Methods, Results, Conclusions. Review articles should use these headings: Purpose, Methods, Results, Conclusions.
- Overall, the presentation of papers should conform to the British Psychological Society's Style Guide (available at www.bps.org.uk/publications/publications_home.cfm in PDF format). Non-discriminatory language should be used throughout. Spelling should be Anglicised when appropriate. Text should be concise and written for an international readership of applied psychologists. Sensationalist and unsubstantiated views are discouraged. Abbreviations, acronyms and unfamiliar specialist terms should be explained in the text on first use.
- Particular care should be taken to ensure that references are accurate and complete. Give all journal titles in full. Referencing should follow BPS formats. For example:
  Billington, T. (2000). *Separating, losing and excluding children: Narratives of differenc*e. London: Routledge/Falmer.
  Elliott, J.G. (2000). Dynamic assessment in educational contexts: Purpose and promise. In C. Lidz & J.G. Elliott (Eds.), *Dynamic assessment: Prevailing models and applications* (pp.713–740). New York: J.A.I. Press.
  Palmer, S. & Whybrow, A. (2006). The coaching psychology movement and its development within the British Psychological Society. *International Coaching Psychology Review 1*(1), 5–11.
- SI units must be used for all measurements, rounded off to practical values if appropriate, with the Imperial equivalent in parentheses.
- In normal circumstances, effect size should be incorporated.
- Authors are requested to avoid the use of sexist language.
- Authors are responsible for acquiring written permission to publish lengthy quotations, illustrations, etc. for which they do not own copyright.

**6. Brief reports**

These should be limited to 1000 words and may include research studies and theoretical, critical or review comments whose essential contribution can be made briefly. A summary of not more than 50 words should be provided.

**7. Publication ethics**

BPS Code of Conduct – Code of Conduct, Ethical Principles and Guidelines.
Principles of Publishing – Principle of Publishing.

**8. Supplementary data**

Supplementary data too extensive for publication may be deposited with the British Library Document Supply Centre. Such material includes numerical data, computer programs, fuller details of case studies and experimental techniques. The material should be submitted to the Editor together with the article, for simultaneous refereeing.

**9. Post acceptance**

PDF page proofs are sent to authors via email for correction of typesetting but not for rewriting or the introduction of new material. Corrections at this stage in production due to errors made by an author may incur a fee payable by the author or their institution.

**10. Copyright**

To protect authors and publications against unauthorised reproduction of articles, The British Psychological Society requires copyright to be assigned to itself as publisher, on the express condition that authors may use their own material at any time without permission. On acceptance of a paper, authors will be requested to sign an appropriate assignment of copyright form.

**11. Checklist of requirements**

- Abstract (100–200 words).
- Title page (include title, authors' names, affiliations, full contact details).
- Full article text (double-spaced with numbered pages and anonymised).
- References (see above). Authors are responsible for bibliographic accuracy and must check every reference in the manuscript and proofread again in the page proofs.
- Tables, figures, captions placed at the end of the article or attached as separate files.

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