



Interest Group in  
Coaching Psychology



**The British  
Psychological Society**  
Special Group in  
Coaching Psychology

# International Coaching Psychology Review

Volume 13 No. 1 – Spring 2018



# International Coaching Psychology Review

## Subscriptions

*International Coaching Psychology Review (ICPR)* is published in Spring and Autumn. It is distributed free of charge to members of the British Psychological Society Special Group in Coaching Psychology and the Australian Psychological Society Interest Group in Coaching Psychology members. It is available to non-members (Individuals £50 per volume; Institutions £60 per volume; single copies £25) from: The British Psychological Society, SGCP, St. Andrews House, 48 Princess Road East, Leicester LE1 7DR, UK.

## Editors

Jonathan Passmore, DOccPsych, Centre for Coaching, Henley Business School, UK & University of Evora, Portugal.  
Sandy Gordon, PhD, University of Western Australia, Perth, Australia.

## International Editorial Board

Hilary Armstrong, PhD, Institute of Executive Coaching, Sydney, Australia.

Tatiana Bachkirova, PhD, Oxford Brookes University, UK.

John Bennett, PhD, Queen's University of Charlotte, North Carolina, USA.

Michael Cavanagh, PhD, Coaching Psychology Unit, School of Psychology, Sydney University, Australia.

Cary Cooper, PhD, Manchester Business School, UK.

Sarah Corrie, PhD, Middlesex University, London, UK.

Susan David, PhD, Harvard Medical School, US.

Anthony M. Grant, PhD, Coaching Psychology Unit, School of Psychology, Sydney University, Australia.

Suzu Green, PhD, University of Wollongong, Australia.

Rebecca Jones, PhD, Centre for Coaching, Henley Business School, UK.

Stephen Joseph, PhD, University of Warwick, UK.

Travis Kemp, PhD, International Graduate School of Business, University of South Australia, Australia.

Ho Law, PhD, Cambridge Coaching Psychology Group, UK.

Lindsay Oades, PhD, University of Wollongong, Australia.

Gordon Spence, PhD, University of Wollongong, Australia

Ernesto Spinelli, PhD.

Catherine Steele, University of Leicester, UK.

Richard Stelter, PhD, University of Copenhagen, Denmark.

Mary Watts, PhD, City University, London.

## Notes for Contributors

The *ICPR* is an international publication with a focus on the theory, practice and research in the field of coaching psychology. Submission of academic articles, systematic reviews and other research reports which support evidence-based practice are welcomed. The *ICPR* may also publish conference reports and papers given at the British Psychological Society Special Group in Coaching Psychology (BPS SGCP) and Australian Psychological Society Interest Group in Coaching Psychology (APS IGCP) conferences, notices and items of news relevant to the International Coaching Psychology Community.

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

### 1. Circulation

The circulation of the *ICPR* is worldwide. It is available in hardcopy and PDF format. Papers are invited and encouraged from authors throughout the world. It is available free in paper and PDF format to members of the BPS SGCP, and free in PDF format to APS IGCP members as a part of their annual membership.

### 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...').

### 4. Online submission process

(1) All manuscripts must be submitted to the UK Co-ordinating Editor by email to:

Jonathan Passmore (Henley Centre for Coaching, Henley Business School, UK): [j.passmore@henley.ac.uk](mailto:j.passmore@henley.ac.uk)

(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.

The British Psychological Society  
Special Group in Coaching Psychology



The Australian Psychological Society Ltd  
Interest Group in Coaching Psychology



# International Coaching Psychology Review



Volume 13 No. 1 – Spring 2018





# Contents

- 4 Editorial  
Jonathan Passmore & Sandy Gordon

## *Papers*

- 6 Trust your gut, listen to reason: How experienced coaches work with intuition in their practice  
Claire Sheldon
- 21 Developing self-compassion in leadership development coaching: A practice model and case study analysis  
Karol M. Wasylshyn & Frank Masterpasqua
- 35 Reciprocal peer coaching: A constructivist methodology for enhancing formative assessment strategy in tertiary education  
Lisa Matthewman, Jenni Nowlan & Katriina Hyvönen
- 48 How is behavioural change sustained over time? Coachee perceptions of the effects of coaching one year later  
Ventaka Nanduri
- 61 Coaching for health and lifestyle change: Theory and guidelines for interacting and reflecting with women about their challenges and aspirations  
Reinhard Stelter & Vinnie Andersen
- 72 One-to-one coaching as a catalyst for personal development: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of coaching undergraduates at a UK university  
Natalie Lancer & Virginia Eatough
- 89 Executive coaching and national culture in the United Arab Emirates: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis  
Graham Dodds & Dasha Grajfoner

## *Reports*

- 106 SGCP Chair's Note  
David Webster
- 107 Interest Group in Coaching Psychology News  
Vicki de Prazer

# Editorial

Jonathan Passmore & Sandy Gordon

---

I AM DELIGHTED to have been appointed as the new co-editor of the *International Coaching Psychology Review (ICPR)*. The publication has played a major part in the development of coaching psychology and evidence-based practice in coaching. This is thanks in large part to the role of previous editors, Stephen Palmer and Michael Cavanagh who helped established *ICPR* and more recently the work of Roger Hamill and Sandy Gordon.

I would like to express my particular thanks to Roger Hamill for his help in the handover of the UK editor role. Roger, who took on the editor role as a short-term plan to 'keep the seat warm' has done an outstanding job in keeping this peer review publication moving forward.

My ambition, when I agreed to take on this role, was to help *ICPR* reach a wider audience, in keeping with the Society's aim of disseminating psychological knowledge. My aim being to help both academics and practitioners develop a deeper understanding of the psychological processes at work within coaching conversations and to support the spread of evidenced based practice.

Over its first 10 years *ICPR* had gradually built a database of solid scientific papers, which were accessible through academic databases. Sadly, the introduction of the new BPA Shop saw much of this content being lost to researchers and practitioners in digital form. Many of us as readers and contributors did not notice the impact initially. As a result we are now in urgent discussions with colleagues at the BPS about how these issues can be resolved. We are optimistic thanks to support from the BPS President, Nicola Gale, and the P4P team, that a restoration of searchability for past and present papers

can be found. However, without a solution there may be significant implications for *ICPR*'s future.

In this issue we have seven original papers from academics around the globe. Our first paper is from Clare Sheldon exploring how coaches work with intuition in their practice.

Our second paper by Karol Wasylyshyn and Frank Masterpasqua, two colleagues from the USA, explores the fascinating theme of self-compassion in leadership development. They offer a case study reviewing how coaches can support leaders in the development of this competence.

In our third paper Lisa Matthewman and Jenni Nowlan from the University of Westminster, London, and Katriina Hyvönen from the University of Jyväskylä, Finland, review the application of reciprocal Peer coaching in tertiary education through a constructivist methodology.

In the fourth paper in this edition, Venkata Nanduri, from the University of Stellenbosch Business School, Cape Town, South Africa, explores how behavioural change can be sustained over time through the application of coaching.

The fifth paper is a conceptual paper by Reinhard Stelter and Vinnie Andersen from Denmark. Their paper proposes a framework and guidelines for working with women on life style and health issues within coaching conversations, and will act as a foundation for other work which they are undertaking in the University of Copenhagen.

In the sixth paper, Natalie Lancer and Virginia Eatough from Birkbeck, University of London, UK, use an IPA methodology to explore the experience of coaching in an undergraduate setting.

The final paper in this edition is by Graham Dodds and Dasha Grajfoner, based in Scotland. Their work explores the application of coaching in the Middle east, specifically within the United Arab Emirates, using an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis lens.

This will be Sandy's last publication in the role of co-editor, and I would like to thank him for his contributions to both *ICPR* and the wider coaching psychology community. The search is now on for a new Australian co-editor, and in addition we are seeking an assistant editor to support the team as we move forward. If either role is of interest please do make contact.

### **Correspondence**

#### **Jonathan Passmore**

Henley Centre for Coaching,  
Henley Business School, UK  
& University of Evora, Portugal.  
Email: [j.passmore@henley.ac.uk](mailto:j.passmore@henley.ac.uk)

#### **Sandy Gordon**

University of Western Australia,  
Perth, Australia.  
Email: [sandy.gordon@uwa.edu.au](mailto:sandy.gordon@uwa.edu.au)

# Trust your gut, listen to reason: How experienced coaches work with intuition in their practice

Claire Sheldon

---

**Objectives:** Experienced coaches profess using intuition in their work. Practitioner literature positions it as a critical coaching tool. Yet minimal empirical data supports using intuition in evidence based coaching practice. This study looked to: add detail to the map of how experienced coaches work with their intuition in their practice, and to the interplay between ‘gut’ and ‘reason’; and to co-create a language, theory or model to support and legitimise discussion about intuition in coaching.

**Design:** A qualitative approach rooted in social constructionism was chosen to accommodate the enquiry, grounded theory to provide structure.

**Methods:** An abbreviated form of grounded theory method (GTM) was developed to explore how four experienced executive coaches talked about intuition and worked at the boundary between intuitive and rational ways of knowing. Data was generated during the iterations of focus group, online discussion and follow-up conversations. Purposive sampling was used.

**Results:** Findings suggested that: dialogue sharpens and extends individual understandings of intuition in coaching; and expertise and developmental maturity facilitate more choiceful and effective decisions about using intuitions. A model, ‘Working at the boundary’, symbolises the potential in the moment between a coach noticing and responding to an intuition. It captures four ways of working with intuition, mapping the impact of these interventions on the coaching relationship.

**Conclusions:** Expertise and maturing as a coach have an impact on the quality of interventions at the intuitive/rational boundary, and dialogue extends understandings of intuition. More research is needed – and ‘Working at the boundary’ kick-starts conversations about intuition and provides a tool for coaching psychologists and their supervisors.

**Keywords:** Intuition; coaching; dual processing; maturity; expertise; coaching relationship.

EXPERIENCED COACHES profess using intuition in their work (Soyez & Dini, 2015). Practitioner literature positions intuition as a critical part of coaching practice (e.g. Bluckert, 2006; Starr, 2011; Whitworth et al., 2007). We are told that ‘successful coaches are highly intuitive’ (Skiffington & Zeus, 2000, p.164). Yet minimal empirical data supports using intuition in evidence-based coaching practice. The data that does exist does not examine how coaches use their intuition, how the dual processes of intuitive and rational thought interact, and what happens when coaches get it wrong, hold back or side-step their

intuitions. This paper helps close that gap. It provides an overview of literature relating to intuition in professional and coaching contexts; outlines the research design; then focuses on results, particularly those relating to how coaches work at the boundary between intuitive and rational ways of knowing. As the study focuses on the process of working with intuition, writing on intuition as a trait or behavioural preference are not included in the literature review.

While academic and practitioner writing supports the use of intuition in professional environments, research across disparate disciplines has resulted in diverse perspectives



and lively debate (e.g. Glöckner & Witteman, 2010; Hodgkinson et al., 2009; King & Appleton, 1997; Lazlo, 2009; McCutcheon & Pincombe, 2001; Salas, 2010; Smith et al., 2004). Despite disagreement about what to include in the family of “ways of knowing” that is intuition (Claxton, 2000, p.49), there are some areas of loose agreement. First, it is widely accepted that intuition is a non-conscious, holistic, rapid and affectively charged way of processing and surfacing information and coming to conclusions (Dane & Pratt, 2009; Hodgkinson et al., 2008). Second, there is broad agreement that intuition has a place in the dual processing models that differentiate between non-conscious and rational cognition (Evans, 2008; Evans & Stanovich, 2013; Glöckner & Witteman, 2010; Hodgkinson et al., 2009). This paper follows the proposal that intuition belongs to Type 1: fast, preverbal, automatic. It contrasts with Type 2: time intensive, rational, effortful and easily disrupted (Evans & Stanovich, 2013). Although scholars and practitioners dispute the relationship between these two processes, recent research suggests few decisions belong to one alone (Hodgkinson et al., 2009; Kahneman, 2011; Welling, 2005).

Literature also suggests that the quality of intuitive decisions develops alongside levels of expertise (Baylor, 2001; Mavor et al., 2010, St. Pierre & Smith, 2014) and self-awareness (Bluckert, 2006); and that it can be impeded by metacognition (Baylor, 2001), stress (Dane & Pratt, 2007; Mavor et al., 2010) and environmental constraints (de Haan, 2008; McCutcheon & Pincombe, 2001; Smith et al., 2004).

Additionally, scholars propose that intuitive judgments have most value in complex, fluid environments where there is a need to evaluate, process and act quickly on vast amounts of disparate data (Khatri & Ng, 2001; Klein, 2003). In these situations they propose professionals could – and should – tap into quick-fire intuitive intelligence (e.g. Hodgkinson et al., 2009; St. Pierre & Smith, 2014; Salas et al., 2010). This paper proposes a parallel between these conditions and the

coaching relationship. A parallel which is supported by the literature on intuition in coaching. In coaching, most writing remains practitioner led, and is often based on small samples and practitioner insight (e.g. Dembkowski et al., 2006; Reitz, 2009; Starr, 2011; Whitworth et al., 2007). The work of Mavor et al. (2010) is an exception. It considers what intuition in coaching might be; what helps coaches access and apply that intuition; and how coaches develop intuitive skills. De Haan’s (2008) research also noted that intuition played a part in every one of 78 critical coaching moments identified by experienced coaches.

Some practitioners suggest intuition is available to all (Whitworth et al., 2007): most present it as the territory of experienced coaches (Bluckert, 2006; Dembkowski et al., 2006; Starr, 2011). There are contradictions, and little information on the process of how coaches worked with their intuition. One message seemed consistent. There might be dangers – confusing intuitions with values, prejudices, cognitive biases and beliefs – (Bachkirova, 2016; Murray, 2004; Reitz, 2009) – but using intuition was a good thing and to be aspired to (International Coach Federation core competencies, 2017; Skiffington & Zeus, 2000; Soyez & Dini, 2015). It seems negligent to signal these potential dangers, yet encourage practitioners to aspire to an undefined mastery. There appears to be an important gap in practitioner literature and coaching research.

## **Methodology**

This exploratory enquiry adopted a qualitative approach to capture both the elusive nature of intuition and the multiple perspectives presented in the literature. The study was rooted in social constructionism: while translating somatic intuitive responses into words might be imprecise, conversation would bring the moment when an intuition surfaced into relief, creating a language to make sense of what coaches did next (Heron, 1996).

Participants were recruited via an email

to coaching colleagues, which was then sent to practitioners who might help with the research. Practitioner literature suggested experienced coaches would have the self-awareness and reflexivity to disentangle prejudice from intuition, and to pinpoint and articulate their intuitive coaching responses (Bachkirova, 2011; Bachkirova & Cox, 2007). This requirement informed the purposive sampling which led to the selection of four executive and leadership coaches as research participants (see Table 1). The small group size allowed high levels of input from these subject experts.

The research adhered to university guidelines on research ethics (2010).

An abbreviated form of constructivist grounded theory method (GTM) was developed to accommodate research constraints. Diverging from traditional GTM, the same participants were used throughout: the intention was to start a peer discussion that could be continued over three iterations of data generation. A focus group provided an opportunity for collaborative meaning making (McLeod, 2011), generating rich, dense and sometimes unexpected data. It was followed by a closed, on-line discussion that allowed participants to reflect and expand on the focus group debate. Finally, follow-up conversations and personal correspondence provided an opportunity to clarify and check data, codes and developing categories.

In keeping with grounded theory tradition, data generation and analysis were

cyclical and concurrent rather than linear. Limited theoretical sampling was adopted, together with line-by-line coding of transcripts and text, constant comparative analysis and memoing, both as a precursor and a companion to developing and abstracting categories and sub-categories from the data (Charmaz, 2006). To support the aim of co-creating a language for talking about intuition in coaching, *in vivo* codes were used when they provided enough reach and abstraction. Positional mapping helped identify relationships within and across the data (Clarke & Friese, 2007).

Analysis of 298 codes coalesced into two higher-level categories, *Mapping the territory* and *Working at the boundary*. *Mapping the territory* was informed by how participants talked about intuition, and what they talked about. A summary of this category provides context for findings relating to the second. *Working at the boundary* explores how participants worked at and across the boundary between intuitive and rational ways of knowing.

**Results**

***Mapping the territory***

Participants reported that their focus group conversations and on-line exchanges helped them sharpen and refine personal maps of what intuition was and was not. While their discussions mirrored some of the tensions and disagreement present in academic writings, participants surfaced four notable areas of agreement. Each has value in contextualising *Working at the boundary*. First, what one

Research alias	Gender	Years of coaching experience	Coaching or associated qualifications	Coaching accreditation	Supervision
Kestrel	F	8	2	N	Ad hoc
Laura	F	14	3	APEC	Regular
Marianna	F	10	2	ICF	Regular
Tinker	M	20	3	N	Regular

Table 1: Research participants

coach experienced as intuition, another might experience as expertise or knowledge. Second, coaches reported that personal notions of what constituted intuition shifted over time and with experience. Third, participants believed that expertise was an enabler, rather than an intuitive way of knowing. They suggested that as their experience grew, their unconscious expertise looked after the mechanics of the coaching session. This – potentially – gave Type 2 processing the space to consciously acknowledge intuition's Type 1 somatic signals (St. Pierre & Smith, 2014). Finally, participants reinforced that working with an intuition has two parts. Having noticed an intuition, the coach then needs to do something with it (Reitz, 2009; Whitworth et al., 2007).

It should be noted that the names used in reporting results were chosen by participants to maintain anonymity.

### ***Working at the boundary***

*Working at the boundary* is both a higher-level category and an explanatory model. Developed to bring together and make sense of data generated during the focus group, the

model captures the potential in the space between a coach becoming aware of an intuition – and doing something with it. This section starts with an overview, then details the codes and outcomes for the four positions the model represents.

When noticing an intuition, participants reported taking one of two stances. *Staying put*, they kept their intuition or interpretation of that intuition to themselves. *Entering the territory*, they shared the intuition or their interpretation of it with their client. In both cases, participants suggested that their level of relative maturity impacted the quality of their intervention and the potential coaching outcome. *Being less mature* represents clumsy or less thoughtful interventions. Being more mature represents more reflexive and elegant coaching interventions.

The less mature interventions of *Missing a chance* and *Taking a risk* and their reported coaching outcomes are presented first. The paper then moves to the more mature interventions that are *Holding back* and *Allowing not-knowing*. In the text, participants label both themselves and their intuitions as more or less mature.

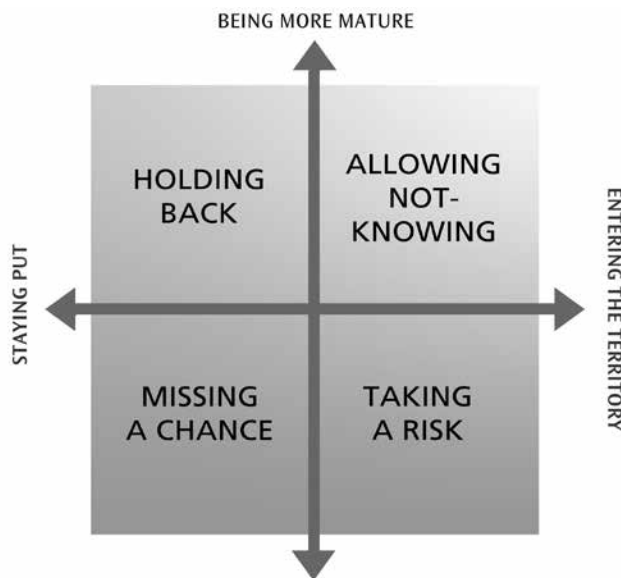


Figure 1: Working at the boundary – overview

### **Missing a chance: 'Being less mature' and 'Staying put'**

Missing a chance correlates with what participants characterised as less mature or less choiceful interventions:

*I can use [intuition] absolutely inappropriately in an intervention and think, 'Oh, why did I do that?' – and then not use it at all and find later that I could really have short cut a whole load of conversations and time by using it. (Tinker, focus group)*

They described three ways in which they might sense an intuitive flutter and miss their chance to act on it. Their responses were characterised by one or more of these focused or *in vivo* codes: *self-doubt, slapping down, being fearful, lacking courage* or *lacking skill*.

First, *Dismissing the intuition* confirms Type 2's tendency to 'censor' intuitions before allowing time to develop or check them out (Sadler-Smith & Shefy, 2004). Here participants dismissed the validity of their intuition, doubting their internal voice and rationalising or talking away intuition's somatic signals. Second, when *Muting the intuition*, participants reported having a strong intui-

tive sense but in the face of contradictory evidence not having '*the courage... or the skill to articulate it*' (Tinker, focus group). Participants typically associated these interventions with relative lack of coaching expertise, or with lack of developmental maturity as a coach. Finally, *Being ill prepared* found them caught off balance by the coaching environment, whether as experienced and less experienced coaches, or failing to voice an intuition because '*if we responded to them all we'd just be... exhausted*' (Kestrel, focus group). Here Type 1 was easily quashed when personal anxiety and environmental management took Type 2's attention (Glöckner & Witteman, 2010; Whitworth et al., 2007).

The data suggest both less and more experienced coaches may be *Missing a chance* to work with intuition in their practice. Their inaction might be accompanied by lack of awareness, an internal struggle, or by lack of preparation. It is neither deliberate nor choiceful. Participants' examples show clients missing out on potentially rich learning; coaches missing short cuts to the heart of the coaching matter; or the client and sponsoring organisation paying a perhaps avoidable price for an unvoiced intuition. These coaching outcomes are shown in Figure 2 as *Losing ground*.

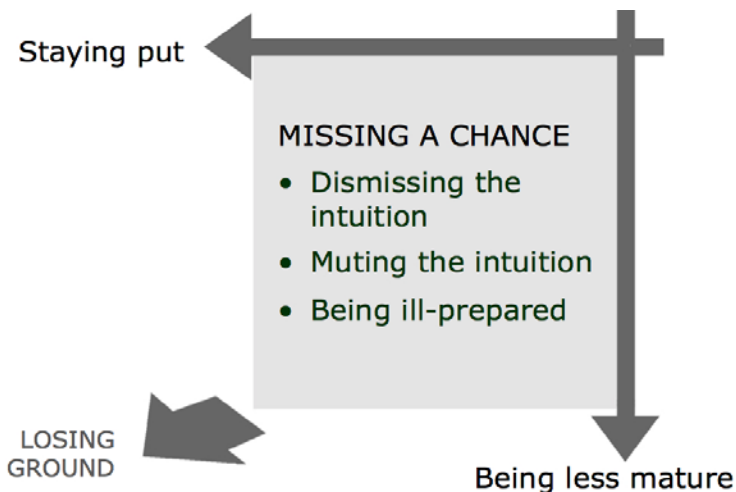


Figure 2: Missing a chance

They appear to support claims that withholding an intuition is potentially dangerous (Morgan, 2004; Reitz, 2009); and that ‘holding back ... does not serve the client’s best interests’ (Whitworth et al., 2008, p.62).

The paper now considers what happened when participants *did* share their intuitions from a position of relative immaturity.

***Taking a risk: ‘Being less mature’ and ‘Entering the territory’***

Findings suggest that *Taking a risk* means minimal preparation and little reflection.

Participants talked of entering the territory armed only with their interpretation of an intuitive nudge. They might ‘pronounce with a flourish’, ‘incorporate the interpretation into the exchange’ or use it ‘to demonstrate cleverness’ (Marianna) – all to mixed effect:

*I think there’s always relevance if you notice something, but there are so many ways we can get it wrong, because we can notice something but attribute it to the wrong thing or develop a sort of slightly whacky theory... (Marianna, focus group)*

Codes informing this category are *labelling; pronouncing; (mis)interpreting; flourishing;* and

*showing off*. Participants retrospective analyses of their interventions illuminated three potential positions: *Being presumptuous; Showing off* and *Getting it wrong*.

First, the participant’s interpretation of an intuition might be correct, but their timing and delivery presumptuous. *I’ve had disasters where I’ve brought an intuition into the conversation well before the client is able to even engage with it’* (Marianna, focus group). She talked about a client clamming up after the ill-timed, *‘I think part of what’s going on here is that there’s this thing about being anxious about risking your reputation’*. Her experience contrasts with the assertion of Whitworth et al. (2007) that an inelegant intuitive intervention demonstrates the coach’s humanity, and contributes to building trust with the client. Instead it was *‘me being clever and me being smart and not at all tuned into what this person really needs or wants’*.

Second, the coach might be *Showing off*, sharing an intuition that appears correct but distracts from the client or the coaching assignment. Laura gave an example of following intuitive leads about a client’s childhood, and about the *‘instant gratification’* that came with *‘showing off’* an interpretation that seemed to hit the spot. Her observations

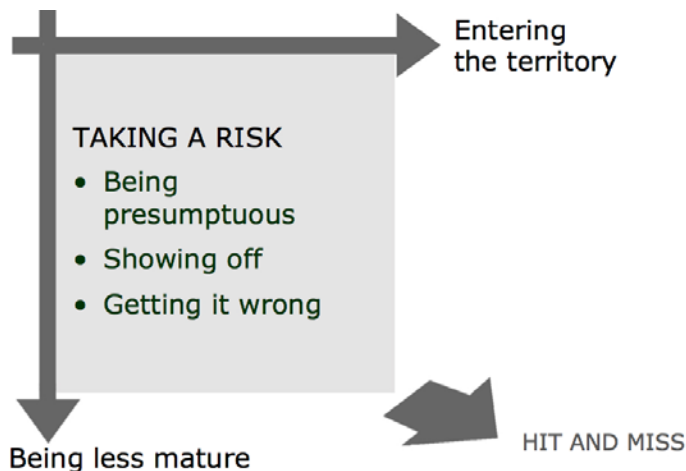


Figure 3: Taking a risk

chime with warnings against the allure of becoming an ego bound ‘intuitive’ (Reitz, 2008; Sadler-Smith & Shefy, 2004).

Finally, the intuition might be misinterpreted or just plain wrong. Kestrel’s intuitive proposal that a client engage in a creative experiment resulted in an emphatic refusal and a blow to the coach’s self esteem. Her experience contrasts with the proposal that the coach who risks sharing an intuition, chancing ‘a beautiful dive or a horrendous belly flop’, builds their confidence as an intuitive practitioner (Whitworth et al., 2008, p.59). Rather than supporting Type 1 knowing, Kestrel’s intuitive faux pas saw her retreat to the safety of Type 2 methodology.

The intuitive interventions in *Taking a risk* lacked cognitive filtering. Participants neither imagined the interpretation of their intuition might be inaccurate or inappropriate; nor that the coaching alliance might be damaged by their intervention. Their ‘premature evaluations’ (Claxton & Lucas, 2007, p.42) shared without thought, meant coaching outcomes were *Hit and miss* (see Figure 3).

There are no empirical examples of these unhelpful intuitive interventions in the coaching literature. Instead there are

suggestions that accurate interpretation is unnecessary, because intuition in coaching ‘always forwards the action and deepens the learning’ (Whitworth et al., 2007, p.54). The research data say something different. *Taking a risk* might also bring the coaching to a halt. While participants’ narratives demonstrated that *Taking a risk* had furthered their learning, that learning came at the expense of the coaching alliance, the client’s learning, and sometimes at the expense of their own coaching confidence. This online discussion posting sums it up:

*I realised that while I was often right about what the issue was, I was also quite often wrong about what I had interpreted it as being. However, what I was not usually mistaken about was that there was ‘something’ implicit going on that was having an impact on the interaction. (Marianna)*

The paper now explores how participants reported working with that ‘something’ using more mature interventions. Findings relating to *Staying put* are outlined before considering what happens on *Entering the territory*.

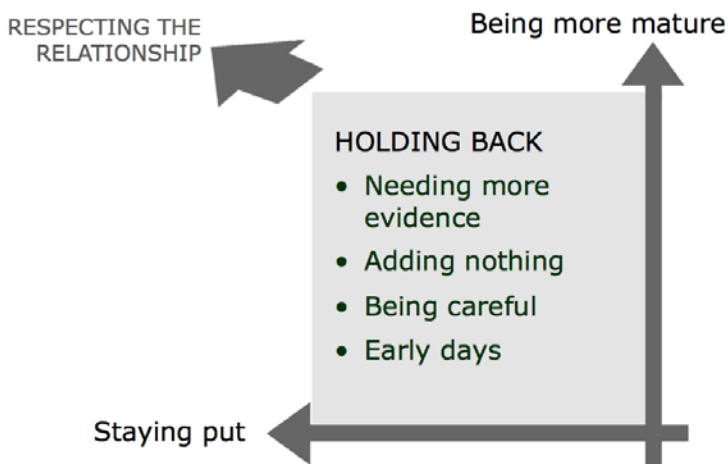


Figure 4: Holding back

### ***Holding back: 'Being more mature' and 'Staying put'***

The data suggest that participants who work from this quadrant have developmental maturity: they have learned from their experiences.

*It's something to do with your maturing as a coach, realising when you maybe express some of these things and when, okay, 'Oh I need to let that lie'. (Laura, focus group)*

They are well prepared, have the confidence to recognise intuitions as their own, and have the skills to articulate and share them (de Haan, 2008). *Holding back* means taking a deliberate and informed choice not to share an intuition. Codes informing this sub-category are: *experiencing noise; lacking trust; needing support; feeling unsafe; lacking value*. They combined for the participants in four ways.

First, participants recognised they might be *Needing more evidence* before sharing their intuition. They might choose to stay put because *'it seems essential that we have a reasonable level of 'intelligence' about where data is coming from'* (Tinker, follow-up dataset correspondence). In these circumstances, and in opposition to some practitioner writing (Whitworth et al., 2007), Laura suggested she might *'need a little more evidence'* (focus group) before acting on her intuition. Marianna also preferred to test her intuitive hypotheses:

*I might make a quiet note to myself to reflect on what I was picking up and where it might be coming from (me or the client or both).*

Kauffman and Bachkirova (2008) label this holding back 'informed intuition'. Like Hodgkinson et al. (2009) they suggest looking for data to confirm an intuitive account, rather than assuming its truth.

Alternatively participants held back, believing their intuition was *Adding nothing* to the coaching. Laura echoed the position that

'intuition would only be offered for the benefit of the client' (Mavor et al., 2010, p.288). She described the transition from a client-centric to more systemic coaching approach:

*If I have a sense of something, a potential insight or intuition with a client, I will think, 'Is this going to progress where we're going with the coaching?' And I might hold back.*

Marianna concurred, *'I think there is a maturation process to Laura's point about just what value or what use might [the intuition] have'* (focus group).

Thirdly, participants decided on *Being careful* because they thought it inappropriate to explore the intuition. Echoing research that finds experienced coaches having 'an intuitive sense of the boundary' (Maxwell, 2009), they described concerns about blurring the border between coaching and therapy.

Finally, the issue might be *Early days* or lack of trust in the coaching relationship (Mavor, 2009). Participants described deliberately holding back on sharing potentially risky or negative intuitions, choosing to share this 'raw data' when trust had been built or they sensed the client would be more receptive. These findings are supported in writing that presents trust and rapport as preconditions for using intuition effectively (Mavor et al., 2010; Smith et al., 2004). They also match suggestions that coaches respect their client's stage of cognitive or ego development, matching interventions to their capacity to hear and reflect (Bachkirova & Cox, 2007; Berger & Fitzgerald, 2002).

Participants' views contrasted with claims that 'by the time you've performed a set of validating tests on your intuition, the client has moved on... Your moment is lost' (Whitworth et al., 2007, p.64). Instead their careful yet confident management of the tensions between intuitive and rational thought demonstrated the intelligent use of intuition advocated by Sadler-Smith and Shefy (2004):

*I'm going to let that one go and trust that if there's something that needs to come up it will. It'll present itself. (Marianna, focus group)*

Decisions to hold back allowed time for rumination, building trust and rapport, preparing the ground and gathering resources (Claxton, 2000). Participants also demonstrated the confidence 'to bide their time until something presents itself or until something sheds new light on the issue' (de Haan, 2008, p.123). This outcome is illustrated in Figure 4 as the abstracted sub-category *Respecting the coaching alliance*.

Having explored *Holding back*, the paper turns to *Allowing not-knowing*. After outlining pre-conditions for working in this final quadrant, it presents what participants considered the more mature and sophisticated practices of this final position.

***Allowing not-knowing: 'Being more mature' and 'Entering the territory'***

Participants reported three preconditions for *Allowing not-knowing*. They needed to be confident following a path without knowing where it might lead: *'feeling safe with not knowing feels a really rich and important place'* (Kestrel). They reported needing a 'deep

*well of knowledge'* on which to draw (Kestrel). And they explained that levels of trust in the coaching relationship must provide *'explicit and implicit permission to explore and enquire and to sort of put something out to be curious about'* (Marianna). These requirements are mirrored in scholarly papers on the use of intuition (e.g. Mavor et al., 2010; Salas et al., 2010; Smith et al., 2004) and reflect coaching practitioner writing (e.g. Bluckert, 2006; Dembowski et al., 2006; Reitz, 2009; Starr, 2011). In particular, participants had learned that:

*We are probably processing [nonconscious data] and interpreting it according to our own models and constructs and the current relational context. Since we are flawed, then our sense-making is inevitably flawed. (Marianna)*

With this as a context, *Allowing not-knowing* sees intuitions shared and explored in the service of the client and the coaching. Codes belonging to this sub-category are: *enquiring using 'soft language'* – the coach tentatively sharing with the client their somatic response to, or interpretation of, an intuition; *pressing; offering up; remaining open; and being courageous*. Participants talked about

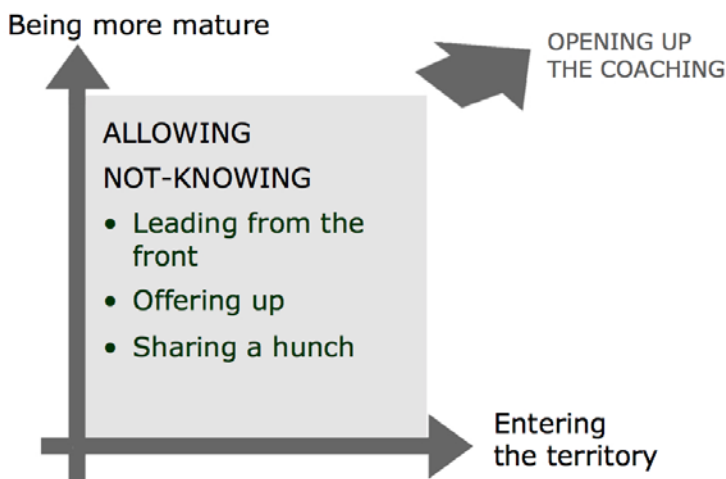


Figure 5: Allowing not knowing



managing the tension between the rational and the intuitive in three ways. They might be *Leading from the front*; *Offering up*; or *Sharing a hunch*.

When *Leading from the front*, participants acted on an intuition without explicitly sharing being at the boundary. Kestrel talked about having a strong intuitive sense of something missing from a systems map drawn by a client. Pressing her client supported them to talk about a deeply personal loss. The intervention '*shifted something and enabled the coaching to open right up*'. She described the moment between becoming aware of the intuition and acting on it:

*I think there was a moment when I nearly didn't ask because my logical brain was saying, 'That's complete, that's fine, let's move on.' So it was a strong enough sense, a strong enough feeling, that I did ask the question.*

This tension between Type 1 and Type 2 was replicated in the experiences of her colleagues, and alluded to in empirical data from other mature coaches (de Haan, 2008; Mavor, 2009;).

Second, participants might use neutral language and enquiry, sharing and *Offering up* Type 1's somatic prompts. This helped participants to share intuitions they might once have avoided. It also provided their clients with choice. Kestrel gave an example:

*When I say, 'When you talk about your boss my stomach tightens and I feel edgy,' that's about 'I don't know what's happening here, but I really notice it and I want to offer it up as something that feels important to me'...*

This tentative approach to sharing intuitions is consistently offered as a template in practitioner writing (e.g. Reitz, 2009; Rogers, 2008; Starr, 2011; Whitworth et al., 2007) and in coaching research (Mavor et al., 2010). Participants went further. They described this not-knowing as '*getting out of the safe zone*', and agreed:

*It's an edgy thing to do, exploring not knowing... It might be nothing, or it could lead to some insight that you might not otherwise have got to or got to so quickly. (Kestrel)*

This excitement, with its tinge of anxiety, matches the significant coaching moments described by de Haan's experienced practitioners: 'all of the critical moments demonstrate that coaches work very intuitively' (2008, p.119).

Finally, participants provided examples of *Sharing a hunch*, giving voice to both the intuition and their interpretation of it. Again, use of language was critical. Posting on-line, Marianna described using '*soft language*' to share a hunch with a client:

*I have an intuitive sense that you are feeling a bit edgy at the moment. My hunch is that you are edgy because I am straying into territory that you don't want to explore.' The response was... 'I guess I am a bit edgy at the moment, but it's because what we have just talked about has made me think about a different incident – one that I'm really embarrassed about!'*

Her language and tone – and openness to the client's response – allowed an exploration of the unresolved incident, precipitating powerful work for the client. Here, as described by Whitworth et al. (2007), the client felt able to correct the coach and the misinterpretation shared had a fruitful outcome. It seems levels of trust, plus 'the power of positive intent and regard for the coachee will go a long way to alleviate potential problems' (Murray, 2004, p.204).

Interventions in this sub-category were characterised by a pivotal moment of reflection, a moment in which these coaches made a conscious choice about both what to share of their intuition and *how* to share it (Phillips, 2006). Their careful use of language also indicates an interplay – however brief – between the intuitive and the rational. This resulted in interventions that were more exploratory yet more sophisticated than those in *Taking a risk*.

The ‘qualitatively different’ intuitions (Baylor, 2001) of *Allowing not-knowing* also resulted in qualitatively different outcomes for clients *and* coaches. Participants’ judgement calls supported more holistic work, triggered rich insights for their clients, and provided shortcuts to developmental issues. In Figure 5, this outcome has the *in vivo* label *Opening up* the coaching. At the same time, *Allowing not-knowing* meant participants had to be prepared for their intuitive intervention to go nowhere or to hit a false note (Mavor, 2009; Reitz, 2008). Paying attention to ‘*how the intuition goes out there*’ (Marianna), rather than investing in their intuitive prowess, appeared to help strengthen and maintain the coaching relationship. Here, as in *Holding back*, participants referenced a developmental shift. The intuitions they described had been held out and examined – however briefly – before coaching action.

## Discussion

The way in which a coach uses intuition in their practice may have a positive or a negative effect on coaching outcomes. It can add value, triggering rich insights for the client, supporting more holistic work and providing short cuts to developmental issues. It can also detract from the coaching agenda, put back the coaching relationship, and impact on the coach’s levels of confidence and self-belief. Two key themes recur through the findings and shed light on this disparity. These are explored in this section, as are implications for coaching psychologists.

### *The place of expertise*

Expertise was not included on participants’ maps of intuition, but contributes to how well they read that map. Expertise means a coach does not need to focus their Type 2 thinking on the mechanics of a coaching session. This gives rational Type 2 space to notice and consider the somatic response that may signal an intuition. In this moment of reflection, expertise contributes two things. It helps the coach choose whether or not to share their

intuition with the client. And it supports them in sharing their intuitive prompt in ways that add value, and advance the work for the client. Coaching expertise does not guarantee that the practitioner will always notice an intuition, or notice it well: personal distractions or environmental issues may take up their Type 2 bandwidth. Neither does it mean the coach will make an appropriate choice: they may still mistake bias or prejudice for intuition, or misjudge an intuition or their timing.

Participants’ perceptions challenge the concept of intuition-as-expertise (Sadler-Smith & Shefy, 2004), while supporting literature that suggests tacit knowledge and expertise are critical to the ‘qualitative’ use of intuition (e.g. Hodgkinson et al., 2010; Salas et al., 2004). This in turn supports both the notion that intuition in coaching should be the province of practitioners who have access to a ‘deep well of learning’ (Kestrel, focus group), and the importance of the coach’s continual professional development (e.g. European Mentoring & Coaching Council, 2012; Stober, 2010).

### *Maturing as a coach*

Maturing as a coach influences how practitioners understand and use intuition. This theme is closely linked but subtly different from the use of expertise in intuition. The less mature coach lacks the resources, rather than the knowledge, to stand back and reflect on their intuitions. The maturing coach fulfils four preconditions. First they can pay attention to an intuition when it enters their consciousness, making more detached and nuanced judgements about its value and what they will do with it. Second they have the self-awareness to recognise when environmental or personal ‘noise’ is impairing their intuitive judgements. Third, they are better able to balance Type 1 and Type 2 thinking: they have the confidence to wait for evidence that supports a shaky intuitive hypothesis; the courage to allow not-knowing and to share intuitions that feel ‘edgy’ but relevant. Finally, matur-

ing as a coach means practitioners understand that they have a great deal more to learn about how they use intuition: *'I've got a personal theory in action that the real prize is more about learning to use [intuition] wisely. And that's quite a journey,'* (Marianna, focus group).

This theme adds to the cache of evidence-based knowledge about how coaches work with intuition and is supported by the wider literature on cognitive and ego development. In particular, Kegan's developmental Subject-Object shift seems a perfect match (Kegan, 1994, cited in Berger & Fitzgerald, 2002). In the less mature coach, intuitions are Subject – while they prompt action, the coach is blind to their provenance, unable to stand back and reflect on them. As the coach matures, more intuitions become Object – the coach can take responsibility for their intuitions, and make choices about how they use them. *Maturing as a coach* widens and adds empirical evidence to the coaching community's continuing discussion about the nature and value of practitioner maturity (Clutterbuck & Megginson, 2010) and development (Bachkirova, 2011; Bachkirova & Cox, 2007).

### Implications for coaching psychologists

First, the limitations. Despite overlaps with other empirical research, the findings of this exploratory study are specific to this group of four practitioners, and impacted by the researcher's interventions, curiosity and world-view. While feedback from participants was that data was accurate and findings meaningful, more needs to be done before claims of generalisability can be made. The study was also constrained by the nature of its subject. Retrospective reporting carries the potential for self-censorship, whether or not intentional. And participants' felt experiences of intuition will have lost something in translation.

Despite this, findings have the potential to illuminate how coaches work at the boundary between intuitive and rational ways of knowing. In raising awareness, they can also extend coaching choices at that boundary. This awareness is important. It is impractical to stop less experienced or less mature practitioners from using their intuition: how can we put brakes on the nonconscious? In lieu of this, the profession might consider three things if it is to develop and nurture skilful intuitive coaches.

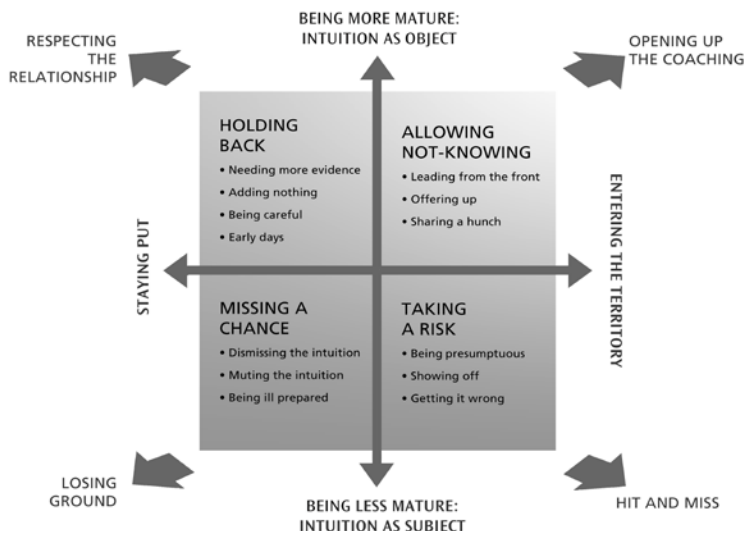


Figure 6: Working at the boundary – intuition and maturing as a coach

First, participants reported that focused dialogue helped them extend their personal and collective understandings of intuition and its application. This study supports Mavor et al. (2010) in recommending that intuition be more widely and explicitly discussed, both by coaches and in their education and development. Specifically, this conversation should be encouraged in arenas where dialogue is already an on-going feature: one-to-one and peer supervision, coaching interest groups and coach trainings.

Second, the coaching profession needs to consider a short-cut to this dialogue, particularly for those coaches who are less experienced or mature. Figure 6: *Working at the boundary – Intuition and maturing as a coach* provides a language to kick-start these conversations.

Finally, the profession needs to encourage continual development, building the unconscious expertise that allows Type 2 the breathing space to notice and respond appropriately to intuitions. This encouragement extends to supporting practitioners in developing their knowledge of dual processing models, becoming more adept at noticing intuitive prompts, assessing an intuition's value-add, and learning how best to share their intuitive judgement. Equally important is the commitment to personal reflection – in whatever guise – that supports the coach in building their confidence, becoming aware of their prejudices, and tolerating uncertainty.

## Conclusions

Although intuition is positioned as a critical part of successful coaching practice, there is minimal empirical evidence to support such assertions. That which does exist (de Haan, 2008; Mavor et al., 2010) provides useful markers, but leaves gaps in our understanding of how intuition is used in coaching. This paper helps close that gap, exploring how four experienced coaches work with intuition in their practice and presenting *Working at the boundary*, a model to facilitate and legitimise discussion about that intuition.

Rich, dense data from participating coaches was analysed using techniques borrowed from constructivist grounded theory. The paper focused on *Working at the boundary*, a higher-level category and explanatory model. This maps the four positions a coach might take when responding to an intuition, together with coaching outcomes. *Missing a chance* and *Taking a risk* are less mature interventions with less effective outcomes; *Holding back* and *Allowing not-knowing* are more mature and more supportive of the coaching relationship. These positions are illuminated by *The place of expertise* and *Maturing as a coach*. These key themes have practical ramifications for coaching psychologists, their supervisors and professional bodies. Specifically, we should legitimise dialogue about intuition in coaching; use *Working at the boundary* to trigger these conversations; and encourage development of the professional expertise that provides bandwidth for mature intuitive interventions.

Finally, further research into the relationship between coaching maturity and use of intuition is both relevant and timely. This exploratory paper provides the springboard for a more expansive enquiry that adds detail, breadth and depth to the map of this territory.

## Correspondence

Claire Sheldon

Email: [claire@thetallhouse.co.uk](mailto:claire@thetallhouse.co.uk)

## References

- Bachkirova, T. (2011). *Developmental coaching: Working with the self*. Maidenhead: McGrawHill.
- Bachkirova, T. (2016). The self of the coach: Conceptualisation, issues, and opportunities for practitioner development. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 68(2) 143–156.
- Bachkirova, T. & Cox, E. (2007). A cognitive-developmental approach for coach development. In S. Palmer & A. Whybrow (Eds.), *Handbook of coaching psychology: A guide for practitioners* (pp.324–350). Hove: Routledge.
- Barbour, R.S. & Kitzinger, J. (1999). *Developing focus group research: Politics, theory and practice*. London: Sage Publications.
- Baylor, A.L. (2001). A U-shaped model for the development of intuition by level of expertise. *New Ideas in Psychology*, 19(3), 237–244.
- Bleneky, M.R., Clinchy, B.M., Goldberg, N.R. & Tarule, J.M. (1997). *Women's ways of knowing: The development of self, voice and mind* (10th anniversary edn.). New York: Basic Books.
- Berger, J.G. & Fitzgerald, C. (2002). Leadership and complexity of mind: The role of executive coaching. In C. Fitzgerald & J.G. Berger (Eds.), *Executive coaching: Practices and perspectives* (pp.27–58). London: Davies-Black Publishing.
- Bluckert, P. (2006). *Psychological dimensions of executive coaching*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Clarke, A.E. & Friese, C. (2007). Grounded theorising using situational analysis. In A. Bryant & K. Charmaz (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of grounded theory*, (pp.363–397). London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. London: Sage Publications.
- Claxton, G. (2000). The anatomy of intuition. In T. Atkinson & G. Claxton (Eds.), *The intuitive practitioner: On the value of not always knowing what one is doing*, (pp.15–31). Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Claxton, G. & Lucas, B. (2007). *The creative thinking plan: How to generate ideas and solve problems in your work and life*. London: BBC Books.
- Clutterbuck, D. & Megginson, D. (2010). Coaching maturity: An emerging concept. *The International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching*, 8(1), 4–13.
- Creswell, J.W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd edn.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc.
- Dane, E. & Pratt, M.G. (2004). Exploring intuition and its role in managerial decision making. *Academy of Management Review*, 32(1), 33–54.
- Dane, E. & Pratt, M.G. (2009). Conceptualising and measuring intuition: A review of recent trends. *International Review of Industrial and Organisational Psychology*, 24, 1–40.
- De Haan, E. (2008). *Relational coaching: Journeys towards mastering one-to-one learning*. Chichester: John Wiley and Sons Ltd.
- Dembkowski, S., Eldridge, F. & Hunter, I. (2006). *The seven steps of effective executive coaching*. London: Thorogood.
- European Mentoring and Coaching Council (2012). Downloaded 17 September 2012 from [http://www.emccouncil.org/uk/en/about\\_emcc\\_uk](http://www.emccouncil.org/uk/en/about_emcc_uk)
- Evans, J.St.B.T. (2008). Dual-processing accounts of reasoning, judgement and social cognition. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 59, 255–278.
- Evans, J.St.B.T. & Stanovich, K.E. (2013). Dual-process theories of higher cognition; Advancing the debate. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 8(3), 223–241.
- Glöckner, A. & Witteman, C. (2010). Beyond dual-process models: A categorisation of processes underlying intuitive judgement and decision making. *Thinking and Reasoning*, 16(1), 1–25.
- Heron, J. (1996). *Co-operative inquiry: Research into the human condition*. London: Sage Publications.
- Hodgkinson, G.P., Langan-Fox, J. & Sadler-Smith, E. (2008). Intuition: A fundamental bridging construct in the behavioural sciences. *British Journal of Psychology*, 99, 1–27.
- Hodgkinson, G.P., Sadler-Smith, E., Burke, L., Claxton, G. & Sparrow, P.R. (2009). Intuition in organisations: Implications for strategic management. *Long Range Planning*, 42, 277–297.
- International Coach Federation. Downloaded 26 November 2017 from: <https://www.coachfederation.org.uk/about-us/icf-core-competencies/>
- Kahneman, D. (2011). *Thinking, fast and slow*. London: Penguin Books Ltd.
- Kahneman, D. & Klein, G. (2009). Conditions for intuitive expertise: A failure to disagree. *American Psychologist*, September, 515–526.

- Kauffman, C. & Bachkirova, T. (2008). An international journal of theory, research and practice: Why does it matter? *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*, 1(1), 1–7.
- Kegan, R. (1994). *In over our heads: The mental demands of modern life*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Khatri, N. & Ng, H.A. (2002). *The role of intuition in strategic decision making*. Retrieved 6 February 2010 from: [http://www.ntu.edu.sg/nbs/sabre/working\\_papers/01-97.pdf](http://www.ntu.edu.sg/nbs/sabre/working_papers/01-97.pdf)
- King, L. & Appleton, J.V. (1997). Intuition: A critical review of the research and rhetoric. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 26, 194–202
- Klein, G. (2003). *Intuition at work*. New York: Currency Doubleday.
- Lazlo, E. (2009). In defence of intuition: Exploring the physical foundations of spontaneous apprehension. *Journal of Scientific Exploration*, 23(1), 51–58.
- McCutcheon, H.H.I. & Pincombe, J. (2001). Intuition: An important tool in the practice of nursing. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 35(3), 242–348.
- Mason, J. (2002). *Qualitative researching* (2nd edn.). London: Sage Publications.
- Mavor, P. (2009). *Intuition in coaching: preliminary findings of an exploratory study*. Paper in support of a presentation at the EMCC UK Conference on 7 April 2009. Downloaded from [www.lane4performance.com/Current-Research-Coaching-Intuition.html?page=1](http://www.lane4performance.com/Current-Research-Coaching-Intuition.html?page=1)
- Mavor, P., Sadler-Smith, E. & Smith, D.E. (2010). Teaching and learning intuition: Some implications for HRD and coaching practice. *Journal of European Industrial Training*, 34(8/9), 822–838.
- Maxwell, A. (2009). The co-created boundary: Negotiating the limits of coaching. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring, Special issue 3*, 82–94.
- Murray, E. (2004). Intuitive coaching – a summary. *Industrial and Commercial Training*, 36(5), 203–206.
- Phillips, K. (2006). *Intuition in coaching*. Handford, Cheshire: KPA.
- Reitz, M. (2009). Developing intuitive awareness. In D. Clutterbuck & D. Megginson (Eds.). *Further techniques for coaching and mentoring*. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Rogers, C. R. (1961). *On becoming a person: A therapist's view of psychotherapy*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Rogers, J. (2008). *Coaching skills: A handbook*. Bedford: Open University Press.
- Sadler-Smith, E. & Shefy, E. (2004). The intuitive executive: Understanding and applying 'gut feel' in decision making. *Academy of Management Executive*, 18(4), 76–91.
- St. Pierre, P. & Smith, M. (2014). Intuition in coaching: It's not magic. *Strategies: A Journal for Physical and Sports Educators*. 27(2), 37–42.
- Salas, E., Rosen, M.A. & DiazGranados, D. (2010). Expert-based intuition and decision making in organisations. *Journal of Management*, 36(4), 941–973.
- Skiffington, S. & Zeus, P. (2003). *Behavioural coaching: How to build sustainable personal and organisational strength*. Sydney: McGraw-Hill.
- Smith, A.J., Thurkettle, M.A. & de la Cruz, F.A. (2004). Use of intuition by nursing students: Instrument development and testing. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 47(6), 614–622.
- Soyez, A. & Dini, S. (2015). *Competency framework for the business coaching psychologist: A first stage of development*. British Psychological Society Special Group in Coaching Psychology conference. London.
- Starr, J. (2011). *The coaching manual: The definitive guide to the process, principles and skills of personal coaching* (3rd edn.). Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd.
- Stober, D. (2010). CPD for Coaches. In E. Cox, T. Bachkirova & D. Clutterbuck (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Coaching*, (pp.405-416). London: Sage Publications.
- Whitworth, L., Kimsey-House, K., Kimsey-House, H. & Sandahl, P. (2007). *Co-active coaching: New skills for coaching people towards success in work and life* (2nd edn.). Mountain View, CA: Davies-Black Publishing.
- Willig, C. (2008). *Introducing qualitative research in psychology: Adventures in theory and method* (2nd edn.). Maidenhead: Open University Press.

# Developing self-compassion in leadership development coaching: A practice model and case study analysis

Karol M. Wasylyshyn & Frank Masterpasqua

---

*Compassion, and especially self-compassion, are commonly understood as being antithetical to leadership and organisational success. In this article, a review of research from different scientific disciplines indicates that these positive affiliative emotions are as much a part of human survival and wellbeing, as are the need for personal safety and achievement. Counter-intuitively, this research indicates that allowing for self-compassion can influence increases in personal and organisational achievement. In the second part of the paper, a model of coaching is presented that can support the development of self-compassion, as well as organisation-wide compassion. We propose that experienced executive coaches can enhance business leaders' self-compassion in three phases. The first gauges and leverages the client's readiness for increasing self-compassion. In the second phase, noticing, feeling and responding to suffering are applied to the client's lived experiences. Finally, the executive coach uses four coaching dimensions to inform actions in client meetings that help to enhance self-compassion. In the final section of the paper indications for future research in the area of self-compassion as a leadership asset are provided.*

**T**HERE HAS BEEN a longstanding assumption, especially in modern Western cultures, that emotions are inherently maladaptive and dysfunctional and therefore need to be controlled by rational thought. This has been especially true for positive social emotions like empathy, love, and compassion; often viewed as signs of personal weakness in a world where survival of the fittest individual reigns. But modern biological and psychological sciences are shedding new light on these social emotions. We now understand compassion, for instance, as not only a universal moral and spiritual principle (Armstrong, 2011) but also as having deep roots in our evolution as a species. These recent findings from evolutionary theory, as well as from psychology and neuroscience, run counter to the commonly accepted notion that to be an effective leader one must first and foremost be self-critical. Instead, in this fresh scientific light we discount compassion for ourselves at our own peril and at the peril of the organisations we lead or serve. In this article, we make the case

for a leadership style that includes a striving toward self-compassionate as opposed to self-critical achievement. We describe how compassion and self-compassion can be integral to effective leadership coaching, and how being overly self-critical can lead to personal and organisational distress. We also describe a protocol whereby coaches can make the case for, and nurture, self-compassion in the leaders they serve.

## **Defining compassion**

While compassion is not easily distinguished from concepts like empathy, sympathy, altruism, kindness, etc., there is a growing consensus among researchers and practitioners that it can be defined as 'a sensitivity to suffering in self and others with a commitment to try to alleviate and prevent it' (Germer & Siegel, 2012; Gilbert & Choden, 2013, Gilbert, 2015) noted that this means that compassion consists of two dimensions, or what he termed 'psychologies'. The first psychology is a turning toward and engaging suffering, rather than denying or avoiding it. The sec-

ond is the acquisition and implementation of the wisdom and skills to alleviate and prevent suffering. In the remainder of this article we describe: (1) the role these two psychologies play in the flourishing of individuals and organisations; and (2) ways that compassion and self-compassion can be nurtured.

### **The evolutionary adaptive value of compassion**

Charles Darwin (1871) is often falsely associated with the notion that humans survived over millennia as a result of individuals' selfishness, and caring primarily for their own personal survival. But consider what he wrote about the importance of 'sympathy.'

*As man advances in civilization, and small tribes are united into larger communities, the simplest reason would tell each individual that he ought to extend his social instincts and sympathies to all the members of the same nation, though personally unknown to him. This point being once reached, there is only an artificial barrier to prevent his sympathies extending to the men of all nations and races... This virtue, one of the noblest with which man is endowed, seems to arise incidentally from our sympathies becoming more tender and more widely diffused, until they are extended to all sentient beings. As soon as this virtue is honoured and practised by some few men, it spreads through instruction and example to the young, and eventually becomes incorporated in public opinion (Darwin, 1871, pp.101–102).*

Recent research supports Darwin's emphasis on sympathy/compassion. In reviewing the results of compassion-related research, Goetz et al. (2010) described three ways by which human compassion/sympathy has been integral to our evolution as a species. The first adaptive value of compassion is rooted in the fact that, unlike other species, human infants require a prolonged period of caregiving to reach the age of reproduction and beyond. Parental caring and compassion for offspring not only increases the likelihood of their children's survival, it also increases the

probability of secure attachments which in turn allow for greater exploration and creativity (Bowlby, 2008). The second reason that evolution favours compassion is based on the finding that when selecting a mate, humans are biased toward partners who show sensitivity to others' needs, leading to greater likelihood of stronger, reliable intimate bonds (Reis, et al., 2004). The third evolutionary value of compassion stems from the enormous role played by affiliation and cooperation in human adaptive success. As individuals, humans are neither the largest, nor strongest, nor fastest among species. Combining these limitations with our extended helplessness in childhood means that we were and are especially vulnerable to predators. The adaptation that contributed most to human survival and flourishing was not individual prowess, but the ability to work closely together and cooperate as a group (Gintis, 2000). Given the critical importance of affiliation for human survival and thriving, the capacity for compassion led to stronger and more trustworthy and adaptive social networks, communities, and organisations.

### **Compassion competes with other emotion regulation systems**

Of course, humans have acquired other emotions that compete with or complement compassion. Gilbert (2014) described how brain science has led to the identification of three systems of emotion regulation that are more or less salient at any time. The first system focuses on feelings of threat and self-protection, and is the one in which humans spend an inordinate amount of time, even when the physical presence of threat is long gone. When the threat system is salient, we are in the sympathetic nervous system's fight or flight mode, which has obvious survival value when a threat is real, but which also can lead to downward spirals of worry, rumination and isolation (Garland, et al., 2010). The second system focuses on seeking achievement and greater resources. Through this system we take pleasure in acquiring food, money, careers, and sexual



partners. The third focus of emotion regulation is on affiliation, caring and compassion. When giving or receiving comfort and caring from others we feel safe, content, and connected. The origins of this system lay in our first relationships with adult attachment figures who are more or less sensitive and responsive (i.e. compassionate) to the hunger and pain of their infants and children.

The interplay among these three systems is vital. For example, attachment research documents the interaction between the soothing/affiliation system and the drive/resource seeking system. Children and adults who can feel safe in non-threatening situations are more likely to be curious, to explore, and to achieve (Bowlby, 2008). On the other hand, those of us who feel less able to feel soothed and connected (e.g. via self-compassion) are more likely to be in a state of threat/self-protection, and therefore less likely to explore and achieve.

### **Compassion is both psychological and physiological**

If compassion has evolutionary roots, then we would expect to see its physiological manifestations, and indeed recent research provides evidence for how feelings of compassion connect across several organ systems. Porges' (2001) polyvagal theory explains how feelings of affiliation and compassion are 'hard wired' into our bodies – as much as the feelings of threat or the need for personal achievement are 'hard wired'. Porges describes how the parasympathetic nervous system via the vagus nerve leads to feelings of soothing and connection when we are giving or receiving care and compassion. The vagus nerve innervates organs extending from the brain stem into the larynx, pharynx and palate before reaching the heart and digestive tract. When it is active, we are more likely to be in a state of soothing throughout the body, combined with a sense of affiliation and connection with others (Stellar et al., 2015).

Vagal activity counterbalances the feelings of threat and isolation induced by the threat-based sympathetic nervous system.

Depending on the circumstances, both sympathetic and parasympathetic activities are important for survival, and their relationship has much to do with how flexible and wise we can be when reacting with threat and/or caring in stressful situations. This sympathetic-parasympathetic balance is also reflected in how patterns of breathing and heart rate are linked together. When we inhale heart rates increase reflecting sympathetic arousal, while exhaling leads to decreased heart rate associated with parasympathetic activity. This heart rate variability (HRV) linked to breathing patterns is easily measured and has been found to be a reliable marker of feelings of compassion, as well as other measures of psychological and physical wellbeing (McCarty & Zayas, 2014). Moreover, training individuals to modulate breathing patterns leads to greater heart rate variability and enables increased feelings of caring and connection. Conversely, when individuals receive or express feelings of caring and compassion they increase heart rate variability (Lehrer & Gevirtz, 2014).

### **Why self-compassion?**

While compassion toward others is almost universally accepted as a noble and even spiritual endeavor, being compassionate to oneself is fraught with negative connotations, often understood as being self-indulgent or as leading to complacency and lack of productivity and achievement. But recent research reveals just the opposite: Higher self-compassion is related to an array of positive mental health and achievement-related outcomes. For example, Neff et al. (2007) found that self-compassion was significantly associated with higher levels of happiness, optimism, positive affect, wisdom, personal initiative, curiosity and exploration, agreeableness, extroversion, and conscientiousness. On the other hand, higher scores on self-compassion were associated with less negative affect. Moreover, these associations between self-compassion and positive mental health occurred irrespective of the personality characteristics of the participants.

How does self-compassion relate to achievement? Neff et al. (2005) found that 'self-compassion was positively related to mastery goals in learning contexts, suggesting that self-compassionate individuals may be better able to see failure as a learning opportunity and to focus on the accomplishing tasks at hand' (p.283). Based on their findings, the researchers reached a conclusion with important implications for leadership and coaching – 'individuals who lack self-compassion may try to enhance their self-image through demonstrating their superiority to others... or else to defend against the label of 'failure' by avoiding situations in which they may be perceived as incompetent' (p.283). In a third related study, Breines and Chen (2012) asked the question of whether treating oneself with compassion after making a mistake, rather than with criticism, would lead to an increase or decrease in motivation to improve. They could conclude: 'These findings suggest that, somewhat paradoxically, taking an accepting approach to personal failure may make people more motivated to improve themselves' (p.1133).

### **The cost of self-criticism**

More often than not, leaders are expected to set ambitious standards for themselves, and their organisations. Lofty standards that border on quests for perfection, can be either adaptive or maladaptive, depending in large part on whether they occur with self-criticism or self-compassion (Beheshifar et al., 2011; Dunkley et al., 2006). Individuals high in adaptive perfectionism hold high standards and aspirations, but with little self-criticism when they do not succeed. On the other hand, maladaptive perfectionism, also called self-critical perfectionism, includes the high standards of adaptive perfectionism but are also inextricably linked to high levels of self-criticism and even shame (Dunkley et al., 2003; Gilbert, 2015). Adaptive perfectionism has been found to be positively associated with measures of health and wellbeing (Beiling et al., 2004). Unlike adaptive perfectionism, self-critical perfection-

ism leads to considerable psychological burden, including a tendency to avoid problems and to work in isolation. One of the benefits of developing self-compassion among leaders is that it can nurture adaptive as opposed to self-critical/maladaptive perfectionism. The research suggests that leaders who maintain high standards and aspirations accompanied by self-compassion rather than self-criticism will be: (1) less likely to avoid or deny difficulties; (2) more likely to be creative and rational when confronting problems; and (3) more likely to engage others when resolving those problems.

### **The relationship between compassion to oneself and to others**

The research cited above indicates that compared to self-criticism, self-compassion influences a variety of positive outcomes for the individual. But how might self-compassion relate to one's compassion for others? Can I be compassionate to others without having compassion for myself? More specifically, presuming that leaders want to foster compassion throughout their organisations, is it possible to do so absent their own self-compassion? While there is yet to be a definitive answer to this question, the answer appears to be – no. Being consistently more self-critical versus self-compassionate is likely to extend to our view of our others' shortcomings, and the recent research corroborates this perspective.

Neff and Pommier (2013) studied hundreds of community members, undergraduates, and practicing meditators to determine the association between having compassion for oneself and concern for others. They were able to conclude: 'Among all participant groups, higher levels of self-compassion were significantly linked to more perspective taking, less personal distress, and greater forgiveness. Self-compassion was linked to compassion for humanity, empathetic concern, and altruism among community adults and meditators but not college undergraduates' (p.160).

Theory and research now lead to the conclusion that rather than being associated

with self-indulgence, incompetence, and lack of productivity, self-compassion may be an integral part in the development of the ability to achieve and to work effectively with others. In the remainder of this article, we focus on business executives and the extent to which they possess self-compassion, as well as the effects of leader self-compassion on their influencing compassionate workplace cultures. Further, we provide a preliminary model for coaching consultants working with clients who have identified increased self-compassion as a development objective.

### **Developing self-compassionate leaders – the challenge**

To what extent are senior business leaders self-compassionate? How able are they to notice, feel and respond to their own suffering? How able are they to *allow* themselves to be vulnerable? The short answer is ‘not very able.’ Based on over 30 years of coaching top executives, one of the authors concludes that self-compassion is rarely found among these leaders. Further, in her experience, most executives would dismiss self-compassion as a weak, soft, and/or irrational notion for leaders who are expected to be strong, resilient, and nimble enough to withstand all pressure as they strive for ongoing business success.

However, she has also found that in the presence of deeply trusting and long-standing coaching relationships, these executives are often helped to grapple with their most critical inner voices – cacophonous voices that not only fuel suffering and erode sleep – they can convert into angry, impatient, and blaming messages that cascade over their organisations as a de-motivating sleet. While these leaders probably would not cite increased *self-compassion* as a coaching outcome, this is, in fact, the resource that’s being evoked and joined with other executive strengths to include their experience and analytical capabilities. As such, self-compassion becomes another leadership asset for managing unduly harsh self-criticism, promoting business success, and influencing greater employee engagement.

Companies rated ‘best’ in Fortune magazine surveys indicate compassionate cultures, that is cultures that place high emphasis on caring for and the contentment of their employees, as a key factor in their success. Further, perennial ‘best’ companies like Google and software giant SAS (record earnings for 37 consecutive years) clearly link innovation with compassion providing a range of wellbeing support for their employees from gyms to on-site medical services (Tenney, n.d.). Former Starbucks CEO, Howard Schultz, supports its College Achievement Programme (CAP) making four-year college degrees possible for its employees. As indicated earlier in this paper, it would appear that leaders’ capacity for self-compassion is a likely pre-condition for their influencing compassionate work cultures that foster higher employee engagement (Neff & Pommier, 2013). While helping executives become more self-compassionate can be challenging, its value is established by consultants who themselves are compassionate, and who possess a combination of strong business knowledge and training in the behavioral sciences. This combination of coach compassion, experience, and training is essential for clearing the inevitable hurdles to making greater self-compassion a development priority with business leaders. Not the least of these hurdles are the leaders’ beliefs and habituated patterns of behavior. We can hear these beliefs and behavioral patterns in their own words – as written in ‘executive reflections’ on their respective executive coaching experiences (Wasylyshyn, 2014).

*I was known as someone who was tough as nails; I went for the jugular when I got into conflicts... I always had to win.*

*I have always been a very independent person; I have great pride in getting there on my own.*

*I considered talking to someone else about my work and challenges as an intrusion.*

*Being coached meant I had to allow myself to be vulnerable; being vulnerable and ‘uncovered’ were enormously challenging for me. I was too guarded to fully engage initially.*

*Being a perfectionist, I was unable to see that there were things I was doing well. I could brush off any praise and move to where I needed to improve.*

*To this day, no matter how hard I work, I cannot measure up to the work ethic of my immigrant parents*

Upon closer examination, a number of themes are revealed through these executive reflections (see Table 1). These themes can block or at least delay a senior leader’s willingness to even consider the value of self-compassion. In the end, it is through the nature of the leader’s relationship with his or her executive coach that the process of evoking self-compassion begins and is main-

tained. It is through the trust, chemistry, credibility – and intimacy – of this relationship that the harshest inner voices and suffering are finally expressed fully enough to be named, felt, challenged, and eased making way for self-compassion as a leadership strength. In the constancy and intimacy of this relationship, the executive coach makes a compassionate commitment to the client to be present, to notice, to feel, and to seek pragmatic and sustained ways for easing the client’s suffering. Wasylyshyn (2017a, p.24) wrote, ‘In the intimacy, safety, and long-term nature of these distinctive relationships, senior executives are guided, affirmed, constructively challenged, and comforted too as they meet business objectives in a world that has become increasingly uncertain.’

**Developing self-compassionate leaders – the challenge intensified**

In addition to the themes cited above, Stebbins and Cajina (2015) highlighted a deeply

**Table 1: Themes that interfere with business leaders’ capacity for self-compassion**

Fear of vulnerability – self-compassion equated with weakness, slacking off, and/or lack of necessary aggression to ‘win’ in the marketplace
Perpetuation of their ego ideals as tough-minded, strong and resilient leaders distinguished from their less talented peers
Conformity to established organisation leadership behaviour norms – norms that influence opportunities, promotions, and succession into C-level roles
Tendency toward compartmentalisation – behaving one way at work; revealing their fuller and/or warmer emotional selves only at home with family members and close friends
Fierce independence – leaders can experience coaching, mentoring, or any other guidance offered as intrusive, i.e. deeply held belief that they can always figure-it-out themselves
Tyranny of the shoulds (Horney, 1950) – I should know all the answers
Thick psychological defenses undergirding strongly habituated patterns of leadership behavior (e.g. intellectualisation, rationalisation, humour, repression, reaction formation, projection, and denial)
Relentlessness of business pressure especially short-term (quarter by quarter) financial results – the transcendent importance of shareholder value over people-centred orientation to leadership

held cultural belief that in Western corporations getting excellent results requires 'suffering'. For this reason, there are still business leaders who favor an authoritative command and control leadership style versus an empowering people-centered approach. Employees in these workplace cultures necessarily experience significant and steady degrees of stress and suffering. This is exacerbated by the fact that such leaders typically do not provide much acknowledgement of work well done, do not value forming affiliative relationships, and persist in blunt expectations that employees must continue achieving multiple and demanding objectives.

In short, these leaders are inured to their own suffering so they are unlikely to be attuned to or compassionate about the suffering of people reporting to them. They run companies in which the cultures are bleak, bland, and in which leaders miss the opportunity to leverage having emotional resonance with their employees. Germer (2017, p.5) stated many of these leaders '...dismiss self-compassion because they think it flies in the face of their ambition or hard-driving attitude... but being self-compassionate doesn't imply that you shouldn't be ambitious or push yourself to succeed. It's about *how* you motivate yourself; instead of doing it with blame and self-criticism, self-compassion motivates like a good coach – with encouragement, kindness, and support – are qualities they think have made them successful.'

We can be encouraged perhaps by what appears to be a different breed of leader emerging as members of the millennial generation assume positions of leadership. According to Grossman (2016), members of this generation will make up 44 per cent of the workforce by 2030. They value collaboration, diversity and inclusion, and expect to develop and advance quickly in their careers. They also want to work in cultures where they have access to senior leaders, feel supported and valued, and receive a steady flow of performance feedback that is both frank and motivational (Fromm, 2015).

We are watching this panoramic unfold-

ing in the workplace currently – especially in the high technology sector. Where it will lead and what its sustained effects might be are still unknown, however, we suggest that coaching consultants' specific focus on developing executives' self-compassion can be a timely tool in the managerial armamentarium of this next generation of leaders. In other words, the places we call work are at an historic inflection point that could indeed benefit from a new way of leading. That this new way of leading involves the evolution of both leaders' self-compassion and the *collective compassion* these leaders can influence in the organisations they lead.

### **Developing self-compassionate leaders – toward a model of practice**

As indicated above, we begin with the assumption that leaders will be better equipped to influence compassionate work cultures if they have developed their self-compassion. Hard-driving and strategic leaders can become even more effective as they identify their own suffering, accept those feelings, focus on ways to ease – versus deny – their suffering and related feelings, and then generalise this awareness into compassionate interactions with those working for them. This evolved state of leadership should strengthen their abilities to inspire, motivate, recruit and retain the talented employees they need to manage the demands of 21st century business dynamics.

As these leaders influence compassionate work cultures, they can also enrich organisational resilience. Frost (2003) and Worline et al. (2003) maintain that in organisations that encourage individual expressions of compassion – of collective noticing, feeling, and responding to the suffering of others – the emotional resources of employees are replenished and strengthened. Further, Gittell and Cameron (2003) and Worline et al. (2003) argue that given the inevitability of pain in organisational life, developing policies and practices that support organisational compassion will likely increase an organisation's capacity for resilience. Compassion-

ate policies and directives – as modelled by top leaders – would likely encourage their employees to notice the pain and suffering of others, to display their feelings regarding others' suffering, and when possible, to respond in ways intended to ameliorate such suffering.

We offer a preliminary model for executive coaches engaged with senior business leaders in the seemingly counter-intuitive agenda of developing their self-compassion. This model is informed by three systems of emotion as cited earlier in this paper (Gilbert, 2014). These systems or types of emotion regulation relate to personal needs for protection, achievement, and affiliation. In the business context, these needs affect leaders' behaviour as they: (1) respond to perceived threats such as negative comments from Board members or key other external stakeholders (protection); (2) strive to accelerate business results and/or personal career aspirations (achievement); and (3) develop critical business relationships (affiliation). We believe leaders who lack self-compassion, and who resist facing their suffering, can be emotionally hijacked by a dominant need to protect. Specifically, they can – albeit unconsciously – be sabotaging their most productive and timely achievement and affiliation efforts.

This model consists of three distinct phases depicted in Figure 1. Further, by maintaining frequent contact with the client's Human Resources partner and the boss – who in some cases may be the Chairman of the Board – the coach receives a flow of collateral information that both informs the work and indicates the progress of such engagements (Wasylyshyn, 2017b).

### **Phase 1: Gauging the right timing**

The executive coach carefully gauges an executive's readiness for increasing self-compassion as a development goal. We suggest this has rarely been a leadership development objective when first working with a leader; it's too soft, touchy-feely, and remote from an established leader's ego ideal of high impact leadership. However, an executive is more likely to be engaged in

the serious exploration of self-compassion as a leadership asset *after* a successful coaching engagement has been completed – an engagement in which strong chemistry, trust, and mutual respect have been established. Further, when the initial engagement is extended – at the invitation of the executive – this can be the moment of client readiness for exploring self-compassion as a tool for greater leadership effectiveness.

In other words, a firm foundation is in place and a special rapport – a rapport that has evolved into an uncommon and trusting intimacy – has been established with the client. It is the constancy and intensity of this leader-coach partnership that most influence the likelihood of the client delving into the fundamental but oft resisted topic of self-compassion. Regarding such ongoing work with senior leaders Wasylyshyn notes, 'While some may argue that long-term relationships of this nature foster dependency, my experience underscores something quite different. Specifically the enduring trust, mutual respect, and committed presence of an objective outsider who, in my case, has a dual background in business and clinical training in psychology, provides the executive with an additional and distinctive resource for leading effectively' (Wasylyshyn, 2015, p.215).

### **Phase 2: Adapting the three elements of compassion**

The second phase of developing an executive's self-compassion involves adapting what Kanov et al. (2004) refer to as the three elements of compassion: (1) noticing another's suffering, (2) feeling another's pain, and (3) responding to another's suffering in ways that will help ease and/or eliminate it. The executive coach adapts this trio of compassion elements as a tool for evoking the client's self-compassion. Specifically, clients are helped to: (1) notice – and name – their own sources of suffering as related to the relentless demands of work; (2) feel – not push away or deny – their suffering; and (3) respond to the suffering by identifying specific ways to address it effectively. In this sense, the execu-

tive coach helps clients make a fundamental psychological shift away from rejecting the importance of self-compassion to *turning into their suffering* by confronting it, and then discovering ways to deal with its adverse effects.

### Phase 3: Integrating three compassion elements with four specific coaching dimensions

The third phase in helping leaders develop their self-compassion involves putting into action the trio of compassion elements that have been adapted to achieve this objective. The executive coach integrates the client's noticing, feeling and responding compassion elements with specific coaching actions. We suggest the use of four coaching dimensions – echo, anchor, mirror, and spark – as a roadmap for guiding

the coach's actions in client meetings. This roadmap is intended to simultaneously: (1) help clients intensify their use of the three compassion elements; and (2) counter the leadership habits and behaviours (see Figure 1) that may linger as a source of resistance to their becoming more self-compassionate.

In the course of client meetings, any one or more of these dimensions can be employed to deepen the coach's compassionate resonance with the client – thus reinforcing the ultimate goal of increasing the client's ability to be self-compassionate. The language, as well as the compassion of the executive coach, is key.

### Echo dimension

For example, when in *echo* mode, the executive coach repeats statements that help clients to *notice* their suffering: (*Let's look at*

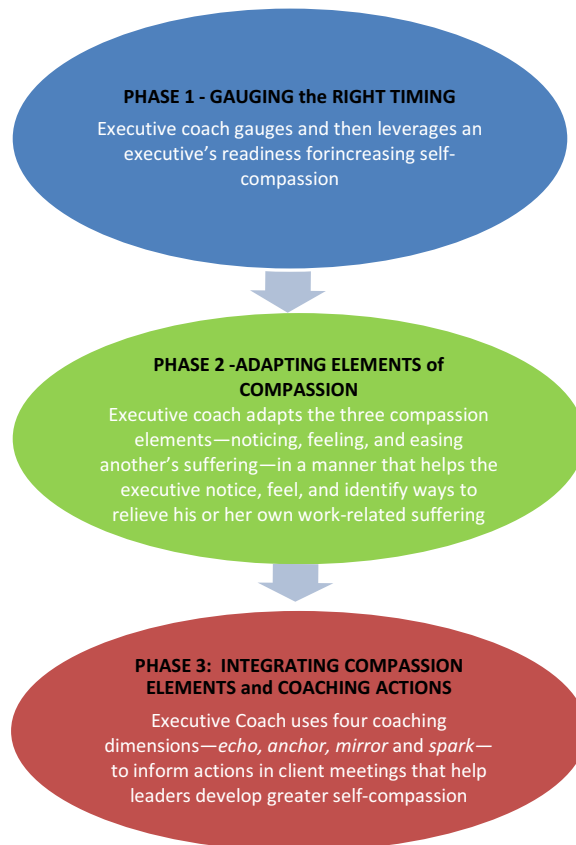


Figure 1: Practice model for helping business leaders develop self-compassion

*what's really going on right now – do you notice how you're beating yourself up about the last two disappointing quarters? Let's discuss how you can avoid your habit of suffering in silence/suffering in silence/suffering in silence especially before Board meetings when the business isn't doing well).* Clients can also be reminded that their feelings of vulnerability are inevitable, normal, and commonplace among their peers in other companies. Further, by normalising these feelings of vulnerability, leaders can relax, become more comfortable with them, and elicit supportive reactions from others in the organisation.

### **Anchor dimension**

When in *anchor* mode, the executive coach reminds the client of lessons or insights gained (in previous coaching) about the positive effects of their being more self-compassionate versus remaining unduly harsh and self-critical. (*I'm hearing your harsh inner critic coming through again loud and strong – can you hear and feel this? Can you remember how much sleep you lost in the past when you tried to push your fears into the background versus talking them through with the people you trust the most?)* Emphasis is often placed on the value of clients shifting from fierce, independent, and competitive behaviour to the use of greater collaborative instincts – and the benefits of this for both themselves and others in the organisation. (*One of your most important insights in the coaching was how your 'warrior thing' made you think you needed to have all the answers and that this is what your leadership team expects of you. You've assembled one of the strongest teams in the industry and what they really expect from you is collaboration and team-based leadership. Let's stay focused on your taking that heavy monkey off your back and instead leveraging the wisdom and experience of your leadership team members.)*

### **Mirror dimension**

When in *mirror* mode, the executive coach helps clients not only experience timely *noticing* of their suffering but also having a greater gentleness with the self that can: (1) minimise their defenses against the suffering (e.g. intellectualisation, rationalisa-

tion, repression, denial, etc.); and (2) place current events into better perspective for good decision-making and/or meaningful interactions with others in the organisation. (*Let's look in the mirror at how you're reacting in the wake of that tough exchange with your Board Chair. Do you see how you're ruminating about how you handled that? How your fear of losing the Board's confidence is taking over now? I see you going back into your bunker mentality when it'll be a lot more helpful for you to reach out and set time to discuss issues with the Board Chair privately so you can clear whatever gaps there may be in your respective expectations.)*

### **Spark dimension**

When in *spark* mode, the executive coach remains alert for making proactive suggestions that would help the executive ease and/or eliminate the current source of suffering. These suggestions could involve a range of issues including staff changes, strategic adjustments, and more direct interaction with leadership team members. (*The President of that business unit has missed the last two quarters and is not giving you reason to feel confident about the rest of the year. As we've discussed before, it may be time to rotate him into another role and give one of your top high potential employees the chance to run something.)* Further, when in this mode, there are often opportunities to discuss the confluence of work and family issues especially for leaders who are struggling with the work-family integration issue. (*We know there's no way your travel's going to get any less intense this year but you could be more intentional about discussing it with your wife so she's less surprised about where you have to be when. You could also make more effort to be fully present when you are home. Zero tolerance for emails at the dinner table would be a good first step.)*

### **Using self-compassion as a coaching resource: Case study**

Invariably, the coaching of senior business leaders in global entities involves a complex inter-play of many factors. In this case these factors included: (1) a culture that historically did not have or seek diversity in its senior lev-



els of leadership; (2) a successful and aspirant female executive; and (3) a highly judgmental male boss. Using self-compassion as a coaching tool was key in the work with this client, a high potential leader in a \$40 billion global manufacturing company. Kathryn, the coachee (client), had been employed by the company for over a decade and was running a business unit of over 1000 employees working in numerous facilities around the world. Further, she possessed an impressive pedigree of education and experience (MIT undergrad, Harvard MBA, consulting at Booz-Allen, as well as many successes in this company).

Executive coaching was recommended to her by the head of Human Resources (sponsor) who recognised that Kathryn, an Asian American, was struggling in the relationship with her new boss, a Frenchman. He was described by the HR executive as 'terse, remote and austere in his interactions with others'. Like his predominantly French peers in what the Human Resources leader described as a 'seriously male-dominated' culture, he placed little emphasis on leadership development, and she believed it would be difficult to engage him fully into the coaching work (and this proved to be true). The coach also learned that the client's career progress depended not only on her forming a stronger working relationship with this boss, she was expected to resolve long-standing business issues – issues that two male peers before her had failed to resolve but whose careers prospered anyway. From a personal perspective, this client's inner tension was heightened by an unrelenting drive to excel exacerbated by her mother's expectations for her daughter's perfection and significant career status. Finally, the client was married to a lawyer who maintained a solo practice and so she was the primary wage earner in a family that included two adolescent girls.

When the coach asked Kathryn *why coaching now*, she mentioned the relationship with her boss but in another poignant moment she added, 'To be successful in this company requires me to behave in ways that are different from who I actually am.' As the coach-

ing unfolded – and with the help of the HR leader who was truthful about the nature of the culture – Kathryn came to question whether she could adjust to the company's culture and opened herself to an existential question about what would make her happier in her work.

As the coach helped Kathryn recognise her habituated pattern of pleasing authority figures (e.g. parents and bosses) and how this blocked her ability to be her 'real self' – the magnitude of her suffering surfaced and the coaching intensified. Using self-compassion as a coaching tool, the coach helped Kathryn to: (1) notice her suffering; (2) recognise the emotions related to her suffering; and (3) identify actions that would help minimise the suffering. In short, Kathryn faced her suffering for the first time and even named the underlying insight about it, her 'duality within'. This captured Kathryn's struggle to meet her mother's expectations and to provide financial security for her family on the one hand, and pursuing her career aspirations/being her true self on the other.

Once the relationship had been cemented with Kathryn, the coach introduced self-compassion as a tool for further leveraging the client's 'duality within' insight. During this one-year engagement, the coach prompted Kathryn to *notice her suffering* in all its complexity. This included her mother's expectations, the rejecting behavior of her boss, and the nature of the company culture – represented by a senior executive hierarchy that did not, for example, permit Kathryn to present her business strategy to the CEO's leadership team because in the words of her boss, 'Your French is not good enough'.

Once Kathryn could acknowledge the emotions in her suffering – namely fear and anxiety – she was able to examine the irrationality of her fears and to neutralise her anxiety with the realisation that there were other viable career options she could pursue. Further, with her increased internal locus of control, she began to identify actions related to her exploring opportunities in companies

that were a better fit for her from an organisation culture perspective. The coach was able to integrate key compassion elements with explicit coaching actions. She: (1) repeated (echoed) key factors about Kathryn's boss and the culture; (2) reminded (anchored) Kathryn of the 'duality within' insight; (3) held up a mirror when Kathryn began to vacillate between how she needed to please versus proactive planning of her career; and (4) sparked Kathryn's thinking about alternative career directions. In a breakthrough moment toward the end of her coaching Kathryn said, 'I know that staying here would be weak and wrong for me but I do it because it's the safe thing. Maybe it's all more financial than I realised.'

Coaching came at a pivotal time in this client's life. Her ability to use self-compassion as a vehicle for leveraging an insight about her *duality within* influenced deepened self-awareness that informed career decision-making – and heightened her personal contentment. Within months of the coaching's end, she left this company and assumed the Presidency of a major business unit in another global company. While the outcome of this coaching engagement was not what either the company or participating executive expected, it influenced a positive outcome for both. When Kathryn resigned, the HR head called the coach saying, 'She's really gifted and was blocked here – she needed to get on with her career.'

### Implications for theory and research

As we have seen, the literature on the role of self-compassion in coaching is in its earliest stages, and has thus yet to include research testing theoretical proposals about how or why it might cause changes. Hypothetically, the testable effects of coaching self-compassion are wide-ranging: from physiological and psychological changes in executives, to changes in the psychosocial climate and productivity of their organisations. (Boyatzis et al., 2013; Dutton et al., 2014).

One important early design would focus on determining the work-related, psycho-

logical impact on coachees of a proposed self-compassion intervention such as the one we proposed earlier. In this study, coaches would work with randomly selected executives from either the self-compassion model or from another common coaching perspective. Coachees would be pre-tested on a physiological measure of flexibility (heart rate variability) and a standardised measure of self-compassion (Neff et al., 2005). Following a predetermined number of sessions groups will be post-tested and compared on these measures.

Subsequent research would focus on effects on work-related changes, both in the executives themselves as well as in their organisations, attributable to self-compassion coaching. Moreover, research would focus on whether any positive effects are mediated by changes in the executives' self-compassion, as well as on variables (e.g. gender, age, etc.) that might serve to moderate the influence of such an intervention.

### Conclusion

We have reviewed research that points to the critical role that compassion played in the evolution of our species, and the role that it continues to play in the optimal development of individuals. Moreover, contrary to commonly accepted assumptions, empirical findings indicate that leaders with high standards combined with self-compassion, as opposed to self-criticism, are more likely to explore new options, learn from their mistakes, be open to working collaboratively with others, and influence compassionate workplace cultures.

We believe that executive coaches who help senior executive clients develop self-compassion will provide these business leaders with another – albeit unexpected – leadership asset. They will remind business leaders of their common humanity and thus relieve them of their inner shame and emotional tension when things go badly. While this work is demanding and can be highly nuanced, we have provided a preliminary practice model and case study that experienced practitioners may use to guide progress

in such engagements. This model is based on three phases: (1) *timing* – gauging the readiness of leaders to focus on self-compassion as a development goal; (2) *adapting* the elements of compassion (noticing, feeling, and striving to ease another's suffering) to the executive's experience of suffering; and (3) *integrating* these adapted compassion elements with four practice dimensions (echo, anchor, mirror and spark) to inform specific actions in client meetings.

Further, as these senior leaders learn to notice, feel and respond to their own suffering, this holds potential for their being compassionate towards others and for influ-

encing compassionate workplace cultures. Through this new way of leading – this fostering of *collective compassion* – organisations, their leaders, and their employees are *allowed* to simultaneously suffer and grow. Based on theory, research, and our own practice experiences, we suggest that self-compassion and organisational collective compassion may be integral forces for both individual and organisation development.

### Correspondence

**Karol M. Wasylshyn**, Leadership Development, 431 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, PA 19106; email [kwasylyshyn@erols.com](mailto:kwasylyshyn@erols.com)

### References

- Allen, D. (8 June 2017). *Revive the spirit and vision of the Marshall plan*. Philadelphia Inquirer, A17.
- Armstrong, K. (2011). *Twelve steps to a compassionate life*. New York: Random House.
- Beauchaine, T.P. (2015). Respiratory sinus arrhythmia: A transdiagnostic biomarker of emotion dysregulation and psychopathology. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 3, 43–47.
- Beheshtifar, M., Mazrae-Sefidi, F. & Nekoie Moghadam, M. (2011). Role of perfectionism at workplace. *European Journal of Economics, Finance and Administrative Sciences*, 38, 167–173.
- Bieling, P.J., Israeli, A.L. & Antony, M.M. (2004). Is perfectionism good, bad, or both? Examining models of the perfectionism construct. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 36(6), 1373–1385.
- Bowlby, J. (2008). *A secure base: Parent-child attachment and healthy human development*. New York: Basic Books.
- Boyatzis, R.E., Smith, M.L. & Beveridge, A.J. (2013). Coaching with compassion: Inspiring health, well-being, and development in organizations. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 49(2), 153–178.
- Breines, J.G. & Chen, S. (2012). Self-compassion increases self-improvement motivation. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 38(9), 1133–1143.
- Darwin, C. (1871). *The descent of man, and selection in relation to sex*. London: John Murray.
- Dunkley, D.M., Zuroff, D.C. & Blankstein, K.R. (2003). Self-critical perfectionism and daily affect: Dispositional and situational influences on stress and coping. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84(1), 234–252.
- Dunkley, D.M., Blankstein, K.R., Zuroff, D.C., Lecce, S. & Hui, D. (2006). Self-critical and personal standards factors of perfectionism located within the five-factor model of personality. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 40(3), 409–420.
- Dutton, J.E., Workman, K.M. & Hardin, A.E. (2014). Compassion at Work. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 1(1), 277–304.
- Fromm, J. (6 November 2015). *Millennials in the workplace: They don't need trophies but they want reinforcement* [Blog post]. Retrieved from 11 June 2017] <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jefffromm/2015/11/06/millennials-in-the-workplace-they-dont-need-trophies-but-they-want-reinforcement/#313338a353f6>
- Frost, P.J. (2003). *Toxic emotions at work: How compassionate managers handle pain and conflict*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Garland, E.L., Fredrickson, B., Kring, A.M., Johnson, D.P., Meyer, P.S. & Penn, D.L. (2010). Upward spirals of positive emotions counter downward spirals of negativity: Insights from the broaden-and-build theory and affective neuroscience on the treatment of emotion dysfunctions and deficits in psychopathology. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 30(7), 849–864.
- Germer, C. (2017). *To recover from failure, try some self-compassion*. Retrieved 6 June 2017 from HBR.

- org, <https://hbr.org/2017/01/to-recover-from-failure-try-some-self-compassion>.
- Gilbert, P. & Choden. (2013). *Mindful compassion*. London, UK: Constable-Robinson
- Gilbert, P. (2014). The origins and nature of compassion focused therapy. *British Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 53, 6–41.
- Gilbert, P. (2015). The evolution and social dynamics of compassion. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 9(6), 239–254.
- Gintis, H. (2000). Strong reciprocity and human sociality. *Journal of Theoretical Biology*, 206, 169–179.
- Gittell, J.H. & Cameron, K.S. (2003). *Virtuous leadership, relationship and resilience: The role of relational and financial reserves in responding to crisis*. Unpublished manuscript, Brandeis University.
- Goetz, J.L., Keltner, D. & Simon-Thomas, E. (2010). Compassion: An evolutionary analysis and empirical review. *Psychological Bulletin*, 136(3), 351–374.
- Grossman, C. (20 January 2016). *What we learned about employee engagement in 2016* [Blog post]. Retrieved 11 June 2017 from <https://blog.beekeeper.io/what-we-learned-about-employee-engagement-in-2016/>
- Herrmann, E., Call, J., Hernández-Lloreda, M.V., Hare, B. & Tomasello, M. (2007). Humans have evolved specialized skills of social cognition: The cultural intelligence hypothesis. *Science*, 317(5843), 1360–1366.
- Horney, K. (1950). *Neurosis and human growth*. New York: Norton.
- Kanov, J., Maitlis, S., Worline, M.C., Dutton, J.E., Frost, P.J. & Lilius, J. (2004). Compassion in organizational life. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 47(6), 808–827.
- Lehrer, P.M. & Gevartz, R. (2014). Heart rate variability biofeedback: How and why does it work? *Frontiers in Psychology*, 5, 756.
- McCraty, R. & Zayas, M.A. (2014). Cardiac coherence, self-regulation, autonomic stability, and psychosocial well-being. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 5, 1090.
- Neff, K.D., Hsieh, Y.P. & Dejitterat, K. (2005). Self-compassion, achievement goals, and coping with academic failure. *Self and Identity*, 4(3), 263–287.
- Neff, K.D. & Pommier, E. (2013). The relationship between self-compassion and other-focused concern among college undergraduates, community adults, and practicing meditators. *Self and Identity*, 12(2), 1–17.
- Porges, S.W. (2001). The polyvagal theory: Phylogenetic substrates of a social nervous system. *International Journal of Psychophysiology*, 42(2), 123–146.
- Reis, H., Clark, M.S. & Holmes, J. (2004). Perceived partner responsiveness as an organizing construct in the study of intimacy and closeness. In D. Mashek & A. Aron (Eds.), *The handbook of closeness and intimacy* (pp.201–225). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Stebbins, G. & Cajina, M. (2017). *Self-compassion – The doorway to wise leadership* [Blog post]. Retrieved 30 May 2017 from [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/gregory-stebbins/selfcompassion-the-doorwa\\_b\\_7074552.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/gregory-stebbins/selfcompassion-the-doorwa_b_7074552.html)
- Stellar, J.E., Cohen, A., Oveis, C. & Keltner, D. (2015). Affective and physiological responses to the suffering of others: Compassion and vagal activity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 108(4), 572–585.
- Stoltz, K. & Ashby, J.S. (2007). Perfectionism and lifestyle: Personality differences among adaptive perfectionists, maladaptive perfectionists, and nonperfectionists. *Journal of Individual Psychology*, 63(4), 414–423.
- Tenney, M. (n.d.). *Linking innovation with compassion* [Blog post]. Retrieved 11 June 2017 from <https://real-leaders.com/linking-innovation-with-compassion/>
- Wasylshyn, K.M. (2014). *Destined to lead: Executive coaching and lessons for leadership development*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Wasylshyn, K.M. (2015). The trusted leadership advisor: Another view from the bridge between business and psychology. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 67, 279–297.
- Wasylshyn, K.M. (March 2017a). From here to certainty: Becoming CEO and how a trusted leadership advisor (TLA) helped the client get there. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 69, 1–25.
- Wasylshyn, K.M., (2017b). The essential partnership between human resources professionals and executive coaches: Enriching executive development. In L.A. Berger & D.R. Berger (Eds.). *The talent management handbook* (3rd edn.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Worline, M.C., Dutton, J.E., Frost, P.J., Kanov, J.M., Jilius, J.M. & Maitlis, S. (2003). *Creating fertile soil: The organizing dynamics of resilience*. Unpublished manuscript, University of Michigan.

# Reciprocal peer coaching: A constructivist methodology for enhancing formative assessment strategy in tertiary education

Lisa Matthewman, Jenni Nowlan & Katriina Hyvönen

---

*Reciprocal peer coaching (RPC) as a form of peer-assisted learning has an important part to play in formative assessment strategy. The primary objective of this article is to evaluate the effective use of RPC as a formative assessment strategy. A multi-method phenomenological research design was employed using purposive sampling. Seventy students completed a qualitative focused questionnaire survey asking them to reflect on their experiences of reciprocal peer-coaching relationships. Content analysis of student perceptions resulted in the emergence of key themes including; RPC relationship process, the learning process and cognitive skills development. Powerful learning gains were reported by participants, and were characteristic of a successful RPC relationships. Overall the RPC relationship can greatly enhance deep level learning and aid the transfer of theory into practice to inform academic debate on the use of constructivist methodology for enhancing the use of formative assessment strategy within undergraduate business education.*

**Keywords:** *Reciprocal peer coaching; peer-assisted learning, formative assessment, self-efficacy; personal development.*

**P**EEER-ASSISTED LEARNING (PAL) covers a range of collaborative and cooperative educational strategies that include learning and teaching of knowledge, understanding, and skills among active equal partners (Topping & Ehly, 2001). The learning and teaching strategies are self-directed through shared interventions, discussions and feedback in dyads or small groups of peers who have equivalent or different academic or experience levels. PAL encompasses different methods including peer teaching, peer modelling, peer coaching, peer assessment, and peer leadership (Topping & Ehly, 2001). When PAL methods are implemented appropriately, there are a number of benefits. PAL methods are shown to promote achievement, social interaction, transfer of skills and emotional gains such as reduced student stress (Topping & Ehly 2001; Topping, 1996). In addition to the cost-effectiveness of the PAL methods, they are also flexible, adaptable, and widely applicable to different educational settings (Topping & Ehly, 2001).

One type of a peer-assisted learning strategy is reciprocal peer coaching. A number of terms can be used to describe coaching in educational settings. These include technical coaching, collegial coaching, challenge coaching, team coaching, cognitive coaching and peer coaching (Ladyshevsy, 2006). All forms of coaching share similar skill sets in the form of listening skills, the use of open questions to encourage personal reflection and providing feedback. Peer coaching (PC) is a term often used in teaching and learning. Definitions can be traced back to Ackland (1991) who defines peer coaching as a learning process involving peers observing one another and providing feedback, support, and a sounding board. Wynn and Kromrey (1999) define PC as peer observation, constructive assistance and enhancing the application of skills, resulting in alternative solution generation.

Peer coaching lends itself to a much deeper conversation (Damon & Phelps, 1989) and is highly influenced by the psychosocial aspects of the relationship (Ack-

land, 1991). Additional attributes of PC have been noted by Zeus and Skiffington (2004) who advocate the importance of listening, questioning and summarising. Increases in performance have been linked to practice and feedback according to Ackland (1991). Enhanced performance through practice and feedback can be viewed in terms of cognitive developmental theory. Vygotsky's theories highlight the key role of social interaction in the development of cognition. Vygotsky believed that community plays a central role in the process of 'making meaning' from our experience of the world around us. 'Learning is a necessary and universal aspect of the process of developing culturally organised, specifically human psychological function' (Vygotsky, 1978, p.90). The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is the distance between a student's ability to perform a task under adult guidance and/or with peer collaboration and the student's ability solving the problem independently. Vygotsky's work is fundamental to all later works on learning theory and remains a good starting point for debate.

PC can also be used to enhance the depth of learning in managerial education to increase greater cognitive gains. Novices can be encouraged to work together under the guidance of a tutor, through social interaction and yield benefits for training and workplace environments (Ladyshevsky, 2006).

The relationship is built upon rapport, trust and confidentiality and facilitated by extensive training on coaching skills (open questioning and active listening), contracting and reflective journal keeping in addition to experiential learning (Kolb, 1984). Equality and mutual self-disclosure are of paramount importance during the planning, and goal setting stages of the relationship. Inherent in this process are monitoring and evaluation of the relationship. The partnership can be reciprocal with each party alternating between roles of coach and coachee.

Ladyshevsky and Ryan (2002) developed a peer coaching framework, useful for understanding how the relationship develops over time. Further to this, Matthewman

(2008) presented a phase-function model of mentoring. In this model, the beginning of the relationship is characterised by selection, establishing commitment, building rapport and goals setting. The middle phase involves working together and problem resolution with finally the last phase of the relationship focused upon action planning, evaluation, relationship refinement and moving forward. Matthewman (2008) adds to the eight-stage peer coaching model by highlighting the important functions of each phase. The coach or mentor starts by listening, this is followed by questioning and challenging of the client and finally feeds back, as each party focuses on action planning. Peer coaching is often brief in nature, fairly formal in style, focused on skill development, and meetings occur on a regular basis. Equality drives the relationship and focus is on specific goal achievement. Feedback giving is non-evaluative and helps the client to reflect deeply on their experiences, which is part of the experiential learning process (Ladyshevsky, 2006).

Learners are able to reconstruct their learning; constructivist learning is enhanced by using experiential learning methods such as peer coaching (Boud, 1986) as reported by Ladyshevsky (2006). Learners also construct their own experience and are influenced by affective, cognitive and socio cultural factors. Such situational learning as described by Boud (1986) allows concepts to emerge through negotiations into a more in depth form. Peer coaching can thus be described as a valuable experiential learning activity, that when used in conjunction with reflective learning logs can be useful for stimulating conversations between peers, allowing for participant interaction and feedback on practice.

Kolb (1984) details experiential learning as comprising of different stages. The first stage consists of concrete experience, followed by a second stage of reflection on practice. The third stage consists of learning consolidation which leads to new outcomes of learning in the fourth stage. Reflective learning logs closely aligns with this cycle. Learn-

ing logs, in association with reflective logs, can thus extend single loop learning into double and triple loop learning processes (Ladyshewsky, 2006). However, this in-depth learning process can only be successful if the relationships are built on core conditions of trust and respect (Zeus & Skiffington, 2004). Since peers are at an equal level, the conversations are not threatening and the peers can be more open and honest in conversation. As Ladyshewsky (2006) notes, peers may also learn from one another because they provide a much greater volume of information that is generally more immediate than that which comes from an instructor (p.71).

Reciprocal peer coaching (RPC) is another term often used in the literature, it can be regarded as a form of peer assisted learning that can encourage individual students to coach each other in turn so that the outcome of the process is a more rounded understanding and skilful execution of the task (Asghar, 2010). Novices are encouraged to work with each other in conjunction with the support and guidance of a tutor (Ladyshewsky, 2004). Each student has a vested interest in their own learning, alongside the learning of other group members. In order to meet individual goals, they work with each other in a collaborative and co-operative manner.

Ladyshewsky and Ryan's (2002) study of postgraduate leadership and management students found gains in student cognitive skills made through RPC. Similarly, in 2006, RPC was found to enhance the depth of learning in managerial education. Work by Asghar in 2010, reported increases in motivational learning and increased levels of group level learning. RPC has an important part to play in formative assessment strategy as it offers the necessary scaffolding for student to work interdependently on goal achievement and feedback giving

### **Formative assessment**

Assessment is an integral component of teaching and learning and promotes the achievement of learning outcomes, offers opportunities for new learning to take place

through the feedback delivered and aids overall bench marking in relation to grading and classification. Assessment can be both formative (assessment that provides feedback to students on their learning progress and actions they can take to improve their learning) and summative (assessment used to sum up a person's achievement),

Shepherd (2000) notes the historical development of assessment processes within the context of changing educational viewpoints. Asghar (2010) cites Pryor and Crossouard (2008), and Shepherd (2000) by highlighting the importance of setting contemporary assessment within a socio-constructivist perspective thus promoting the integration of assessment as a means of facilitating a learning culture. Differing views of assessment exist, assessment can be regarded as purposive (Shepherd, 2000), student-focused (Boud, 2000) and recognise societal dimensions of learning (Pryor & Crossouard, 2008). There is growing understanding that formative assessment has great potential to provide not just feedback to enable students to make improvements and progress, but can motivate students to self-regulate their learning, affect student's self-efficacy, assist them in gaining meta cognitive skills and to develop autonomous and life-long learners

However, Bloxham and Boyd (2007) provide three conflicting purposes of assessment, these include: assessment of learning, meaning the assessment of learning outcomes; assessment for learning, meaning that the process of assessment indicates the extent of learning that has taken place and assessment as learning, meaning that during the assessment process, learning takes place, feedback is received and new learning takes place

For assessment to be effective, it needs to include motivation for learning, fairness, equity, long lasting learning and feedback processes. Formative assessment is also recognised as having value through the use of students as peer assessors (Bloxham & Boyd, 2007). Therefore, learning to learn through formative assessment permits students to

focus attention on reflection and make these learning experiences their own by developing new internalised understanding in relation to their own experience.

### **Reciprocal peer coaching as a formative assessment strategy**

In workplace settings, coach and mentoring practitioners need to be able to undertake deep reflection regarding client work and complete complex solving cognitive thinking tasks. Formative assessment can be used to measure students' achievement and at the same time it can be employed to aid and assist students in their individual learning journey.

Formative assessment is useful for providing opportunities for students to act as peer assessors (Bloxham & Boyd, 2007). Formative assessment is also recognised as having value as students are able to act as peer assessors (Race, Brown & Smith, 2005). Peer coaching is a dialogic process that can assist students to re-organise learning and meaning as a result of their interactions with each other. The process or RPC as discussed in this research study is focused upon the dialogic process of mutual feedback as opposed to requiring students to formatively or summatively grade each other. Providing feedback with the formative intention of identifying collaboratively how well each member is progressing towards their individual development goals was a key focus (Liu & Carless, 2006, as cited in Asghar, 2010). The formative assessment process in this study was characterised by the use of real world/real time coaching sessions and documentation that elicited reflection and the completion of reflective skills logs. Students were able to practice coaching and mentoring in partnerships. Through peer feedback each student was able to carry out coaching, receive feedback and further enhance their coaching competence. Tutor feedback was provided in class and formally included at the mid module formative assessment point. The formative learning is fed forward to the portfolio at the end of the module, when each student is summatively assessed individually. The summative portfolio of competence includes

all previous session documentation, reflective logs and client work scenarios.

There has been growing interest in the potential of formative assessment as its benefits become better known (Cross & O'Loughlin, 2013). However, as the Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshal and Wiliam (2003) comment, there is still a need for further research on how formative assessment processes might work within oral and dialogue-based settings. How the potential of formative assessment might be realised within the context of higher education is therefore complex (Cross & O'Loughlin, 2013).

### **Research context**

A review of the curriculum and revalidation of the undergraduate programme in 2009 provided an excellent opportunity to embrace alternative and contemporary methods of assessment, learning and teaching. In 2012, a coaching psychology module was introduced as an optional module for final year business studies degree students. Although providing a strong academic component, the module was primarily skills-based and driven by the GROW model (Whitmore, 1992).

Students spent two-thirds of the module in seminars/workshops where they carried out practical skills-based development and one-third in lectures. A reflective case study and portfolio assessment diet was introduced which permitted students to record their personal reflections and competency development with regards to the practical skills taught on the module. The module comprises of a total of 200 hours of student learning and teaching time, including 48 hours of contact time and 152 hours of structured independent learning activity. Students spend 48 hours of the module in seminars/workshops where they carry out practical skills-based formative assessment development tasks, including real time reciprocal peer coaching and 152 hours on independent learning including 12 hours, specifically spent on reciprocal peer coaching. The module is delivered intensively over a 12-week period.

The students are from mixed cultural and linguistic backgrounds with high levels of lit-



eracy and education in their first language. The students choose to take this module and so their motivation to learn is deemed to be of a considerable high level by their seminar tutors. This form of independent learning is supported by online tools and resources, physical learning space, skill development exercises, practical demonstrations, guest speakers and tutor support and feedback. Tutors engage with peer partnerships on a weekly basis to ascertain how the relationship is progressing, what stage the relationship has reached, how goals are being achieved and what the important learning outcomes have been. In addition, one-to-one supervision and group supervision is a key component of the learning process, which also feeds into the reflective element of independent learning.

The RPC relationship resulted in students writing up one coaching/mentoring relationship as an in-depth case study (assessment one) and constructing a reflective portfolio (assessment two). Both assessments required students to include a reflective commentary on their learning and development. Thus, competency development was facilitated through self, peer and tutor feedback (verbal and written). In addition, it was achieved through a formative process which relied upon reciprocal peer coaching, a form of collaborative learning. Starr (2003) refers to collaborative coaching which she explains as partnerships working together to create highly effective conversations.

Continuous classroom based formative assessment throughout the duration of the module culminates in documentary evidence which is used for the summative assessment assignments.

### ***Methodology***

Seventy students participated in reciprocal peer coaching and formative assessment tasks over the course of one semester as part of a 12-week long module that was part of an undergraduate business management programme.

All the students were studying full-time. As part of their learning process, students

were required to maintain reflective learning logs that related to the content being studied. An opportunistic, purposive sample of 70 participants was drawn from a level 6 cohorts of students taking an option module in the psychology of coaching and mentoring between 2012 and 2017.

Students selected two students to form two separate RPC relationships, known as client A and client B. They were required to undertake continuous assessment tasks with these clients and complete two coaching/mentoring relationships of a minimum of six hours practice work per client. Thus, each individual reciprocal peer coaching relationship consisted of six hours, made up of four meetings, each meeting consisting of 15 minutes preparation time, 60 minutes of coaching and 15 minutes reflective write-up time. The students were required to meet up on a weekly basis and additionally weekly contact time was encouraged. Students undertook face-to-face meetings, synchronous telephone conversations, asynchronous emails and remote synchronous Skype coaching.

The overall process of the RCP was to provide students with a safe place to discuss their coaching goals stemming from real life personal and professional issues. This practical work was then reflected upon for the first formative assessment in the form of a reflective case study. Students then form one further new reciprocal peer coaching relationship for the remainder of the module. This practical work culminates in the production of a summative reflective portfolio of competence. An iterative data collection process was employed with students completing a questionnaire of open questions. As a final evaluation of their coaching relationships, students were asked to complete a reflective RPC open ended questionnaire survey that described their experience. The format for this account was as follows.

The open-ended questions were adapted from Feggetter (2007) and are summarised in Table 1.

Students were provided with an information sheet detailing associated confidential-

**Table 1: Opened ended questions**

Question 1	What were your coaching objectives?
Question 2	Progress achieved against achieving objectives?
Question 3	Summary questions pertaining to coaching process, ratings of content of sessions, listening skills, variety of questioning and interventions, focus on needs, challenge and stretch, application to work setting, openness and honesty and commitment to applying learning.
Question 4	Feedback received from others about their perceptions of behaviour.
Question 5	The contribution of coaching to on the job performance.
Question 6	What was most appreciated things from coaching (critical learning points)?
Question 7	How to improve coaching?
Question 8	Any other comments?

ity issues and were then invited to complete the reflective open-ended questionnaire. The questionnaire was administered to all of those who completed the coaching and mentoring module. The purpose of which was to systematically gather their perceptions about the process of RPC as a continuous formative assessment strategy. Voluntary submission of the questionnaire was taken as informed consent. The research project met the university's ethical research guidelines, all names were reported as pseudo-names.

A multi method phenomenological approach was used to illuminate the students' experience of RPC and its use as a formative assessment strategy. Student explorations of themselves as individuals and also as co-learners was an integral component of the formative assessment process. Through understanding the context and situation of a particular student population, the phenomenological approach can provide insights into beliefs, values and culture of their world (Van der Zam & Bergum, 2000). The data generated was collated and coded using conventional content analysis techniques and by reading and re-reading the text to identify salient themes, sub-themes and issues with respect to development, skills achieved and continuous assess-

ment. N-VIVO, a qualitative data analysis software package, was used to aid analysis. Based on the reflective open-ended questionnaire, the researchers developed coding frameworks that emerged from reviewing the written comments. A holistic overview of the perceptions and conceptualisations of the students was captured from the text that explained the ways in which the students accounted for their experiences and understand what this experience means from their perspective. Coding can be descriptive, interpretive or used to convey patterns (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Codes can be descriptive and refer to phenomena in the text or interpretive with meanings being ascribed by the researcher. Such first level coded were useful for summarising the data. Second order codes were then developed which were inferential and illustrated emerging themes. Documentary analysis of the student case studies and portfolios was also completed as a way of triangulating the data.

### **Findings**

Three key conceptual dimensions emerged from the interpretation of the student questionnaires. The first conceptual dimension related to the process of reciprocal peer coaching, in other words the important fac-

tors that contributed to the facilitation of the relationship. The second conceptual dimension related to the learning process, in other words the extent to which students engaged in the experiential learning process. The third conceptual dimension refers to cognitive developments, meaning the extent to which knowledge and competencies were enhanced as a result of participating in the RPC relationship. The conceptual framework describing the key outcomes of the RPC experience is illustrated in Table 2.

**The process of reciprocal peer coaching**

A number of key alliance enablers that supported the reciprocal peer coaching relationships were described by the students. In reviewing the textual data, several sub-dimensions emerge that best describe the most effective RPC relationship. These five sub domains include development goals, communication skills, techniques and tools, strength of alliance, and coach characteristics. The definitions for each of the sub domains is presented in Table 2.

Students indicated that successful coaching was dependent upon the client having very explicit and achievable developmental goals. As a result of the continuous formative assessment strategy in the form of RPC relationships, the students were able to have a clearer vision for the future.

The conversations had stimulated the clarification of their academic and professional *development goals*. For many level six students, they are facing the end of their degrees and so their attention often turns towards careers and jobs. The RPC contributed towards the clarification of career goals and career development needs. Much of the independent learning undertaken that was inherent in the RPC relationships focused on the goals, actions needed and success criteria attached to personal development planning and so clarity further resulted in students having a clearer focus regarding the direction that their personal development planning might take in relation to career objectives. Examples of brief quotes are indicated.

Table 2: Thematic definitions

<p>Process of reciprocal peer coaching</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <b>Development goals:</b> The extent to which students had explicit goals (pdp plans) at the onset of the RPC relationship.</li> <li>■ <b>Communication skills:</b> The ability of the coach to employ attentive listening, probing questions and offer constructive feedback.</li> <li>■ <b>Techniques and tools:</b> The ability of the coach to use arrange of tools.</li> <li>■ <b>Strength of alliance:</b> The extent to which the relationship was built upon trust, empathy, positive regard an genuineness.</li> <li>■ <b>Coach characteristics:</b> Characteristics of openness, approachability and accessibility.</li> </ul>
<p>Learning process</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <b>Learning loop:</b> The extent to which students engage in the experiential learning process.</li> </ul>
<p>Cognitive developments</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <b>Knowledge exchange:</b> New knowledge constructed from the knowledge base of both parties.</li> <li>■ <b>Self efficacy and self confidence:</b> The extent to which RPC enhances self-worth, self-regulation, confidence and overall efficacy.</li> <li>■ <b>Skills:</b> The development of skills sets such as leadership, resilience and stress management.</li> </ul>

*Reached my goals in timely manner.*

*I could focus on achieving short-term goals.*

*Having the ability to progress my goals was important.*

*To help with direction to achieve PDP goals.*

The process of the RPC relationship was characterised by factors that helped to facilitate the relationship. Students' perceived effective coaching to be related to the level of commitment invested in the alliance. For many of the students who reported successful reciprocal peer coaching goals achievement, it was apparent that commitment to the process and reciprocal peer coaching philosophy was vital. The students were frequently challenged to keep the relationships with their clients on track, especially when many of the students in the group lived far apart, had different study loads or were working in employment. The investment of time and relationship flexibility was important for the students, some resorted to skype or phone calls in order to maintain regular contact with their peer learners.

*A person who is committed to my development.*

*You have to give it your time or it doesn't really work.*

Further, the ability to use a range of key coaching communication skills such as listening, questioning, giving feedback and analytical skills were deemed fundamental to relationship success. Basic communication skills including probing, summarising, paraphrasing and provided client affirmation were also emphasised as being very important to build the relationship.

The ability to embed different *tools and techniques* into the coaching sessions was also considered important for the students in relation to opening up reflective dialogue. Different tools allowed for variety and the engagement of different learning preferences. These techniques involved writing activities, the use of coaching apps or using holistic approaches

that engaged the mind and the body (e.g. two chair work). Evidence of this is noted here.

*Someone with great at listening.*

*Someone ready to listen to me and not to judge what I say.*

*Different techniques that can be used to help me get where I want to be.*

*Insight into different development tools that help the learning process.*

The strength of the alliance referred to the extent to which the relationship was built upon trust, empathy, positive regard and genuineness. These conditions refer to the core conditions of Rogers (1957). Rogers commented that if certain conditions existed, the interpersonal relationship and process would bring about greater integration, less internal conflict, more utilisable energy for effective living and changes in behaviour. The quality of the relationship was an important contributor to relationship success, certainly when the partnerships were new, establishing trust at the onset was vital. When there was mutual trust, opportunities for social support were also created. The alliance could only be effective if the overall environment was one of safety and confidentiality.

*They need to be open and honest.*

*Both of us need to be open to questions outside our normal way of thinking.*

*Elaborate on feelings more, try to be more truthful to myself about how I am feeling.*

*More listening, trying to listen in more to what is being said by my client.*

*To use better non-verbal communications.*

Several common traits also emerged that described coach characteristics. Most students wanted to work with someone who was approachable, friendly and accessible.

Friendliness, open-mindedness and honesty were frequently mentioned by the students.

*That they are approachable and confident.*

*Are open-minded and considerate.*

*The need to be able to build a good relationship with the client.*

*They are sociable and good conversationalists.*

In a number of instances, peer coaches were selected because individuals had previously worked together on different modules or projects and had already established a positive relationship alliance. Previous familiarity assisted the relationship process.

### **The learning process**

A further theme that emerged from these peer-assisted learning activities was an increase in self-reflection ability. The second conceptual dimension related to the learning process, in other words the extent to which students engaged in the experiential learning process.

This theme included references to the extent which students' maintained reflective learning logs or adopted journaling processes. Journaling, along with other formal relationship documentation provided structure and focus for the students. The formality of having agendas, plans, objective and review forms served to assist the coaching pairs plan and prepare for each session. These reflective writing tasks also supported follow-up and review activities. The reflective logs were a useful mechanism for students to track their learning and monitor insights and new insights gained from the RPC relationship.

Students became more aware of their strengths and weaknesses as individuals. They were motivated to learn about themselves and their shortcomings as human beings. Increased familiarity with the RPC process permitted the application of previously learnt concepts to new situations. Through the formative assessment strategy experiential learning

appeared to be taking place at a much deeper level. Certainly the pressure of undertaking coaching sessions under the watchful eye of the tutor encouraged deeper level learning and memory retention. The RPC sessions meant that students had to give immediate feedback to each other, often in the form of video feedback and they also received regular tutor feedback. The students commented how they appreciated this immediate affirmation of their practical work. It helped them to gain an immediate understanding of how they were progressing on the module. Progress was viewed as a continuum and increased confidence and ability levels. Developing coaching skills in a real world context helped to cement their work in preparation for professional practice. Using real world clients, and real life problems contextualised the learning, helping students to recognise how this was important for their future professional working life. Students recognised the importance of professionalism and being responsible for the wellbeing of others.

*Time to reflect on me.*

*More self-awareness of how I behave and act.*

*Getting to know myself a little better.*

*Providing opportunity for self-reflection, experiential reflections, looking inside.*

*Having more time on reflecting.*

### **Cognitive developments**

Finally, the third theme resulting from the phenomenological analysis concerned the development of cognitive developments. These outcomes were broken down into three thematic sub-dimensions that best describe the overall cognitive developments. The three sub-dimensions included *knowledge exchange, self-efficacy, reflexivity and skills*.

By undertaking mutual dialogue with another student regarding development goals and perceived barriers to achieving goals, students were able to heighten their

experience of *knowledge exchange*. Evidence of this appears in various comments.

*I have a better sense of direction and determination from gaining new knowledge.*

*We were able to discuss different perspectives and exchange different ideas and thoughts.*

*I experienced major shifts in my view on...*

Students were able to actively engage in mutual dialogue with another student and develop a heightened knowledge base on a particular real life problem. They could build upon their existing knowledge base which facilitated the development of new ideas, strategies and solutions. This helped the students to overcome barriers to their own problems as well as enhance their coaching competence. Perspective sharing was considered as part of this dimension, as students were able to share and exchange different perspectives on an issue with their peer learner. This further contributed to the reframing and development of new knowledge constructs which only served to strengthen levels of coaching mastery. Mutual problem solving sharing further served to develop the students' knowledge networks. Learning experiences often varied in intensity which in some cases could lead to fundamental shifts in thinking. Formative assessment played an important role in enhancing skill development and served as an incentive to enhance the students' use of time.

RPC helped the students to embrace and develop *self-confidence* and *self-regulatory or efficacy* processes with the peer-assisted learning experience acting as a catalyst for self-efficacy and confidence building. Insights developed from the RPC process often lead to increases in self-belief and individual ability to carry out specific skills.

*Increase self-confidence and social skills.*

*Confidence with examinations and tests now.*

*More confident about my actions and studying in university.*

Students repeatedly commented on how they were developing a range of skills. They were able to explore the development of these skills through the coaching dialogue. For some this meant utilising time more efficiently or enhancing their ability to manage their stress more effectively. Skills of resilience building were also reported and some students reported increases in their overall leadership abilities. The RPC relationship promoted the transfer of learning and skills beyond the realm of academic life. RPC formative assessment opportunities, motivated the students to learn and helped them to manage their time effectively and prioritise tasks and prompted increased time spent on assessment related tasks.

*To be more organised and to improve on time-management skills.*

*Less stressed and more relaxed.*

*Stick to dates and deadlines more.*

*My time-management has improved.*

*More confident in managing my time.*

*Increased listening skills.*

To summarise, feedback from the module was highly positive, with students demonstrating both academic and personal development. Key findings indicate that the experience of being both coachee and coach in peer-to-peer coaching exercises enabled students to apply psychological principles and to make progress on personal goals. They also reported an improved awareness of the degree to which they could demonstrate key competencies related to employability via the acquisition of coaching psychology skills.

*It was an interesting experience.*

*It has been a helping life learning curve.*

*A key to providing a new and enjoyable experience.*

## **Discussion**

The outcomes of the RPC relationships offers strong support for the use of this formative assessment strategy to support practice and learning within undergraduate business education. The development of coaching competency requires the learners to continually engage in the experiential learning process (Kolb, 1984) and develop practical coaching mastery.

The RPC relationships can be viewed as a valuable peer-assisted learning methodology that is reliant on self-directed discussions and feedback that promote social interaction, transfer of skills and emotional gains such as reduced student stress (Topping & Ehly, 2001).

RPC was supported by psycho-social attributes that contributed to the facilitation of the relationship (Ackland, 1991; Zeus & Skiffington, 2004) and appropriate use of skills and techniques such as non-evaluative communication and feedback leading to gains in performance and learning taking place (Ackland, 1991).

This relationship process was closely aligned to the framework posited by Ladyshewsky and Ryan (2006), Ladyshewsky (2006), and the Matthewman Phase Function model (2008). Students selected partners and then developed trust, commitment, equality, rapport, feedback giving and goal setting objectives that lead to effective working and finally action planning activities (Liu & Carless, 2006). Listening questioning and challenging underpinned these formal yet brief relationships. Such relationship processes allowed students to explore their own learning in a safe, supportive and confidential environment. Making meaning from the real world relationship experience in conjunction with tutor guidance and/or peer collaboration enabled independent student problem solving (Vygotsky, 1978).

The RPC relationship supported the development of increased self-awareness and factors linked to the learning process. The learners had to continually engage in the experiential learning process. RPC sup-

ported the expansion of cognitive developments (Ladyshewsky & Ryan, 2006) regarding knowledge expansion, self-efficacy and skill development by engaging student learners in rich conversations and problem solving situations. Appreciating different perspectives enhanced their own thinking constructs. The development of new thinking and mental concepts indicates that the RPC relationship was an appropriate constructivist methodology (Boud, 1986, 2000; Shepherd, 2000; James 2006; Pryor & Crossouard, 2008) and situational learning for enhancing formative assessment strategy within undergraduate business education. Professional and personal knowledge integration allowed students to achieve their development goals through RPC and affirm their own and others learning and achievements. By using the RPC relationship as a formative assessment strategy, students had the opportunity to challenge themselves and learn from their mistakes and successes to build their self-confidence. Self-efficacy and autonomous learning were promoted by the RPC formative assessment strategy.

The RPC relationship outcomes reported in this paper indicated the transformational nature of these dyadic partnerships. The transfer of learning to real life context was clearly indicated with regard to time management, stress management, resilience building and career clarity.

Overall the RPC relationship was a positive experience for students, not only were gains made in learning, their personal skills in coaching mastery improved and developed as a result in this type of formative assessment strategy.

## **Conclusion**

This paper concludes that that RPC as formative assessment strategy illustrates that participants were able to expand their knowledge base and develop increased self-efficacy. Participants were able to exchange knowledge constructs and perspectives to aid the development of new tactical knowledge and skills by evaluating them against the knowledge

constructs of their reciprocal peer coaching partners. Receiving regular dialogic feedback exchange and tutor guidance underpinned the transformational nature of the relationship.

RPC an essential component of the constructivist learning element and appears to be an effective and formative assessment strategy that undergraduate business education that should be considered as part of the curriculum framework. The paper also suggests that formative assessment in this format can promote autonomy in learning and encourage the social aspects of learning that create a safe learning culture where learning can be shared. Proving opportunities where all students can engage in a variety of formative assessment activities is crucial.

### Authors

**Lisa Matthewman**, Department of Leadership & Professional development, University of Westminster, London, UK; **Jenni Nowlan**, Department of Leadership & Professional development, University of Westminster, London, UK; and **Katriina Hyvönen**, Department of Psychology, University of Jyväskylä, Finland

### Correspondence

L.J.Matthewman@westminster.ac.uk

### References

- Ackland, R. (1991). A review of the peer coaching literature. *Journal of Staff Development* 12, 22–26.
- Ashgar, A. (2010). Reciprocal peer coaching and its use as a formative assessment strategy for first year students. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education* 35, 403–417.
- Black, P., Harrison, C., Lee, C., Marshal, B. & Wiliam, D. (2003). *Assessment for learning: Putting it into practice*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Bloxham, S. & P. Boyd. (2007). *Developing effective assessment in higher education: A practical guide*. McGraw Hill: Oxford University Press.
- Boud, D. (1986). *Implementing Student Self-Assessment*. Sydney: Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australia.
- Boud, D. (2000). Sustainable assessment: Rethinking assessment for the learning society. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 22(2), 151–167.
- Cross, R. & Loughlin, K. (2013). Continuous assessment frameworks within university English Pathway Programs: Realizing formative assessment within high-stakes contexts. *Studies in Higher Education* 38(4).
- Damon, W. & Phelps, E. (1989). Strategic uses of peer learning in children's education. In T. Berndt & G. Ladd (Eds.), *Peer relationships in child development* (pp.135–157). New York: Wiley.
- Kolb, D.A. (1984). *Learning style inventory*. Boston, MA: McBer & Co.
- Feggetter, A.J.W. (2007). A preliminary evaluation of executive coaching: Does executive coaching work for candidates on a high potential development scheme? *International Coaching Psychology Review*, 2(2).



- James, M (2006). Assessment, teaching and theories of learning. In J. Gardner (Ed.), *Assessment and Learning*, (pp.47–60). London: Sage.
- Ladyshevsky, R. & Ryan, J. (2002a). Reciprocal peer coaching as a strategy for the development of leadership and management competency. In *Proceedings of the 11th Annual Teaching and Learning Forum: Focusing on the Student*. Perth: Edith Cowan University. Retrieved 18 June 2014 from <https://clt.curtin.edu.au/events/conferences/tlf/tlf2002/ladyshevsky.html>.
- Ladyshevsky, R. (2006). Peer coaching: A constructivist methodology for enhancing critical thinking in postgraduate business education. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 25(1), 67–84.
- Liu, N. & D. Carless. (2006). Peer feedback: The learning element of peer assessment. *Teaching in Higher Education* 11(3), 279–90.
- Matthewman, L.J. (2008). Coaching and mentoring for professional development, Chapter 19. In D. Simmonds, C. Porter & C. Bingham (2008), *Exploring human resource management*. New York: McGraw Hill.
- Miles, M. & Huberman, M. (1994). *Qualitative Data Analysis: A sourcebook of new methods*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Pryor, J. & Crossouard, B. (2008). A sociocultural theorisation of formative assessment. *Oxford Review of Education* 34(1), 1–20.
- Race, P. Brown, S. & Smith, B. (2005). *500 tips on assessment*. Oxford: Routledge Falmer.
- Rogers, C.R. (1957). The necessary and sufficient conditions of therapeutic personality change. *Journal of Consulting Psychology*, 21, 95–103.
- Shepherd, L. (2000). The role of assessment in a learning culture. *Educational Researcher* 29(7), 4–14.
- Starr, J. (2003). *The coaching manual: The definitive guide to the process, principles and skills of personal coaching*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.
- Topping, E. & Ely, W. (2001). Peer assisted learning: A framework for consultation. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, 12(2).
- Van der Zam, J. & Bergum, V. (2000). Hermeneutic – phenomenology: Providing living knowledge for nursing practice. *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 3(1), 211–218.
- Vygotsky, L.S. (1978). Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes. The president and fellows of Harvard College. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Whitmore, J. (1992). *Coaching for performance: A practical guide to growing your own skills (People Skills for Professionals)*. London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing.
- Wynn, M. & Kromrey, J. (1999). Paired peer placement with peer coaching in early field experiences: Results of a four-year study. *Teaching Education Quarterly* 26(1), 21–38.
- Zeus P. & Skiffington S. (2004). *The complete guide to coaching at work*. Sydney: McGraw Hill.

# How is behavioural change sustained over time? Coachee perceptions of the effects of coaching one year later

Ventaka Nanduri

---

**Objectives:** *This study addressed three research questions: How do participants perceive the effects of coaching and sustain changes a year later? What challenges were experienced by the coachees in sustaining their changes? What factors enabled the coachees in sustaining their changes?*

**Design:** *The study employed Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to understand the felt experiences of former coachees on the effects of coaching after a period of 12 months.*

**Methods:** *Seven former coachees were purposively selected as participants. Informed consent of the participants and ethical clearance were obtained to conduct research interviews. Semi-structured interviews of the participants were conducted using open-ended questions. The interview conversations were audio-recorded and transcriptions were obtained from a service provider. IPA was used to analyse data and identify themes relevant to the objectives.*

**Results:** *The study revealed a number of aspects about sustainable change, these include sincere efforts through concentration and self-discipline, and intrinsic motivation supported by coaching to change.*

**Conclusions:** *Sustained effects of coaching over a time are linked to coachee satisfaction derived from fulfillment of their goals and desires. The coach's role in reinforcing client interests/passion and coachee action to maintain the changes are both crucial in achieving durable effects.*

**Keywords:** *long term effects of coaching; changes; durable changes sustainability; factors; enablers; challenges.*

COACHING IS DEFINED in a variety of ways by different authors and practitioners (Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011; De Haan, Duckworth, Birch & Jones, 2013; Soneh et al., 2015). Researchers typically define coaching as a short- to medium-term relationship between an executive/leader/manager (referred to as the coachee or client) and a professional coach with the expressed purpose of improving the coachee's work effectiveness (Fieldman & Lankau, 2005). A perceived effect of coaching implies change experienced by a coachee resulting from the coaching process. A review of the existing studies that have empirically examined outcomes of coaching indicates that most often, the aim of these studies has been to identify what the outcomes at the end of coaching are, such as client learning, behavioural changes, and client satisfaction

(Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011; Koroleva, 2016). Less attention seems to have been given to studying the long-term effects or sustainability of coaching as experienced by the coachees over the longer term (Koroleva, 2016). Therefore, this study aimed at exploring the perceived effects of coaching a year after the coaching intervention ended, and what factors challenged and enabled the sustainability of changes experienced.

## Background information and relevance to coaching

Using the goal-centred and solution-focused (Grant, 2012) evidence-based coaching approach, this practitioner-researcher conducted a coaching intervention for seven manager-coachees during May to July 2014. The goal outcomes at the end of the coaching found through qualitative research inter-

views were identified to be positive for most coachees. Also, the coachees expressed their intention to sustain the changes over time, as they strongly felt it to be in their own interest. This is a follow-up study with the same coachees after a year to identify the changes experienced and how they were sustained. The findings from this study will add to our knowledge of the long-term effects of coaching and how sustainability of changes in thinking and behaviours resulting from coaching may be better understood and coaching practice aligned accordingly.

### **The literature on executive coaching**

Executive coaching *per se* emerged in the 1990s as an intervention geared specifically to changing the behaviour of middle- and senior-level managers (Fieldman & Lankau, 2005). An overview of the literature relevant to executive coaching indicates that most studies primarily aim at knowing the outcomes at the end of coaching. There is lack of longitudinal research in terms of understanding the long-term impact of coaching, and very few studies examined any sort of longitudinal influence of coaching (Grover & Furnham, 2016).

### ***Studies on long term effects or sustainability of changes over time***

Bennett (2010) observed that there are two purposes of executive coaching: (1) the attainment of the client's goals or outcomes as the immediate consequence; and (2) some form of learning for sustainability. Few studies have however explored the impact of coaching beyond the end of the coaching intervention, with follow-up studies conducted after a time varying from three months to five years from the end of the coaching intervention. According to Grant (2016, p.27), those few longitudinal studies indicate that coaching can indeed produce sustained change.

Within the limited literature on sustained long-term effects of coaching the key findings are: Increased self-awareness (Bozer, Sarros & Santora, 2013; Gegner, 1997; Harrington, 2006; Koroleva, 2016; Wasylshyn, 2003; Why-

teco, 2014), sustained behavioural changes such as: feeling responsible for performance (Gegner, 1997; Smither et al., 2003); building better relationships (Wasylshyn, 2003); openness to new behaviours (Finn, Mason & Griffin, 2006); choice responsibility (Harrington, 2009); change of habits (Outhwaite & Bettridge, 2009); sustained behavioural changes (de Meuse & Dai, 2009), setting clear goals and action (Finn et al., 2006; Smither et al., 2003; improvement in performance (Smither et al., 2003), better confidence and motivational ability (Wasylshyn, 2003; Whyteco, 2014). self-efficacy (Finn et al., 2006), changes in thinking (Outhwaite & Bettridge, 2009; Whyteco, 2014); work wellbeing, general wellbeing, job satisfaction and engagement (Hicks, Carter & Sinclair, 2013). These findings are observed to be the direct effects of coaching relating to the coaching goals or objectives. Some indirect effects of coaching were found in Whyteco's (2014) study, which stated that some important personal changes and transformation occurred as an indirect effect of coaching, and the long-term impacts did not always relate to coaching goals.

Factors for successful long-term impacts of coaching as seen from the literature are in three categories: (1) coachee factors: Being ready for change (Koroleva, 2016); coachability (commitment, motivation, accountability and self-efficacy) (Korn/Ferry, 2009); (2) coaching relationship (Koroleva, 2016); and (3) coaching related factors: Setting clear goals (Smither et al., 2003); Coachee action and feedback from coach (Smither et al., 2003); Koroleva, 2016).

It is also seen that some authors reported barriers or obstacles to sustaining changes. Gegner (1997) found that the obstacles to sustaining long-term changes are: (1) time; (2) environment; and (3) other pressures. Outhwaite and Bettridge (2009) observed that a major barrier to sustaining change is 'mindset'.

It is observed that several studies related to health behaviours change maintenance have appeared in the literature, for example, Dixon (2008), Ogden (2009), Prochaska,

Norcross and DiClemente (2013), from which coaching field may deduce some similarities with regard to sustaining or maintaining behavioural changes. The Transtheoretical (TTM) Model of Change (Prochaska et al., 2013) suggests that change involves evolution through a series of recognisable, although somewhat overlapping, and not necessarily linear, stages. Grant (2012) observed that five of these stages have direct relevance for goal setting in coaching. According to this theory, the stages are stated to be: 1. Pre-contemplation: No intention to change in the foreseeable future. 2. Contemplation: Considering making stages, but have not yet made any changes. 3. Preparation: Increased commitment to change, intending to make changes in the near future and often have attempted to make small changes. 4. Action: Engaging in the new behaviours, but have made such changes for only a short period of time (usually less than six months). 5. Maintenance: Consistently engaging in the new behaviour over a period of time, usually six months. How these stages could be associated with the themes from this study will be discussed in the discussion section.

### **Research questions**

Therefore, the research questions this study addressed are: (1) how do participants perceive the effects of coaching and sustain changes a year later? (2) What challenges were experienced by the coachees in sustaining their changes? And (3) what factors enabled the coachees in sustaining their changes?

### **Methodology**

This research study is practitioner-research (Costley, Elliott & Gibbs, 2010) with qualitative approach using IPA (Smith, Jarman & Osborn, 1999; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014) to explore lived experiences and perceptions of the former coachees. Qualitative analysis provides a unique insight into complex phenomenon, such as sustained effects of coaching, and can be very useful to guide where quantitative research should be focused (Grover

& Furnham, 2016). In this study, the focus was on the participants' experience, understanding, interpreting, and meaning-making of their experience of effects of coaching. To answer the research questions, this research employed IPA as its approach that is informed by three philosophical underpinnings – phenomenology, ideography and hermeneutics. Phenomenology is concerned with the study of the phenomenon under investigation, which in this case is the experience of the participants in how they perceive the effects of coaching a year later. Ideography is concerned with making an in-depth study of the phenomenon, by asking questions going deeper into the participant's perceptions relevant to the study. The challenging part of IPA is in fact double hermeneutics, that is, participants' interpretation of their experiences which in turn will be interpreted by the researcher making meaning of an individual's experiences. Therefore, an interpretative phenomenological approach was appropriate in this pursuit to answer the research questions.

### **Research participants**

The participants in this study (Table 1) were selected purposively by following up seven previously coached managers. At the time of coaching they were employed in different departments of the same company. This is a homogeneous group for the purpose of doing IPA, because they were all in the middle management level in the same company, with the same environment of the workplace. All participants were coached in one intervention. Informed consent to participate in this study was obtained individually from all seven participants and also from the company where four of them (West, Charlie, Kahn and Dag) were still employed. Two (Dick and Neel) were self-employed who gave personal consent that did not call for a separate company consent. In case of the only participant (Ben) who changed the job moving to another company, a verbal approval to conduct an interview from the participant's superior was obtained. Ethical

**Table:1 Research participants**

Pseudonym	Position at the time of coaching	Position at the time of Research Interviews
BEN	Underwriting Manager	Manager in a New Company
DICK	Marketing & Sales Manager	Self-employed in Agribusiness
NEEL	Lawyer, Legal advisory services	Self-employed in Law practice
WEST	Lawyer, Legal advisory services	Same position, same employer
CHARLIE	Accountant	Manager-Finance, Same employer
KAHN	Accountant	Same position, same employer
DAG	HR Business Partner	Same position, same employer, with more responsibilities

(In the above table participant age and gender are not included because age and gender were not in the focus of this study)

cal clearance for conducting the research was obtained from the institution where the practitioner-researcher was affiliated.

**Role of the researcher**

This practitioner-researcher was a former coach of the participants, and this research gave an opportunity to revisit and interact with these former coachees. Through this research the practitioner researcher was also looking forward to learning and assessing how his own coaching approach worked in their cases. Grant (2013, p.17) observed that research as part of one’s practice, when conducted by a practitioner well trained in research methods, has the potential to be extremely valuable and has made a significant contribution to the emergence and dissemination of the findings for development of strong evidence base for coaching.

On the other hand, some scholars might argue (Rooney, 2005) that because the practitioner-researcher, who is an ‘insider’ in terms of his working relationship with the participants, he or she is no longer ‘objective’. Rooney (2005) cautions that there is a likelihood of practitioner’s prior relationship with participants impacting on their behaviour and conversation during the

research interviews, which may be different from an independent researcher. Such a possibility could exist if there was an ongoing and continued relationship between the practitioner-researcher and the participants, which is not the case in this study.

The practitioner-researcher had a peer, his previous Master’s research supervisor, to review the process, methodology and findings through several collaborative discussions and reviews that took place by means of emails, telephone calls and also Skype.

**Data collection**

The interview questions were aimed to elicit how the participants made progress and experienced the achievement of their coaching goals after the year compared with immediately after the end of coaching, the effects and changes they experienced and sustained, their overall coaching experience and other effects the participants experienced as a result of coaching, what challenges they experienced and what factors enabled them to sustain the changes. Scaling technique was used during the interviews asking the participants to rate their responses on a scale of 1 to 10 to compare the position at the end of coaching and at the time of the interview,

to quantify their self-judgement expressing whether an effect experienced was maintained, grew or reduced over the period of the year.

Consistent with IPA practice, semi-structured, one-on-one confidential interviews of the participants were conducted using open-ended questions and audio-recorded. Transcriptions of the audio recordings were obtained from a service provider. Each participant was requested to verify his transcription for correctness and return the corrected hard copy with confirmation to proceed to the next stage of data analysis.

### Data analysis

The transcripts of all audio-recorded interviews were analysed using IPA (Smith et al., 1999; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). The process of analysis was iteratively carried out and involved reading and re-reading the transcript a number of times. In the first stage the transcript of one participant was taken for idiographic analysis making notes on interesting significant points while understanding and interpreting what he was saying on his experiences and perceptions relevant to the research questions, simultaneously coding the key words and writing preliminary theme titles as they emerged. From the emergent themes and the clusters (subordinate themes) associated with them, connections were identified that led to identifying and listing superordinate themes. The extracts from the participant's transcript were noted with page and line number for reference. This process was repeated to analyse transcripts of the other participants, until the master list of themes was consolidated and finalised for the group using the expert guidelines given by Smith (2011), taking into consideration frequency and prevalence of the occurrences of experiences considered important by the participants. Also, similarities and differences between participants were identified in the analysis. After finalising the identification of themes, the transcripts were de-identified with respect to the participant, and pseudo-

nyms are used in this paper not to reveal the real names of the individual participants.

### Findings

This study identified five themes to answer the research question 1, two themes to research question 2 and two themes to research question 3, stated as follows.

#### ***Themes pertaining to research question 1: How do participants perceive the effects of coaching and sustain changes a year later?***

*Theme 1: More organised with clarity in goal accomplishment.*

Most participants experienced goal orientation and achievement and sustained this change which benefitted them personally and professionally.

Through coaching, Dag learnt to be more organised with concentration in his work that helped him implementing the retrenchment process in the company.

*'...now planning and focusing becomes very critical ... to balance activities in the three companies.'* (Dag, 12.13)

He continued applying this learning even after completing the retrenchment process in handling additional responsibilities entrusted to him to oversee the HR activities in the three companies under the group head office.

In Dick's case, coaching enabled him to learn how to concentrate on goal planning. As he put it,

*'that (coaching) helped me become more focused.'* (Dick, 15.21)

Dick got retrenched after the restructure and using the severance pay he invested in starting his own business. Prior to coaching he lacked clarity of the proposed business. Coaching conversations helped him to convert business ideas into clearly written down business plan.

*'It (coaching) has changed me. Made me define the business goal and find my way of achieving the ultimate goal.'* (Dick, 5.13)

As a legal adviser, Neel experienced the need to pay attention to customer service critical to his profession.

*'Yeah, that was the main focus basically and it is still the main focus here with the firm, customer service.'* (Neel, 12.3)

One of his coaching goals was to know the what and how of good customer service, which he acknowledged as his main emphasis in his legal practice now.

*Theme 2: Recognised and adapted to changes needed in thinking for improving oneself*

The participants learned to think in other ways than the usual way, taking alternative thinking approaches and broader perspectives in exploring their issues, which is a perceived change experienced and sustained by all participants. As Ben put it,

*'Coaching enabled, taught me to think differently, to think broadly...'* (Ben, 6.4)

Through coaching he learnt to apply his mind to each problem from different viewpoints, evaluate different solutions or options and to choose the one most suited. This was the major change he sustained.

Charlie wanted to improve his interpersonal skills through coaching and how to be a more effective manager.

*'Coaching enabled me crystallise my thoughts'* (Charlie, 7.4) *'The residual influence (of coaching) is one of perspective.'* (Charlie, 21.33)

The change he sustained was to view from different angles realising that it is possible to get out of the mental trap (a closed mind), by opening his mind to other possibilities.

Neel went into self-employment as a result of the learning from coaching that helped

him to change his usual way of thinking, and consider various other thinking approaches to achieve the objective.

*'I would say I have been applying consciously knowing that you know what I am actually applying thinking outside the box; and that's where definitely I see the returns (of the learning from coaching).'* (Neel, 15.25)

*Theme 3: Adjusting to needed changes in own behaviours for goal attainment*

Most participants experienced and sustained behavioural modifications found beneficial for them in the pursuit of their goals. The participants changed social behaviour, such as improved interpersonal skills in working with others in their contexts.

Coaching helped Charlie to soften his attitude and change his behaviour towards his direct reports; a change which he experienced and sustained.

*'I am trying to treat others the way that I want to be treated.'* (Charlie, 7.24)

Another sustained change for Charlie was learning and trying to be assertive.

*'I need to be assertive... I am trying...'* (Charlie, 7.2)

A significant change Charlie sustained is that he is no more dwelling on his old behaviours.

*'They (old behaviours) surface repeatedly... but I don't dwell on it.'* (Charlie, 21.17)

Charlie is now ready to get into the next level of change.

In case of Kahn he needed to reduce his association with friends because he sought to concentrate and give more attention to his part time professional studies.

*'I had to change the way I did things with people...my friends... I would say a lot has changed.'* (Kahn 26.17)

Going into self-employment was Dick's goal in coaching and afterwards he commenced cattle farming business during the year. He realised changes in life style needed in pursuing the goal and adjusting to prioritised new work schedules needed in running own business.

*'I had to change lifestyle... in terms of someone who has been used to wearing suits; now you see I am wearing khaki colours, big hats.'* (Dick, 19.14)

*Theme 4: Being more aware of one's own strengths, abilities and limitations*

Participants became more conscious of their own strengths, capabilities, weaknesses and shortcomings as a result of coaching, that helped them modify their own thinking and behaviour to pursue their goals; a change most of them experienced and sustained.

Initially, Charlie was reluctant to shoulder managerial responsibilities entrusted to him, because he lacked interpersonal skills needed in delegation and supervision. He went through strengths assessment in coaching, helping him to become more aware of his potential capabilities. Awareness of his strengths and seeing some progress made over the year in improving social relations he sustained a small beneficial effect.

*'residual influence (of coaching) is one of perspective; awareness of what are the challenges, and what am I trying to achieve.'* (Charlie, 20.33) *and say, it's constructive self-awareness.'* (Charlie, 21.12)

Dag became more aware of his skills and capabilities in dealing with people as a HR business partner, following his coaching conversations.

*'I always knew about them but, at times, you take all these things for granted until the coach asks you questions.'* (Dag, 12.16)

After he started being more aware of his own capabilities, Dag performed well in his

present job, and also undertook additional responsibilities in the group HR activities.

Ben experienced increased awareness of his strengths and weaknesses in his leadership role dealing with people. He accepted that he needed to continue to work on developing himself.

*'just need to keep improving myself...'* (Ben, 5.25)

*Theme 5: Pursuing broader objective of personal growth and development with increased self-confidence*

This is an interesting finding from the experiences of most participants having made positive progress personally and professionally, such as moving up the career ladder, going into self-employment, thus indicating some other changes experienced and sustained by them.

Kahn was experiencing and sustaining higher levels of self-confidence as a result of progress achieved on his goals during the year.

*'It (his confidence) is very high. I'm more courageous than before.'* (Kahn, 12.25)

He became bolder in taking necessary action steps to fulfill his desires and goals. He also received recognition and support from people in his work context which boosted his confidence.

Neel experienced and sustained high growth of self-confidence which resulted in leaving the job and setting up his own Law practice.

*'the outcome of the setting up of this (Law) firm is a success of the coaching process... helping me have the confidence to actually get away from the fear of the unknown and actually getting into doing it...'* (Neel, 10.3)

At the beginning of coaching, West scored low on interpersonal relations scale in the EI assessment and he was coached to overcome this deficiency. West experienced increased



confidence in maintaining social relations after coaching. When asked about the extent of progress made in this aspect, he stated,

*'Before coaching I was at 4, after coaching at 8 on a scale of 1 to 10. But dropped to 6 now.'* (West, 6.10)

He ascribed the reason for lowered confidence to his senior management's letdown of not considering him for promotion during the year, and resentment seeing his juniors overtaking him in promotion ladder. This caused West feeling demoted, and as a result his confidence level dropped to 6 on the scale as he put it.

***Themes pertaining to Research question 2: What challenges were experienced by the coachees in sustaining their changes?***

Two themes were identified in this study as the challenges experienced by the participants in an effort to sustain the changes.

***Theme 1: Lack of sufficient time to reflect due to overwhelming work pressures***

All participants acknowledged lack of time to derive full benefits of the coaching intervention and also to reflect sufficiently after the company restructure due to work pressure and shortage of time and resources.

Company Restructure caused heavy work pressure on Dag, the HR business partner.

*'Yes, the challenges for me as part of the transition of the company.'* (Dag, 5.19)

*'...a lot of other responsibilities.'* (Dag, 5.26)

The company entrusted Dag with HR responsibilities of two other companies during the year that caused lack of time in his case to reflect sufficiently.

Charlie experienced heavy work pressure on job during restructure and also as finance manager after restructure. As a result, he could not reflect and apply the learning from coaching.

*'Sustained behavioural change requires time and space to practice'* (Charlie, 4.17)

Charlie had to work very late almost every day and also over the weekends most of the time. He made some effort to put the new learning into practice, however, yet the required amount of effort and consistency of action were lacking.

***Theme 2: Faced difficulties in making needed changes***

Several participants experienced individual difficulties that challenged their attempts to sustain the changes. Kahn admitted that he was faced with challenges of old behaviours popping up occasionally.

*'challenges were there.'* (Kahn, 26.5) ... *temptations would be there.'* (Kahn, 17.8)

Despite distractions and enticements to deviate from pursuing goals, such as diverting time and resources for other reasons, Kahn managed to overcome those challenges and remained on course working towards his goals.

Charlie experienced his old behaviour of lack of willingness on his part blocking him to perform managerial responsibilities effectively.

*'Managerial stuff is new and uncomfortable...'* (Charlie, 11.14)

He did not enjoy the task of managing other people, though he received coaching on how to be a good and successful manager. He made a small progress with delegating simple tasks to his team with success, however.

***Themes pertaining to research question 3: What factors enabled the coachees in sustaining their changes?***

Two themes were identified as the factors that enabled participants to sustain changes

***Theme 1: Sincere efforts with concentration and self-discipline***

The participants learnt to be orderly and manage their time, and sustained this change.

Dag was consistently exercising a great deal of self-discipline by adhering to his goal pursuits, performing and progressing well professionally with additional responsibilities entrusted to him.

*'I have been sticking with my goals.'* (Dag, 10.25)

During this period, he had also successfully completed a senior management development part-time programme while holding the additional responsibilities for the group.

Kahn too, by being resolute and firm, was able to make progress on his professional and personal goals.

*'But nothing is going to stop me from going forward even if I do not perform it as I would have hoped to, but I am still going to push on further.'* (Kahn 13.11)

Kahn has been seriously and consistently concentrating on his professional and personal goals of part time professional studies, demonstrating sustained self-discipline and focus.

*'to move up the professional ladder...'* (Kahn, 8.12) *'so then I have to be disciplined...'* (Kahn, 16.10)

The factor that enabled Dick to sustain the changes and progress well was consistent time management in successfully pursuing his goals.

*'you need... time management...'* (Dick, 11.21) *'Know how to manage your time.'* (Dick, 11.23)

*Theme 2: Driven by intrinsic motivation reinforced by coaching to change and develop*  
The participants attributed self-motivation helping them to sustain their changes at the end of the year after the coaching intervention was concluded.

Ben had intense ambition to keep growing professionally. At the time of this inter-

view, Ben was in his new job office. He revealed that he fulfilled his inner desire to gain more work-related knowledge and competencies through successfully completing some professional examinations. He would be doing some more professional courses later on to keep growing further in career.

*'desire to keep...to learn some more, to keep growing.'* (Ben, 7.7)

With a strong business sense, Dick went into self-employment after retrenchment.

*'Self-motivation, yes. That is the key.'* (Dick, 8.24)

Dick was very passionate about business and self-motivated to set up and run his own business. He worked very hard during the year and established a medium-size agri-business.

Kahn had strong desire to acquire higher accounting professional qualification by working hard with a firm plan of action agreed during coaching, and intended to pass two papers in each semester. His motivation grew so strong and sustained over the year that he would further continue working with full force regardless of some failures in the attempts made. As he put it,

*'But nothing is going to stop me from going forward even if I do not perform it as I would have hoped to, but I am still going to push on further.'* (Kahn, 13.11)

## Discussion

This study identified five themes of sustained effects of coaching experienced by the participants, two themes of challenges faced and two themes as factors that enabled sustaining the changes. These are discussed in this section in comparison with the literature.

For purposes of this discussion, it will be also interesting to compare these findings with the concept of the five stages of change applied in health behaviours change maintenance – Precontemplation, Contemplation, Preparation, Action and Maintenance, with

occasional Relapse as sixth stage (Prochaska et al., 2013) and according to this theory, the stages of change are not necessarily linear.

### ***Effects of coaching***

#### *Theme 1: More organised with clarity in goal accomplishment*

This theme suggests that goal orientation came out as an important effect for all participants and most of them felt that taking needed actions with proper planning and focus was working for them. When compared with the stages of change process (Prochaska et al., 2013) this theme appears to correspond with all five stages which most of the participants in this study had gone through. However, two participants appeared to be struggling with action and maintenance stages and a partial relapse was noticed in their cases.

Much of the executive (leader/manager) coaching is conducted for helping the clients define, set and achieve goals. This theme supports similar findings from the coaching literature, setting clear goals (Smither et al., 2003) and action plans for goals (Finn et al., 2006).

#### *Theme 2: Recognised and adapted to changes needed in thinking for improving oneself*

Participants recognised the need for changes in the way they think for making improvements and maintaining progress in what they want to achieve personally and professionally. They felt it to be in their interests and with this realisation, they were pursuing their goals and objectives. A similar finding – A change in thinking, as a sustained effect of coaching, was reported in the literature (Outhwaite & Bettridge, 2009; Whyteco, 2014).

Viewed against the stages of change (Prochaska et al., 2013), this theme corresponds to the three stages of precontemplation, contemplation and preparation to change, leading to action and maintenance of changes in thinking for progressing with goals. The core philosophy of all coaching is to influence client's thinking process. Most participants in this study thus experienced

changes in their thinking approach to problem situations and sustained the new ways of thinking.

#### *Theme 3: Adjusting to needed changes in own behaviours for goal attainment*

Goal orientation drives needed behavioural changes and the participants in this study felt the need and adjusted their behaviours. Achieving beneficial changes in behaviour is also among the most common aims of coaching. This theme compares with similar findings of sustained behavioural changes such as: feeling responsible for performance (Gegner, 1997; Smither et al., 2003), building better relationships (Wasylyshyn, 2003), openness to new behaviours (Finn et al., 2006), choice responsibility (Harrington, 2009), change of habits (Outhwaite & Bettridge, 2009), sustained behavioural changes (Korn/Ferry, 2009). When compared with the stages of change (Prochaska et al., 2013) this theme seems to correspond to all five stages, indicating that coachee action is important for sustaining changes.

#### *Theme 4: Being more aware of one's own strengths, abilities and limitations*

Raising the self-awareness of the coachees is one major aim of Executive Coaching. Increased self-awareness is a key sustained effect found from coaching research (Bozer et al., 2013; Gegner, 1997; Harrington, 2006; Koroleva, 2016; Wasylyshyn, 2003; Whyteco, 2014).

This theme appears to correspond with completion of three stages of change process (Prochaska et al., 2013) – precontemplation, contemplation and preparation, and maintenance of this awareness consciously through action.

#### *Theme 5: Pursuing broader objective of personal growth and development with increased self-confidence*

This theme of perceived indirect effects is in agreement with Whyteco's (2014) research finding which stated that long-term impacts of being coached didn't always relate directly

to coaching goals. After undergoing coaching, personal change and in some cases transformation occurred over time, not related to coaching goals alone.

It is observed that out of the seven participants in this study on the effects attributable to coaching after a year, West was the only one who did not make progress in the job or career because of lack of action to adapt to required new behaviours. Ben acquired a new job with better prospects with career motivation. Two participants, Neel and Dick, went into self-employment with passion. Three participants, Kahn, Charlie and Dag, who remained in the company after coaching, experienced career progression and personal development through consistent awareness and action.

### **Research question 2**

This question led to understand the challenges encountered by the participants in sustaining the changes and two themes surfaced.

*Theme 1: Lack of sufficient time to reflect due to overwhelming work pressures*

*Theme 2: Faced difficulties in making needed changes*

These challenges seem to occur naturally for most people in the process of change maintenance, corresponding to a relapse stated to be one of the stages in change occurrence and maintenance theorised by Prochaska et al. (2013).

In the coaching literature, it is observed that Genger (1997) found the following similar obstacles to sustaining long-term changes: (1) element of time; (2) environment; and (3) other pressures. Outhwaite and Bettridge (2009) reported that a major barrier to sustaining change is 'mindset' (an individual's knowledge, awareness, and perspectives).

### **Research question 3**

This question led to exploring what factors enabled the participants in their experience of sustaining the changes, and two themes emerged.

*Theme 1: Sincere efforts with concentration and self-discipline*

*Theme 2: Driven by Intrinsic motivation reinforced by coaching to change and develop*

In the literature it is found that motivational ability (Wasylyshyn, 2003; Whyteco, 2014) is a sustained effect of coaching. This finding supports the observation of Dixon (2008), that motivation and confidence are key determinants of behaviour change.

### **Conclusions**

The practitioner-researcher concludes from the findings that sustained effects of coaching over a time are linked to coachee satisfaction derived from fulfilling their goals and desires. There is a need for the coaching process to identify and work on coachee interests to ensure that coachees gain satisfaction (aligned to the 'Law of Effect' in Psychology) in achieving desired goals through durable changes in thinking and behaviour.

In this context, it will be worthwhile noting the observation of Kohli (2016), that 'a simple claim (by the coaching firms) that coaching, independent of the client, can bring about a sustainable change is at best elusive and at worst a fallacy'. According to Kohli (2016), when a coaching client (coachee) is unable to experience the promised change, the result is disappointment and future resistance toward coaching. This situation can be detrimental to coaches and the reputation of coaching itself, cautions Kohli (2016).

## Implications for practice

Therefore, the coach's role in reinforcing client interests/passion is thus crucial in achieving client satisfaction leading to sustained changes in client patterns of thinking and behaviours. The role of passion in sustainable psychological well-being is a well recognised phenomenon (Vallerand, 2012). The coach would do well working with client interests turning them into passion helping them to experience durable changes in realising goals. The Practitioner-researcher would like to state further that the evidence based goal-centred solution focused coaching approach used in the coaching intervention worked well in this case contributing to perceived sustained effects for most participants. This is in agreement with Grant's (2012) research finding indicating that the goal-focused coaching style is effective in facilitating goal attainment in coaching.

## Recommendations

To reduce the possibilities of practitioner-researcher-bias creeping in, further studies, similar to this, may be conducted by independent researcher other than the coach. There is ample scope for further research on this topic using different coaching approaches, different time periods and a variety of coaching situations and samples, to widen our knowledge of this phenomenon.

## Correspondence

**Ventaka Nanduri**, Department of Management Coaching, University of Stellenbosch Business School, Cape Town, South Africa.

## References

- Bennett, K. (2010). *Executive coaches' experience of developing their clients' self-coaching capacity* (Unpublished master's research report). Middlesex University.
- Bozer, G., Sarros, J.C. & Santora, J.C. (2013). The role of coachee characteristics in executive coaching for effective sustainability. *Journal of Management Development*, 33(3), 277–294.
- Costley, C., Elliott, G. & Gibbs, P. (2010). *Doing Work Based Research*. London: Sage
- De Haan, E., Duckworth, A., Birch, D. & Jones, C. (2013). Executive coaching outcome research: The contribution of common factors such as relationship, personality match, and self-efficacy. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 65(1), 40–57. doi:10.1037/a0031635.
- De Meuse, K.P. & Dai, G. (2009). *The effectiveness of executive coaching: What we can learn from coaching literature*. Retrieved 25 December 2016 from [www.kornferry.com/institute/download/download/id/17147/aid/298](http://www.kornferry.com/institute/download/download/id/17147/aid/298)
- Dixon, A. (2008). *Motivation and confidence: What does it take to change behaviour*. Retrieved 8 November 2017 from [https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/field\\_document/motivation-confidence-health-behaviour-kicking-bad-habits-supporting-papers-anna-dixon.pdf](https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/field_document/motivation-confidence-health-behaviour-kicking-bad-habits-supporting-papers-anna-dixon.pdf)
- Fieldman, D.C. & Lankau, M.J. (2005). Executive coaching: A review and agenda for future research. *Journal of Management*, 31(6), 829–848 doi: 10.1177/0149206305279599
- Finn, F., Mason, C. & Griffin, M. (2006, July). *Investigating change over time – the effects of executive coaching on leaders' psychological states and behaviour*. Paper presented at the 26th International Congress of Applied Psychology, Athens, Greece.
- Gegner, C. (1997). *Coaching: theory and practice* (Unpublished Master's thesis). University of San Francisco.

- Grant, A.M. (2012). An integrated model of goal focused coaching. *International Coaching Psychology Review*, 7(2), 146–165.
- Grant, A.M. (2013). The efficacy of coaching. In J. Passmore, D.B. Peterson & T. Freire (Eds.), *The Wiley-Blackwell handbook of the psychology of coaching and mentoring* (pp.15–39). West Sussex: Wiley & Sons.
- Grant, A.M. (2016). *The efficacy of executive coaching: The Wiley-Blackwell handbook of the psychology of coaching and mentoring* (pp.15–39). New York: Wiley & Sons.
- Grover, S. & Furnham, A. (2016). Coaching as a developmental intervention in organisations: A systematic review of its effectiveness and the mechanisms underlying it. *PLoS ONE*, 11(7), e0159137. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0159137
- Harrington, A. (2009). *Investigate the impact of coaching on adults returning to an educational environment and experiencing coaching for the first time as part of a personal development programme* (Unpublished Master's research report). Middlesex University.
- Hicks, A., Carter, A. & Sinclair, A. (2013). *Impact of coaching on employee well-being, engagement and satisfaction*. Retrieved 4 November 2017 from <http://www.employment-studies.co.uk/system/files/resources/files/hrp8.pdf>
- Kohli, A. (2016). The fallacy of sustainable change. *In effective coaching, and the fallacy of sustainable change: Management for professionals* (pp.35–56). doi: 10.1007/978-3-319-39735-1. New York: Springer.
- Koroleva, N. (2016). A new model of sustainable change in executive coaching: Coachees' attitudes, required resources and routinisation. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring*, 10, 84–97.
- Ogden, J. (2009). A psychological model of behaviour change and a role for life events. *The European Health Psychologist*, 11 (June, 2009). Retrieved 10 October 2017 from <http://www.ehps.net/ehp/index.php/contents/article/viewFile/ehp.v11.i2.p30/945>.
- Outhwaite, A. & Bettridge, N. (2009). From the inside out: Coaching's role in transformation towards sustainable society. *The Coaching Psychologist*, 5(2), 76–89.
- Passmore, J. & Fillery-Travis, A. (2011). A critical review of executive coaching research: A decade of progress and what's to come. *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*, 4(2), 70–88. doi: 10.1080/17521882.2011.596484
- Pietkiewicz, I. & Smith, J.A. (2014). A practical guide to using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis in qualitative research. *Czasopismo Psychologiczne – Psychological Journal*, 20(1), 7–14.
- Prochaska, J.O., Norcross, J.C. & DiClemente, C.C. (2013). Applying the stages of change. *Psychotherapy in Australia*, 19(2)
- Rooney, P. (2005). *Researching from inside: Does it produce validity?* Retrieved 27 October 2014 from <https://level3.dit.ie/html/issue3/Rooney4.htm>
- Smith, J.A., Jarman, M. & Osborn, M. (1999). Doing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. In M. Murray & K. Chamberlain (Eds.) *Qualitative Health Psychology* (pp.218–240). London: Sage.
- Smith, J.A. (2011). Evaluating the contribution of the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. *Health Psychology Review*, 5(1), 9–27.
- Smither, J.W., London, M. F., Flautt, R., Vargas, Y. & Kucine, I. (2003). Can coaching with an executive coach improve multisource rating over time? *Personal Psychology*, 56, 23–43.
- Soneh, S.C., Coultas, C.W., Lacerenza, C.N., Marlow, S.L., Lauren E. Benishek, L.E. & Salas, E. (2015). The power of coaching: A meta-analytic investigation. *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*, 8(2), 73–95.
- Vallerand, R.J. (2012). *The role of passion in psychological wellbeing*. Retrieved 17 September 2015 from <https://pswib.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/2211-1522-2-1>
- Wasylshyn, K.M. (2003). Executive coaching: An outcome study. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 55(2), 94–106
- Whyteco. (2014). *Coaching sticks (Whyteco Research Bulletin)*. Retrieved 25 August 2015 from [http://whyteco.com.au/PDFs/Research\\_Bulletin\\_No.14\\_Mar14%20WEB.pdf](http://whyteco.com.au/PDFs/Research_Bulletin_No.14_Mar14%20WEB.pdf)

# Coaching for health and lifestyle change: Theory and guidelines for interacting and reflecting with women about their challenges and aspirations

Reinhard Stelter & Vinnie Andersen

---

*Coaching is increasingly applied throughout life and work domains as a relatively new way to support the learning and development of individuals and groups. In a research project group coaching was applied and explored with menopausal women (45 to 55 years of age). The goal of the research project was to support women in their attempts to remain physically active and to develop and maintain a healthy lifestyle. The main objective of this article is to take a close look at the best way to achieve this – not by telling the women what to do or by pushing them towards specific goals, but by inviting them into a space of common reflection and joint action. In that sense, the interaction (not intervention) will take its point of departure in a broad, collaboratively inspired approach that is broader in focus than widespread interventions, which are often exclusively based on motivational interviewing. The goal of this article is to present a theoretical basis and practice guidelines for a series of group coaching dialogues and to serve as an inspiration for the further development of the reader's own practice.*

**Keywords:** *Motivational interviewing; health coaching; group coaching; lifestyle change; collaborative practice; lifeworld; self-determination theory; wellbeing; positive psychology; stages of change.*

FOR SEVERAL YEARS, professionals within sports, health and clinical psychology have been searching for intervention methods that are more effective than expert advice. The health benefits of, for example, physical activity, healthy eating habits and non-smoking has become common knowledge – highly influenced by mass media coverage, without, however, resulting in a healthier population where virtually everyone is physically active, controls their body weight and thrives at work and in their personal life. Hence, psychologists have developed new forms of developmental dialogues as a way to help people help themselves. As part of this effort, motivational interviewing has been applied as a conversational tool, especially in relation to clients' development of a healthier lifestyle. The present study explores new ways to improve the participants' motivation and maintenance of a physically active and healthy lifestyle in accordance with official public health guidelines. The success of the *interven-*

*tion* depends on the willingness and determination of the participants and focuses in particular on the positive impact of the group setting on motivation and readiness to change.

The article argues for a new type of collaborative, group-based dialogue with people who are interested and engaged in striving for a healthy lifestyle with a focus on building new habits in regard to physical activity, nutrition and general wellbeing.

## **Moving beyond motivational interviewing**

Health research generally has a strong focus on types of intervention with a narrow path to behavioural change. One of the frequently applied approaches is Motivational Interviewing (MI) (Britt et al., 2004; Dimarco et al. 2009; Hardcastle & Hagger, 2011; Martins & McNeil, 2009; Miller & Rollnick, 2012; Rollnick, Miller & Butler, 2007). In a review article on MI, Britt and colleagues (2004) highlighted MI as an improvement compared to advice-giving and

as a more motivating and involving way to make patients ready for health-related behaviour changes (see also Barnes & Ivezaj, 2015; Dilillo & West, 2011; Ekong & Kavookjian, 2016; Simmons & Wolever, 2013). Britt and colleagues (2004) emphasised that MI is not based on any specific theory but includes a number of theoretical concepts, such as Locus of Control, Theory of Reasoned Action, Social Cognitive Theory, Decisional Balance, Health Belief Model, Health Action Process Model, Self-Determination Theory and Self-Regulatory Model. As a key perspective in regard to building a relationship with the client, Britt and colleagues mentioned the importance of empathic processes based on Carl Rogers's client-centred approach. In their opinion, MI also provides health practitioners with a means of tailoring their interventions in a way that suits the patient's degree of readiness for change. The steps of the MI procedure are straightforward and are described by Miller and Rollnick (2012) as:

1. **Engaging:** The main aim of engaging is to form a relationship with the client in a non-directive way, which is based on empathy and the desire to understand clients from their own perspective, without a specific agenda.
2. **Focusing:** In this process, the coach supports and guides the client towards a target behaviour that is important to them. It is important to identify a target area that the client is ambivalent about, or where the client is struggling to make a change. At this stage it is vital to identify the real challenges related to the target area.
3. **Evoking:** This process aims to draw out the client's motivation by highlighting their personal reasons for and interests in behaviour change. The task of the coach is to support the client's ideas by reinforcing and summarizing their change talk and by not appearing as an expert. The goal is to support the client's motivation for change.
4. **Planning:** The goal of this process is to ensure that the client commits to the change agenda by asking questions that

activate the client's readiness for action planning, by helping the client plan for change, by revising doubtful or unstable plans and by developing additional change plans.

The authors of the present article support Rubak and colleagues' (2005) conclusion that MI is typically more effective than no treatment and than traditional advice-giving. However, two central aspects can be highlighted as the basis for further improvement of a dialogue towards lifestyle change in an adult population:

- MI and other cognitive-behaviour-based intervention methods focus too little on the subjects' *lifeworld* (Merleau-Ponty, 2012) and *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1992; Mukerji, 2014) and on their specific challenges, living conditions, experiences, social habits, practices, etc. Consequently, these aspects are not the main focus of attention for the health professional, for example, a health coach, counsellor or nurse. In a general practitioner setting MI might offer a helpful compromise, considering the time constraints. Although MI can be understood as non-judgemental, non-confrontational and non-adversarial, its dialogical orientation may be seen as more or less focused and goal-directed. The aim is to develop new and healthier behaviours. From a developmental coaching and counselling perspective, however, it seems necessary to provide a richer and longer-lasting opportunity for clients by working in depth with their life situation and its meaningfulness as regards specific possibilities and aspirations for lifestyle change. By focusing on meaning-making and collaborative dialogue and by viewing the life of the client in a broader perspective we assume it is possible to achieve more lasting and sustainable change with the client group in focus. From this point of view, the present article addresses lifestyle change in a broader perspective that embraces the client's life in full.
- A number of comparable studies in areas such as leadership and education (Alrø &



Dahl, 2015; Merriman et al., 2015; Sommers & Lawson, 2013; Stelter et al., 2011) have shown that group coaching may be a viable path for developing individuals in a more meaningful, in-depth and efficacious way. Considering the explosive rise of costs in the healthcare sector, it seems beneficial to search for cost-effective ways of promoting a healthy lifestyle. Some attempts are being made in this field. Armstrong and colleagues (2013, p.96) argued as follows:

*The importance of improved patient engagement has become increasing apparent, as lifestyle behaviours are a major factor in at least 80 per cent of chronic disease. Health and wellness coaching has been proposed as one approach to empower individuals to make choices that will improve their health and well-being. Group models would likely increase the availability, access, and potential population impact of coaching.*

Based on the understanding of the possible limitations of MI outlined above and inspired by the potential for enriching the developmental dialogue by taking a broader life-world perspective and utilising the catalysing impact of a peer group, this article describes the theoretical basis and specific guidelines for an interaction that draws on the existing knowledge in health research in an approach that includes clients as active and collaborative partners in the developmental dialogue.

### **Group coaching for health and lifestyle change**

Group coaching for health and lifestyle change has been part of a large research initiative under 'The University of Copenhagen Excellence Programme for Interdisciplinary Research (2016)' with the title 'Physical Activity and Nutrition for Health'. The research team, entitled the Copenhagen Women Study, decided to bundle its efforts on different health issues with a special focus on women (<http://cws.ku.dk>) and received grants totalling 3.4 million euros. The work

package that this project has been a part of focused on women before, during and after the menopausal transition (<http://cws.ku.dk/workpackages/wp2>). During the first part of the intervention, the women were enrolled in a physical activity training programme (e.g. spinning) with the aim of including this intervention in a number of physiological studies. After the end of such a training programme, the participants would normally leave the research project. This is where the group coaching project came in. The intention aimed to help women reflect on their experiences and to support them in continuing or reactivating their engagement in physical activity and healthy living. The project was divided into two research parts: a quantitative, quasi-experimental study and a qualitative interview study:

1. The project examined the effects of group coaching compared with a control group during an intervention period of three months.
2. It furthermore examined the participants' subjective experience with participating in group coaching and maintaining a physically active lifestyle compared with a control group.

The focus of this article is to describe the theoretical and practical framework of group coaching for health and lifestyle change: six group sessions of 90 minutes each with about five participants over a period of three months.

### **Theoretical framework and implications for practice**

The critique of MI will form the basis for developing a theoretical model and practical guidelines to inspire health and lifestyle change practitioners to implement an effective dialogue with their clients. As mentioned earlier, a group intervention might enable a new dimension in the change effort compared to individual dialogues. The main theoretical argument for a group intervention lies in the development of *social capital*, an 'enzyme' that can boost the change effort, as the individual group member realise that oth-

ers face similar challenges. The group members collaboratively develop new perspectives on their situation. In that sense, the group setting may enable the participants to mutually strengthen each other in the pursuit of an ambition that may be too difficult for any of them to reach on their own. Social capital is a theoretical concept that highlights the importance of social relationships as a kind of 'glue' in social networks and organisations on any level – from a small group to society at large. This perspective is gaining growing attention in regard to health promotion, on both a social network and a community level (Moore et al., 2013). The French sociologist P. Bourdieu (1983) defined social capital as:

*The aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition (p.248).*

In the following, some foundational theoretical dimensions of the author's concept of *third-generation coaching* (Stelter, 2014) will be unfolded. These factors are relevant both for the individual participant and for the group as an interactive and co-created social body:

1. **Meaning-making in dialogue:** Meaning-making is an existential premise for individuals' self-understanding and for social interactions. Finding what is meaningful in specific situations, through our actions and in life in general, is a fundamental basis of human viability. Meaning-making is a key concept that serves as the basis for co-creating in dialogue and thus as a prerequisite for understanding oneself, one's lifeworld and the specific contexts and conditions of one's life. Meaning emerges through two separate and, in practice, intertwined processes: through bodily-sensory experiencing in and of the situation and through interactions in relationships and dialogue. Building on the link between existential-phenomenological (Depraz et al., 2003; Merleau-Ponty, 2012) and social-constructionist, co-creative theory (Gergen, 2009) the approach enables a fruitful and transformative dialogue for all participants with meaning as a key pillar of the group dialogue.
2. **Values – a basis for action:** Our current times promote a sense of restlessness where life is not always perceived as meaningful but instead often renders us slaves to self-control, self-surveillance and our own performance drive (Han, 2015). We fail to make time for reflection – an activity that needs to be reintroduced and vitalised. Reflecting on values provides a strong basis for individual agency. Values emerge when we immerse ourselves in what is meaningful and most important in our lives. Values also come to the forefront in conflict situations and acknowledged dilemmas. Examining values or central concepts and themes in life helps prepare the individual to act with confidence, consistence, and commitment (Kirkeby, 2009; Stelter, 2016b). Values are a key anchor point for our identity and form a link between our ethical convictions and our actions. Values can be defined as one specific foundation of personal identity and have an explicit impact on promoting an in-depth dialogue. Reflecting on values – for example, what does health mean to me? – leads to symmetrical and shared moments in the group dialogue.
3. **The narrative perspective – transformation through sharing:** Throughout history, people have told each other stories as a way to share important events, sorrows and joys. Narratives or stories help to shape our understanding of how we live, what we value, how we have changed and survived and how we manage to develop in the future (Bruner, 2002; Frank, 1995; Kraus, 2006). For the individual, narratives lay the foundation for creating and shaping oneself and for developing a sense of identity and self-understanding. In our hypercomplex world, where grand narratives have lost their power of identification or legitima-

tion, narratives can take on new meaning. Personal experiences and reflections enable the individual and the group to become active co-narrators in the dialogue, thus contributing and acting as mutually supportive partners, enabling each other to handle life and its particular challenges in a new and more adaptive way. The role of the narrative can be described as a way we speak to each other. Narratives help make meaning for an individual, while for a community they help establish a collective understanding. We develop through dialogue – individually and on a group level. Narratives are bearers of inherent values. Through the narrative we can express things that are important to us. As part of our dialogue practice, narratives and the narrative-co-creative approach lay a foundation that integrates meaning-making and values into a coherent process.

### ***Third-generation group coaching practice***

This approach, which was developed by the first author (Stelter, 2014) is not a closed system or manual, but an integration of existential aspects with social-constructionist and narrative-collaborative approaches. The actual dialogue builds on the idea that the coaching participants construct their social reality in a collaborative process by listening to each other's stories, by sharing reflections and by supporting each other by acting as outsider witnesses (White, 2000, 2007). Through these interactions, the group members form shared meaning in regard to specific challenges and aspirations based on their earlier involvement in the physical activity programme. Some central guidelines and procedures for the coach are listed in Table 1 (see also Stelter et al., 2011):

Third-generation coaching is a further development of approaches from second-generation models and theories based on different systemic and solution-focused approaches. It involves a shift, however, in the coach's basic orientation and relation to the coachee. First-generation coaching (e.g.

MI) and second-generation coaching are characterised by a clear asymmetry between coach and coachee. The coach's basic position is to be neutral and not-knowing and to avoid being directly engaged or involved in the coachee's challenges. A third-generation coach will place a higher emphasis on being a fellow human being and a collaborative partner like all the other participants in a group coaching session (Stelter, 2016a). In certain stages and situations, the coaching conversation becomes a genuine dialogue between two or more human beings (cf. Buber, 1999), where the coach or one of the participants shares his or her considerations and reflections with a group member in order to serve as a witness and a co-creator of the dialogue. The coaching conversation can be described as a collaborative process, where all participants are experts within their respective domains and, at the same time, not-knowing at the outset of the conversation. The generated knowledge emerges between them in a dialogue process that gives rise to something new, possibly for all participants. As a prominent feature, the coaching dialogue revolves around values and the meaning-making aspects of life – aspects that are particularly central in people's lives – thus inviting all group members into a reflective space that transcends everyone's life and its challenges. The coach includes herself as a co-reflecting partner and a witness-thinker. Witness-thinking was described by Shotter (2006) as follows:

*Witness (dialogic)-talk/thinking occurs in those reflective interactions that involve our coming into living, interactive contact with an other's living being, with their utterance, with their bodily expressions, with their words, their 'works'. It is a meeting of outsides, of surfaces, of two kinds of 'flesh' (Merleau-Ponty, 1968), such that they come into 'touch' or 'contact' with each other. [...]*

*In the interplay of living moments intertwining with each other, new possibilities of relation are engendered, new interconnections are made, new 'shapes' of experience can emerge (p.600).*

**Table 1: Guidelines and procedures for the coach**

Both coach and coachee(s) are conversation partners. Each participant contributes to the joint process of meaning-making and the production of knowledge.
All participants strive to be flexible and willing to change; this makes mutual development possible and allows the participants to redefine their perspective and position.
Being attentive to others and to differences can be very fruitful for one's own development and learning.
All participants value the contribution of others to the dialogue and the knowledge that unfolds co-creatively, but also value potential and enduring differences.
Generous listening is central for mutual inquiry, where interested and sometimes naïve wondering helps to develop generative conversations.
The coach can support the process by paraphrasing the coachee's remarks or reflections and interpreting or shaping these reflections on one's own terms, including associative comments on specific reflections ('When you say that, it makes me think of ...').
Flexible attitudes make it possible to redefine one's own and others' positions, leaving one open to developing and to learning from others.
Through the use of questions, the coach can invite the participant(s) to consider a new perspective. The emphasis in this approach is on various types of circular questions, similar to those used in systemic coaching.
Through the use of metaphors the coach can invite the coachee to unfold sensuous reflections and expand the dimensions of actions, perceptions and thoughts.
By coupling landscapes of action (focus on purpose, goals and action) with landscapes of consciousness (focus on values, identity, aspiration, dreams and wishes) the interconnection between action and identity can be unfolded.
By linking specific values to individuals who are or may have been important to the coachee(s), the stories of the coachee(s) grow richer and more complex and may develop in a new direction (alternative storyline). This lets the coach strengthen the coachee's sense of identity in a scaffolding process that bridges the coachee's learning gap by recruiting lived experiences.
<p>The use of narrative documents – a poem, short essay, specific reflection or retelling of a story, either by the coach or the coachee(s), the coach encourages new ways of reflecting on challenging issues.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Identifying/highlighting a specific expression or phrase used by the coachee: 'What expression or phrase caught your attention as you listened to the story?'</li> <li>■ Asking others to imagine being the coachee: What kind of picture do you get of the coachee's life, identity or way of relating to things in general? What does this expression or phrase reveal about the coachee's intentions, values, attitudes, aspirations, hopes, dreams or commitments?</li> <li>■ Relating an expression or phrase to one's own life: How does that expression/phrase resonate with aspects of your own life? What kinds of ideas about your own intention, values, attitudes etc., struck you while listening to the story? How might elements of this story be important to your life, career, etc. – and why?</li> <li>■ Description of one's own response to the story: How were you touched by an expression, a phrase or the story as a whole? Where do your own experiences with the story lead you? What kinds of changes do you notice in yourself?</li> </ul>

It is important to underline that it is not only the coach who strives to be a witness-thinker; in fact, all the group members benefit from doing so, as it helps to intensify the dialogue and one's understanding of oneself and the other.

### Supporting theoretical approaches

Several approaches were included as supplements to the described theoretical framework of third-generation coaching and its practice: (1) Self-determination theory; (2) Stages of Change model; (3) A broad understanding of mental and physical health; and (4) Features from positive psychology. The following section offers a brief presentation and discussion of these four theoretical aspects and their implications for the practice of the health coach or consultant.

### Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2017) is widely used to describe and explain motivational processes across a variety of areas (e.g. work, healthcare, education, psychotherapy, sport and physical activity). According to SDT, motivational processes are formed on a continuum from intrinsic (inherently driven) to extrinsic (stimulated by external sources) motivation. Ryan and Deci (2000) highlighted three psychological needs as fundamental to intrinsic motivation: (1) autonomy; (2) competence; and (3) relatedness.

In the group coaching process we highlighted these aspects in the following way. In regard to *autonomy* we helped to explore the personal values and meaningfulness of the individual coaching participant: how do I want to engage in physical activity and other lifestyle changes on the basis of my needs, attitudes and values? In regard to *competence* we supported the coaching participants in becoming aware of what they actually enjoy to do when they are physical active or to focus on other activities in regard to their health and wellbeing. And in regard to *relatedness* we included the group in an effort to help all participants restore their memory, experiences and expectations, share their stories and develop new perspectives and views on their life and which possible changes they wish to make and have the energy to do.

### Transtheoretical model – stages of change model

As a guiding theoretical framework, the Stages of Change Model (Prochaska, Norcross & DiClemente, 1994; Prochaska & Prochaska, 2016) has often been used to help shed light on the challenges faced by a person who is moving towards a healthier lifestyle. The stages in the model are defined as precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, maintenance and relapse.

The model has been criticised by several authors (Littell & Girvin, 2002; Whitelaw et al., 2000) for its limited practical utility in regard to the validity of stage assessments. As with other stage models, the critique focused on the oversimplification in regard to the complexities of behavioural change, which might be better approached as a process with all the ups and downs that the individual goes through. West (2005) suggested an alternative model:

*The model needs to consider the difference between desire and value attaching to a specific behaviour (smoking a cigarette) vs. a label (being a smoker). Lasting behaviour change relies on the balance of motivational forces regarding the specific behaviour consistently favouring the alternative whenever the opportunity to engage in it arises. The model of change needs to describe and explain how this occurs (p.1038).*

The Stages of Change model was only used as an explanatory tool in the dialogue with the coaching group participants. We appreciated the heuristic value of the model, because it helped to portray change as an individually challenging process and because it promoted a less pejorative view of people who relapse or who struggle to achieve a lifestyle change. We used the model to help the participants understand what they might go through, what kinds of barriers they might encounter, and that relapse can be part of the change process. It may also be helpful for the coach to understand which phase the individual participants were in, and what might be the necessary subsequent step on their way forward.

## Understanding of mental and physical health

Health is much more than absence of illness, pain or minor malfunction. We were inspired by the Antonovsky's (1987) salutogenetic concept, where the focus is not on disease, on pathogenesis, but on two fundamental aspects that form the basis for a broader understanding of health: first, he draws attention to the concept of *generalised resistance resources*, which refers to biological, material and psychosocial factors, such as ego-strength, money and social support, that help people perceive their lives as consistent, structured and understandable. We saw the coaching group as a *resistance resource* that might help the participants see themselves as part of a peer group. For us, the most important factor in Antonovsky's approach was his emphasis on a *sense of coherence*, which includes comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness. These components refer to the participants' ability to see their lives in a broader perspective, where even inclemencies and detours might make sense. This approach is further supported by research on resilience, a research area of growing interest, where the interrelatedness between physical health and mental wellbeing becomes obvious (Zautra, Hall & Murray, 2008). Reivich and Shatté (2002) defined resilience:

*as the basic strength underpinning all the positive characteristics in a person's emotional and psychological makeup. A lack of resilience is the major cause of negative functioning. Without resilience there is no courage, no rationality, no insight. It is the bedrock on which all else is built (p.59).*

Reivich and Shatté underlined people's ability to see the interconnectedness between thoughts and feelings, to gain insight into one's own convictions and to look for alternative explanations when the going gets tough. Some of these ideas were integrated into our health coaching effort with a special focus on relationships, meaning and personal strength.

## Features from positive psychology

In regard to our final theoretical source, we used features from positive psychology to support the participants in taking a closer look at their *character or signature strength* and virtues (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) with the intention of finding their personal anchor in terms of what they appreciate most and how they intend to move forward on their health and lifestyle agenda. According to this positive psychology theory, people have five signature strengths, which Linley (2008) defined – similar to our understanding – as learned behaviour that helps individuals identify what provides or blocks their energy. In that sense, a focus on strength and virtues relates to the emphasis in third-generation coaching on values and meaning-making as an important means for the participants to find personal engagement and the readiness to act. Other elements from positive psychology have also served as an inspiration, including mindfulness, which can be seen as a resilience and self-regulating factor that improves one's ability to be present in the here-and-now (Childs, 2007). The final elements associated with positive psychology were *hope, optimism* and *attribution pattern*. Even someone with a tendency towards a negative attribution style can actually learn to be more optimistic and hopeful (Kobau et al., 2011; Seligman, 1998). In the third-generation coaching, the coach supports such a change in attribution style by drawing attention to situations where the participant actually was successful, satisfied and happy about specific events and new action patterns.

## Individual sessions

The main challenge in a research project such as this was that due to randomisation, the participants have not actively chosen to participate in a coaching group. They gave their consent to be part of the project, and they were selected to join a coaching group while others (initially) wound up in the control group (this latter group was later offered to take part in a workshop on health and lifestyle change). From that perspective, all sessions were organised around two compo-

nents: (1) Psychoeducation in the form of a brief lecture presented by the coach; and (2) the actual coaching session. In the introduction to the first session, the participants were informed about ethical issues (confidentiality, respect for others) and some specific ideas and rules in regard to the chosen form of group coaching (active listening, outsider witnessing, sharing with each other). Some further details concerning the composition of the individual session:

1. To form common ground for all participants, each session was introduced by about 15 minutes of *psychoeducation*. Here, the coach presented basic theoretical ideas from the Stages of Change model (first session), self-determination theory (second session), mental and physical health and resilience (third session), strength and virtues (fourth session), mindfulness (fifth session) and, finally, hope and optimism (sixth and final session). These short introductions to a specific topic helped to organise the subsequent coaching dialogue on a provided topic and helped the group participants develop a joint theme for dialogue going forward. Furthermore, each topic was also addressed in a small homework assignment to serve further promote individual reflections. For example, the homework in relation to the topic of strength in session four was, 'How can you use your strength more consciously in your life and in relation to the changes you wish to make? Keep both your mental and physical health in mind!'
2. The coaching sessions had the following structure: each session began with the group participants' reflections since the previous meeting, followed by the psychoeducation segment. The theme of the specific session led to a number of reflections and issues for group work, where the women learned to share their thoughts, specific challenges and ideas

for possible future actions. During this part of the session, third-generation coaching, with its focus on collaborative practices, was used as the main approach supported by the specific theoretical orientation of the given session. The session concluded with a segment where the participants were asked what each of them would be taking home as their key focus point, learning or issue for further reflection and action. Finally, the homework assessment for the next session – based on the topic of the current session – was handed out.

### Conclusion

A group coaching setting clearly has both benefits and challenges. The immediate benefit was that the participants became aware that they were not alone with their challenge. A challenge in group work was the dynamics at play between the participants and within the group as a whole. In practice, it may be beneficial to select participants based on their earlier engagement in physical activity, socialisation in regard to physical activity and their stage in the menopausal transition. The results of this research will be published in a subsequent article (Elsborg, Andersen & Stelter, submitted).

### Authors

**Reinhard Stelter & Vinnie Andersen**, Department of Nutrition, Exercise and Sport (NEXS), University of Copenhagen.

The project was part of the 'Copenhagen Women Study' financed by The University of Copenhagen Excellence Programme for Interdisciplinary Research (2016).

### Correspondence

Professor Reinhard Stelter, Coaching Psychology Unit, Dept. of Nutrition, Exercise and Sports, University of Copenhagen, Nørre Allé 51, DK-2200 Copenhagen N; email: rstelter@nexs.ku.dk

## References

- Adams, J. & White, M. (2005). Why don't stage-based activity promotion interventions work? *Health Education Research*, 20, 237–243.
- Alrø, H. & Dahl, P. (2015). Dialogic group coaching – inspiration from transformative mediation. *Journal of Workplace Learning*, 27(7), 501–513.
- Antonovsky A. (1987). *Unraveling the mystery of health: How people manage stress and stay well*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass
- Armstrong, C., Wolever, R., Manning, L. et al (2013). Group health coaching: Strengths, challenges, and next steps. *Global Advances in Health and Medicine*, 2(3), 95–102.
- Barnes, R. & Ivezaj, V. (2015). A systematic review of motivational interviewing for weight loss among adults in primary care. *Obesity Reviews: An Official Journal of the International Association for the Study of Obesity*, 16(4), 304–18.
- Britt, E., Hudson, S.M. & Blampied, N.M. (2004). Motivational interviewing in health settings: A review. *Patient Education and Counseling*, 53, 147–155.
- Bourdieu, P. (1983). Forms of capital. In J. C. Richards (Ed.). *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*. New York: Greenwood Press.
- Bourdieu P. (1992). *The logic of practice*. (Repr.). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Bruner, J. (2002). *Making stories – Law, literature, life*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Buber, M. (1999). The genuine dialogue. In J. Buber Agassi (Ed.), *Martin Buber on psychology and psychotherapy: Essays, letters, and dialogue*. (The Estate of Martin Buber). New York: Syracuse University Press.
- Childs, D. (2007). Mindfulness and the psychology of presence. *Psychology and Psychotherapy*, 80(3), 367–376.
- Depraz, N., Varela, F.J. & Vermersch, P. (2003). *On becoming aware*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Dillillo, V. & West, D. (2011). Motivational interviewing for weight loss. *The Psychiatric Clinics of North America*, 34(4), 861–9.
- Dimarco, I., Klein, D., Clark, V. & Wilson, G. (2009). The use of motivational interviewing techniques to enhance the efficacy of guided self-help behavioral weight loss treatment. *Eating Behaviors*, 10(2), 134–6.
- Ekong, G. & Kavookjian, J. (2016). Motivational interviewing and outcomes in adults with type 2 diabetes: A systematic review. *Patient Education and Counseling*, 99(6), 944.
- Elsborg, P., Andersen, V. & Steller, R. (submitted). *The effects on mental health of group coaching following a physical activity intervention for women undergoing menopause*.
- Frank, A.W. (1995). *The wounded storyteller: Body, illness, and ethics*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Gergen, K.J. (2009). *An invitation to social construction*. London: Sage.
- Han, B.-C. (2015). *Burnout society*. Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Hardcastle, S. & Hagger, M.S. (2011). 'You Can't Do It on Your Own': Experiences of a motivational interviewing intervention on physical activity and dietary behavior. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise* 12, 314–323.
- Kirkeby, O.F. (2009). *The new proreptics – The concept and the art*. Copenhagen: Copenhagen Business School Press.
- Kobau, R., Seligman, M.E.P., Peterson, C., Diener, E., Zack, M., Chapman, D. & Thompson, W. (2011). Mental health promotion in public health: Perspectives and strategies from positive psychology. *American Journal of Public Health*, 101(8), e1-9.
- Kraus, W. (2006). The narrative negotiation of identity and belonging. *Narrative Inquiry*, 16(1), 103–111.
- Littell, J.H. & Girvin, H. (2002). Stages of change. A critique. *Behavior Modification*, 26, 223–273.
- Linley, A. (2008). *Average to A+: Realising strengths in yourself and others*. Coventry: CAPP Press.
- Martins, R.K. & McNeil, D.W. (2009). Review of Motivational Interviewing in promoting health behaviors. *Clinical Psychology Review* 29, 283–293.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (2012). *Phenomenology of perception*. London: Routledge.
- Merriman, D., Coddling, R., Tryon, G. & Minami, T. (2016). The effects of group coaching on the homework problems experienced by secondary students with and without disabilities. *Psychology in the Schools*, 53(5), 457–470.
- Miller, W.R. & Rollnick, S. (2012). *Motivational Interviewing* (3rd edn.). New York: Guilford Press.



- Moore, S., Salsberg, J. & Leroux, J. (2013). Advancing social capital interventions from a network and population health perspective. In I. Kawachi, S. Takao & S.V. Subramanian (Eds.). *Global perspectives on social capital and health*. New York: Springer.
- Mukerji, C. (2014). The cultural power of tacit knowledge: Inarticulacy and Bourdieu's habitus. *American Journal of Cultural Sociology*, 2(3), 348–375.
- Peterson, C. & Seligman, M.E.P. (2004). *Character strengths and virtues: A handbook and classification*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Prochaska, J.O., Norcross, J.C. & DiClemente, C.C. (1994). *Changing for good: The revolutionary program that explains the six stages of change and teaches you how to free yourself from bad habits*. New York: W. Morrow.
- Prochaska, J.O. & Prochaska, J.M. (2016). *Changing to thrive*. Center City, MN: Hazeldon Publishing.
- Reivich, K. & Shatté, A. (2002). *The resilience factor, Seven keys to finding your inner strength and overcoming life's hurdles*. New York: Broadway Books.
- Rollnick, S., Miller, W.R. & Butler, C.C. (2007). *Motivational interviewing in health care: Helping patients change behavior*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Rubak, S., Sandbaek, A., Lauritzen, T. & Christensen, B. (2005). Motivational interviewing: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *British Journal of General Practice*, 55, 305–312.
- Ryan, R.M. & Deci, E.L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 68–78.
- Ryan, R.M. & Deci, E.L. (2017). *Self-determination theory: Basic psychological needs in motivation, development, and wellness*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Seligman, M. (1998). *Learned optimism*. New York: Pocket Books.
- Simmons, L. & Wolever, R. (2013). Integrative health coaching and motivational interviewing: Synergistic approaches to behavior change in healthcare. *Global Advances in Health and Medicine*, 2(4), 28–35.
- Sommers, J. & Lawson, K. (2013). Learning from within: Peer-based group coaching among undergraduate students. *Global Advances in Health and Medicine*, 2(Suppl), P01.04.
- Stelter, R., Nielsen, G. & Wikman, J.M. (2011). Narrative-collaborative group coaching develops social capital: A randomized control trial and further implications of the social impact of the intervention. *Coaching – Theory, Research and Practice*, 4(2), 123–137.
- Stelter, R. (2014). *A guide to third generation coaching: Narrative-collaborative theory and practice*. Dordrecht: Springer Science+Business Media B.V. doi: 10.1007/978-94-007-7186-4.
- Stelter, R. (2016a). The coach as a fellow human companion. In L.E. van Zyl, M.W. Stander & A. Odendaal (Eds.), *Coaching psychology: meta-theoretical perspectives and applications in multi-cultural contexts* (s.47–66). Basel: Springer. doi:10.1007/978-3-319-31012-1\_3
- Stelter, R. (2016b). Working with values in coaching. In T. Bachkirova, G. Spence & D. Drake (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of coaching* (s.333–347). London: Sage Publications.
- Vansteenkiste, M., Williams, G. C. & Resnicow, K. (2012). Toward systematic integration between self-determination theory and motivational interviewing as examples of top-down and bottom-up intervention development: Autonomy or volition as a fundamental theoretical principle. *The International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*, 9(23). www.ijbnpa.org/content/9/1/23.
- White, M. (2007). *Maps of narrative practice*. London: Norton.
- Whitelaw, S., Baldwin, S., Bunton, R. & Flynn, D. (2000). The status of evidence and outcomes in Stages of Change research. *Health Education Research*, 15, 707–718.
- Zautra, A. J., Hall, J.S. & Murray, K.E. (2008). Resilience: A new integrative approach to health and mental health research. *Health Psychology Review*, 2(1), 41–64.

# One-to-one coaching as a catalyst for personal development: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of coaching undergraduates at a UK university

Natalie Lancer & Virginia Eatough

---

**Objectives:** *This paper examines the experience of nine undergraduates who had six coaching sessions over an academic year. It is part of a wider study which explores how young people experience and understand personal growth in the context of university life.*

**Design:** *A qualitative, longitudinal design was employed and semi-structured interviews were used. The transcribed interviews were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), an experiential approach which focuses on how individuals make sense of a particular experience in a specific context.*

**Methods:** *A volunteer sample of nine students, across various Arts and Social Science subjects, was recruited in a Russell Group university and each student received six one-to-one professional coaching sessions in person and/or by Skype.*

**Findings:** *The students felt that the coaching sessions sped up the growth that would have happened eventually, and thus they could put into practice what they had learned much earlier than they could otherwise have done. Coaching benefitted the students in four broad ways: it gave them an increased sense of control over their work and other areas; it helped them achieve greater balance and focus; it increased their confidence; and enabled them to take new perspectives on various issues.*

**Conclusions:** *Coaching helped the undergraduates address common concerns such as time management, stress, social relationships and confidence. Universities could enhance the student experience if they helped students address these concerns, perhaps by training personal tutors to take a coaching approach or by giving students access to professional coaches as a widening or pre-emptive component of their psychological services provision.*

**Keywords:** *Coaching; Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis; positive psychology; personal development; emerging adulthood; higher education.*

THE BENEFITS of both one-to-one and group coaching for students have been demonstrated in numerous studies. However, most of these have used quantitative designs and measures such as the General Health Questionnaire (Short et al., 2010). These studies are useful as they make clear how coaching affects students in particular domains. For example, in an early study, Grant (2003) found that group coaching for postgraduate mature students was associated with significantly higher levels of goal attainment, along with improvements in metacognitive processing (self-reflection and

insight) and mental health (lower depression, stress, and anxiety). Sue-Chan and Latham (2004) compared grades attained and satisfaction for MBA students coached by an external coach with those coached by peers and found that both measures were greater when coached by external coaches. Thus it seems there are specific benefits for using external or professional coaches.

Coaching studies on undergraduate students have tended to focus on deprived or 'special case' populations. For example, Greene (2004) found that one-to-one coaching helped economically and socially disad-

vantaged undergraduates gain confidence and reduce anxiety. Swartz et al. (2005) found that coaching helped undergraduates with ADHD organise themselves and make positive changes and Van Zandvoort et al. (2009) found that obese female university students attributed their adoption of healthier lifestyles and enhanced self-acceptance to coaching. Robinson and Gahagan (2010) found that coaching resulted in 40 per cent fewer suspended students from a group of academically underperforming students.

There have been a limited number of coaching studies on non 'special case' and non-clinical students, which is surprising given that coaching aims to help all types of non-clinical people attain goals and achieve enhancement of their life experience in personal and/or professional spheres (Grant, 2003). The few studies undertaken include Franklin and Doran's (2009) work which found that two different coaching programmes increased academic performance; Short et al. (2010) found that peer coaching significantly reduced the psychological distress of a group of psychology undergraduate students, compared to a control group whilst Fried and Irwin (2016) found that stress management and academic performance improved as a result of coaching sessions compared to a control group.

We suggest that the breadth and depth of the existing literature is limited both due to the nature of the measures used (such as academic performance) in the quantitative studies and due to the small number of qualitative studies undertaken. These studies give an overview of coaching but due to their design cannot explain how coaching is experienced and what it is 'like'.

There are, however, plenty of qualitative studies which focus on the experience of education (unrelated to coaching) and coaching in contexts other than education. For example, the focus of specific studies using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) include the personal growth of mature university students (Stevens, 2003) and the experiences of coaching in a business setting (Gyllensten et

al., 2010). However, there is a dearth of studies that use qualitative approaches to explore coaching in university settings. We posit that IPA's focus on the experience of the participants' world, as lived through their eyes, is important when considering how coaching affects students as it provides insight into their perspective as told through their words. IPA's method of elucidating shared themes is helpful when considering how the group as a whole benefited from coaching. This analysis can be used to tentatively consider how other similar groups of people in a similar context may benefit from coaching.

Arnett (2000) identifies the ages from 18 to 22, the age range of all the undergraduates in this current study, as a distinct life stage of 'emerging adulthood' complete with its own dilemmas to explore. Thus we argue that the reasons to offer coaching to undergraduates are compelling, not only might it affect academic scores and confidence, but most undergraduates are making the transition into emerging adulthood replete with its own distinct issues.

The fact that students are at time in their lives where support could be beneficial is not the only reason why universities might offer coaching to their undergraduates. In an age of market forces within the university context, students are 'consumers' (Naidoo et al., 2011) and universities are having to work hard to attract the best. Jackson (2003) estimates that one in four students in the UK drops out. In a separate study, Yorke and Longden (2004) found that students' experience of the course and institution was one of four main reasons for student withdrawal. This, coupled with the fact that tuition fees are increasing in the UK, means that universities are going to have to work hard to make sure all students have a positive experience to both attract and retain them. There is evidence to suggest that coaching can increase student retention. A US Government study found that undergraduates who received individual coaching for two semesters were significantly more likely to remain at college, up to 18 months after the intervention, com-

pared to those who had not received coaching (US Department of Education, 2012). Furthermore, positive student perceptions of their learning environment had a stronger positive correlation with academic outcomes than previous school achievement (Lizzio et al., 2002). Therefore, universities keen to maximise university students' academic outcomes would be wise to consider how to increase these positive student perceptions.

The growing number of student users accessing counselling services (Turner et al., 2007) may reflect a gap in student support systems. Coaching in the university context may therefore 'nip in the bud' issues which could otherwise develop into problems requiring counselling services and can thus be viewed as a preventative tool that addresses student health and wellbeing.

The current research is the first study from a series exploring the personal growth of undergraduates who volunteered to participate in one-to-one coaching sessions over one year. The second study explores the experience of undergraduates who had two years of coaching.

## Methods

### Design

A qualitative, longitudinal design was employed and data was gathered using semi-structured interviews at four time points over 12 months. The transcribed interviews were analysed using IPA, looking first idiosyncratically, case-by-case and then moving across the data set to make comparisons in what is shared and what is variable. IPA is an interpretative, experiential approach which focuses on how individuals make sense of a particular experience in a specific context. Analysis is a co-construction of knowledge between participant and researcher.

### Recruitment strategy and participants

Nine full-time undergraduates responded to a call to participate which was made in two ways, via the first author's presentation about the study at the beginning of an undergraduate lecture and via an email sent by the

subject administrator. Six of the participants were female and three were male; seven were first year students and two were second year students. The students were highly articulate and academically able. See Table 1 for further participant details.

### Procedure

Nine students from a Russell Group university, across various Arts and Social Science subjects, were recruited to receive six one-to-one professional coaching sessions in person and/or by Skype at the beginning of the 2014/2015 academic year. Ten coaches volunteered to give *pro bono* coaching in response to our notice posted on the European Mentoring and Coaching Council website and through the first author's professional network. The coaches could use whatever coaching approach they preferred. In coaching generally, many coaches use the 'systemic eclectic' approach (i.e. they develop their own philosophy and techniques as their knowledge and experience develops) to fit the context and the client (Lancer, Clutterbuck & Megginson, 2016).

After the researchers led a group briefing with coaches and students, each student was given an information sheet and signed a consent form. The first author paired the students with the coaches randomly. Each student had three one-hour coaching sessions between October and December 2014 and a further three one-hour coaching sessions between January and March 2015 in which they were free to discuss whatever issues they wanted. They were also free to change coaches if the pairings did not 'work', or if there was some other issue. The coaches attended a debrief led by the first author in March 2015.

Pseudonyms have been used throughout to protect anonymity (see Table 1). The study was approved by the Ethics Committee at Birkbeck, University of London and adhered to BPS ethical guidelines.

IPA requires the participants to have a degree of homogeneity in order for the essence of an experience to be distilled (Smith et al., 2009). Students were recruited

Table 1: Table of participant descriptors

Pseudonym	Year at university	Subject	Age	Gender
Zara	1st	Humanities	19	Female
Claire	1st	Humanities	20	Female
Natasha	1st	Humanities	20	Female
Lynn	1st	Arts	19	Female
Holly	1st	Arts	19	Female
Martin	2nd	Arts	20	Male
Colin	2nd	Humanities	25	Male
Hermione	2nd	Arts	21	Female
Neil	1st	Humanities	19	Male

from the same university and studying similar subjects. Additional homogeneity arose from the fact that they all had an interest in personal development and were invested in their coaching sessions as manifested both in terms of attending them all and also being keen to discuss them in their interviews.

**Data collection**

Each student was interviewed, using one-to-one, semi-structured, open-ended interviews by the first author at four time points: before their first coaching session, after their third, after their sixth and six months after their last coaching session in a comfortable university office. Thus although the data reflects the participants’ retrospective sense-making of their coaching experience, for the middle two interviews, the participants’ accounts were close in time to the coaching sessions they were describing. Using semi-structured interviews enabled rich data to be collected as although there was an interview schedule, it was used flexibly and we were open to the students speaking about what was important to them within the broad subject matter (Smith et al., 2009). The interview questions were designed to elicit concrete details of the lived experience of coaching and to enable the participants to reflect on

how coaching had affected them. The questions were similar at each time point and are listed below:

- Tell me about the coaching sessions in as much detail as possible.
- What does being coached feel like? What happens in a session or between sessions?
- Would you have learnt what you have learnt on your own eventually or has the coaching added something new?
- What were your expectations of the sessions? Are they what you expected?
- What general themes/topics have you covered?
- Last time, you described a typical day at university. Has the experience of coaching affected how you approach your day or made you think about your day differently?
- How do you think coaching is affecting you, if at all? What about in terms of: contributing to your developing personal growth, life plans, relationships, ambitions, confidence, outlook, academic performance, motivation, and sense of self?
- Overall how would you describe the coaching experience?
- When was the coaching conversation most and least productive?
- What do you think you have achieved through the coaching sessions?

- Do you think you would have achieved those things without the sessions?
- Would you have coaching again? If yes, why? If no, are you pleased you signed up to have coaching? Why wouldn't you have further coaching?
- Would you recommend coaching to your university friends?
- What will take the place of the coaching relationship for you?
- What do you think the future holds for you? Have your coaching sessions influenced your thinking on this?
- Did you think about your coaching sessions at all over the summer?
- Do you think you are still feeling the effects of the coaching sessions from last year?

The interviews were recorded on a digital recorder and transcribed.

### **Analysis**

The four interview scripts for each participant were considered as a joined-up longitudinal account. They were analysed using IPA. This involves capturing the detailed lived experience of participants on an idiographic level and then looking for patterning across cases. The first author immersed herself in the data, reading all four transcripts for one participant in one sitting whilst listening to the audio recording. Each transcript was then re-read and annotated line by line with key words, phrases, themes and ideas. The data was then transferred to a spreadsheet and each answer or question was allocated a cell. Thus, when quoting below we give cell numbers. Each interview was put on a different tab of the same document and each participant was allocated a new spreadsheet. Descriptive comments were noted in the cell to the right of the transcript, key phrases were highlighted in red and linguistic observations that gave insight into the participant's experience were noted (Smith et al., 2009). Emergent themes were noted to the left which were at a higher conceptual and psychological level than the descriptive themes. All the emergent themes were copied and pasted into one document, duplicates were removed

and themes were grouped into clusters. Some of the themes were used as labels for emergent themes, or a new label was found to capture the ideas of several emergent themes. Careful consideration was given to the superordinate themes. A table of superordinate themes and emergent themes was created, complete with an example quotation for each one and finally, the table was turned into a thematic diagrammatic structure. This was repeated for each participant. Each diagrammatic structure was then compared for each participant and similarities and differences were analysed, resulting in an overall thematic structure for the experience of coaching as an undergraduate for the whole group (see Table 2).

The first author was consciously reflexive about her experience as a student, university adviser and professional coach and was open to what the data said on its own terms (Smith et al., 2009). The second author acted as an independent verifier and both authors reflectively discussed the emergent and superordinate themes until consensus was reached. The findings were evaluated using Yardley's (2000) criteria for qualitative methodologies. Firstly, the analysts were sensitive to context by immersing themselves in the relevant philosophical, empirical and methodological literature. Secondly, they were sensitive to the data itself as analytical claims were grounded in the data with extracts used as evidence to aid transparency, allowing the reader to assess our interpretations. The effect of the researchers' characteristics on the participants both in interview and in terms of what was subjectively brought to the analysis was reflexively considered. Both analysts are committed researchers and interact with university students in their jobs, and, coupled with the fact that the first author is a professional coach, this meant that rapport could be established quickly and pertinent supplementary questions could be asked, giving rise to high quality data elicited at interview. The second author is an IPA expert and was a sounding board for the first author to check her analyses were rigorous. A mark of quality of analysis is that the reader gains an understanding of the phenomenon at hand and an appreciation of what it must be

Table 2: Superordinate and emergent themes

'It was a catalyst for development': Coaching as catalyst	
Superordinate theme one: 'It's like more of like a conversation with a friend' – reflections on the experience of coaching	Superordinate theme two: 'I'm 100 per cent sure I would not have done things that I've done this past six months without the coaching': coaching 'wins'
Emergent themes	Emergent themes
Coaching accelerating development	Control: Making tasks and problems more manageable
The nature of the coaching relationship	Balance and focus
Coaching compared with other support mechanisms	Confidence: self-belief, assertiveness and reassurance
Perceptions of which types of people would benefit from coaching and at what times in their lives	New perspectives

like to experience that phenomenon. Finally, the research should bring a new understanding to the topic and this study has added to the literature by focusing on a first-person perspective illuminating what the experience of coaching is like in a university context. Furthermore, if the findings resonate with the reader then this is an indication of the quality of research (Finlay, 2011).

**Findings**

The coaching experience was broadly similar for eight of the nine students. One student, Zara, had a very different experience which acted as a counterpoint, serving as a contrast to emphasise the salient features of the other participants' accounts. Therefore, although she appears less often in the following extracts, her data has an important role to play analytically. The phrase that captures the whole shared experience is *'It was a catalyst for development': Coaching as catalyst*. This experience was made up of two superordinate themes: *'It's like more of like a conversation with a friend' – reflections on the experience of coaching* and *'I'm 100 per cent sure I would not have done things that I've done this past six months without the coaching' – coaching 'wins'*.

The first superordinate theme is about the students' thoughts on the coaching experience including their relationship with their coach and for whom they felt coaching would be useful in future. This provides the context for the second superordinate theme which includes the content of the sessions and how this content was put to use in the students' lives. It was found that coaching helped the students gain control of their lives, achieve greater balance and focus, increase their confidence and see situations from new perspectives.

***Superordinate theme one: 'It's like more of like a conversation with a friend': Reflections on the experience of coaching***

This superordinate theme comprises the almost unanimous characterisation by the participants of coaching accelerating development. It also includes the nature of the coaching relationship, coaching compared with other support mechanisms, perceptions of which types of people would benefit from coaching and at what times in their lives.

***Coaching accelerating development***

There was a great deal of convergence in the idea that coaching sped up the participants'

development like a ‘catalyst’. This word was used spontaneously by one student and the sentiment was echoed by the others:

*I would say that it [coaching] was very helpful in that it was a catalyst for development.* Holly, 3D88

The word ‘catalyst’ is inextricably linked with temporality – that is, it makes a change or a realisation happen faster than it would have done otherwise. The language the students used to describe their coaching experience was very positive. As well as the word ‘helpful’ above, other words included ‘enjoyable’, ‘active’ and ‘engaging’. Claire exemplifies this position:

*I think without coaching you will take longer time to be confident. Coaching just shortened that time period.* Claire, 4D299

Neil explains that it would have taken longer for him to feel psychologically secure at university if he had not had coaching sessions, and he would have got worse grades:

*Yeah, I still think that without the first one [session] and the others, I suppose, I would have still been insecure about being at [at this university] or it would have taken me longer to get over and I might have got worse grades.* Neil, 4D102

Several students allude to the fact that coaching decreased the amount of time it would have taken for them to reach the same level of academic performance. Colin wished he could have been as motivated and organised in his first year, when he did not have coaching:

*Even though the workload was easier and stuff like that, I think if I had been able to approach my work like I did this year, last year, it means I could have come into this year and started straight away. I could have got better results in my first coursework.* Colin, 3D179

As well as speeding up growth, coaching added new ideas into the mix. The time man-

agement techniques that Colin’s coach introduced were new to him:

*It sounds so simple now that I’m thinking about it but at the time it was like a revelation. It really was.* Colin, 3D141

The word ‘revelation’ emphasises the fact that a new way of doing things was revealed to him. He felt that this new way directly improved his academic performance. Martin and Natasha both commented how coaching had stimulated their thinking and that new personal ground had been broken:

*It’s quite challenging but then it’s quite interesting as well because it’s making me think of things which I wouldn’t think of by myself.* Martin, 2D168

*It’s actually new stuff that I’ve, I’ve never thought about doing.* Natasha, 2D192

So we can see that some students believed that coaching accelerated their development and others felt it had introduced new elements of development.

#### *The nature of the coaching relationship*

The nature of the coaching relationship influenced how the students responded to the coaching and the benefit they derived from the sessions.

Neil felt that because the coach was a professional (a professional listener and motivator, in a sense) he could open up about himself more:

*Yes I feel like, you know, because he’s outside but it’s like when you go to a doctor about a physical problem you know they see it all the time, you know I mean I presume, like I mean yes I’m probably younger than a lot of the people that he sees professionally but, no, I just think I’m sure he can deal with this.* Neil, 2D231

Holly found she had an informal, friendly relationship with her coach:



*I found it to be a lot more informal and a lot more casual than I expected in a very good way. Holly, 3D88*

Claire valued the fact that she did not have any ties to the coach so she could really speak freely:

*I think I can feel release because I can talk with someone, yes. I don't know her, she doesn't know me. That we can discuss on one part of my life just only this part and yes. Claire, 2D216*

Many students experienced these feelings of 'relief' and 'release' in the process of unburdening themselves in the coaching sessions. Many students were surprised at how the coach was totally focused on them. Neil was touched by how deeply his coach was listening to him:

*Yes within the first, within the first one because it was at the point where he, where he suddenly, he would say something and it showed that he's listened so much you know like a really sort of in-depth comment so at that point you think you know he's not just, he's not just looking at his watch. Neil, 2D179*

For many students, opening up to their coach was a new experience. Hermione found the opening up that she was able to do, refreshing:

*Yes I am actually yes, they go pretty quickly and I guess I'm just not that used to talking about my feelings, not used to discussing that sort of thing so it's very refreshing to be able to open up and analyse things like that yes. Hermione, 2D66*

The word 'refreshing' alludes to reinvigorating the self and a restoring of energy. Many students felt that the sessions gave them a boost of energy. Other students also characterised coaching as a boost of motivation:

*It's kind of like a little cheerleader in a way, I think. So, having that as advice and then motivation... it's hard to explain. Lynn, 3D128*

The coach was a 'cheerleader' encouraging Lynn and motivating her.

The very act of having to report back in the next coaching session was inherently motivating:

*I think I had the potential to get there but I almost needed the external push, knowing that I would then have someone to tell that to, to relate that back, its more motivation to actually do it. Hermione, 2D116*

The students developed a relationship with the coach such that they did not want to fall short of their expectations:

*I think, I wouldn't like to, I wouldn't like to disappoint him, not that he'll be that bothered but, yes disappoint him in a very vague sense I mean I'm hardly that much of a part of his life. Neil, 2D209*

Zara was also motivated by coaching but found that the effect dissipated:

*Maybe it had short-term impacts like straight after you'd be like, 'Oh I should do this or get going with this.' Then it kind of fades after a bit until your next session. Zara 4D78*

Zara's image of the motivation fading contrasts with Natasha's belief that the coaching's impact would last forever:

*I, I don't think I will freak out because like the stuff I will carry with me for like the rest of my life, like these little tips. Natasha 2D166*

Thus it can be seen the students' perceived that coaching, in terms of having someone non-partisan with whom to discuss issues, enabled the students to open up and unburden themselves, which gave them the feeling of release and relief. Furthermore, having to report back to their coach in the following session gave the students an extra source of motivation to work on their goals.

#### *Coaching compared with other support mechanisms*

Many students made comparisons between

coaching and other forms of support including therapy and friendships. Several students expressed the view that the coaching relationship could be achieved within friendships:

*Mike was a lot like a friend in the way that he listened and was compassionate but yeah I think you can get that from actual unpaid friendships as well so that... Neil, 3D317*

However, Holly expressed the view that she was pleased that she was able to talk about friends to someone who was not her friend, precluding the need to 'bitch' about them:

*It's not the same as counselling but it was very cathartic to be able to talk about things that I didn't feel I had anybody else to talk to about them, so specifically I could always talk about friends that I didn't want, that I didn't want to have to bitch about a friend to somebody else, so that sort of thing was good. Holly, 3D88*

She compares coaching to counselling and draws out the cathartic nature of the sessions as a similarity. Martin draws a similar parallel:

*One of my friends is seeing a therapist now which isn't exactly the same but it's essentially the same sort of thing where you're talking. Martin, 3D161-162*

However, Natasha found the power relations within coaching to be quite different to those found in counselling. She found that coaching gave rise to a more equal relationship between professional and client, in contrast to her previous experience of therapy where she felt the therapist was writing notes about her, as if she were an object who was having therapy done to her, rather than with her:

*So different, I've, I don't feel like someone is domineering the conversation. It's like 'and how does this make you feel?' I hate questions like that, it's just. If I don't say how it makes me feel, I don't want to talk about how it makes me feel. It's completely different and people think therapy is like coaching, completely*

*wrong. It's like more of like a conversation with a friend, just having like a one on one conversation. It doesn't feel like someone's writing notes about you like, oh this is your reaction to this equals something. Natasha, 2D400*

Thus in the participants' eyes, the experience of coaching shared commonalities and differences to therapy and friendships.

*Perceptions of which types of people would benefit from coaching and at what times in their lives*

The students discussed whom coaching could benefit and when would be a good time in life to have coaching. Over half felt coaching would be useful for people who lacked confidence:

*I think generally people who are less confident or who have less insight into their own lives would be the kind of people who would benefit. Lynn, 3D136*

Confidence is a concept that permeated the interviews and is clearly something the students felt was very important to cultivate. It seems to hold the key to what was achieved through coaching and what was missing in a lot of students' lives.

The one student who did not benefit from coaching, Zara, attributed this to her inability to open up to a stranger, even though she wanted to talk about relationship issues:

*Yeah. I think maybe I'm just not comfortable talking about more personal stuff with people I don't know that well. Zara, 3D52*

Zara, did in fact, change coaches after two sessions, but she felt unable to disclose her issues to either of them. This suggests that it was not the coaches' skills that prevented her from opening up, but, as she herself identified, it is that she is not comfortable doing so which has important implications for whom coaching is offered in the future. In fact, Holly highlighted the ability to open up to be important for the success of coaching:

*I think it does take a certain openness of mind to do it. Holly, 3D208*

When considering the best time to have coaching, many students explained that due to the strangeness of university when they first arrived, the first year of university would be the most beneficial year which has direct implications for university policy:

*I think first year is a good time because it's kind of chaotic and a time for adjustment. I think in uni years, the first one is probably the best one and then probably the next best time would be like midlife crisis. Lynn, 3D130*

Indeed, half the students felt that any dramatic life transition would be a good time to have coaching:

*I can't really think on the top of my head of something more appropriate than, a significant transition like university or trying to find a job after university or, or maybe even somebody who's about to go into retirement as well, just when your complete lifestyle is going through a change or moving, you know when you do something big like a new town or move to a new country even, I think would be very useful. Holly, 3D232*

Thus the students felt that people who lacked confidence, but who had the ability to open up, would benefit the most from coaching, and that coaching would be most useful in the first year of university, and also at other transitional times in life.

This superordinate theme has encompassed the experience of coaching as a catalyst for development; the experience of the coaching relationship; the idea that coaching shared common features with other forms of support and that coaching would most benefit first year university students who lacked confidence and who could open up.

***Superordinate theme two: 'I'm 100 per cent sure I would not have done things that***

***I've done this past six months without the coaching' – coaching 'wins'***

This superordinate theme describes the four broad ways in which coaching benefited the students. Firstly, coaching gave the students a sense of control by imparting specific strategies to address tasks and problems. Secondly, coaching helped them achieve greater balance and focus in the different aspects of their lives. Thirdly, coaching sessions increased the students' confidence which led to them feeling more motivated. Finally, it helped the students see situations from new perspectives which empowered them to change behaviours, benefitting the students in different ways such as enjoying improved relationships.

***Control: Making tasks and problems more manageable***

Much of what was addressed and achieved through the coaching sessions for all participants was gaining a sense of control over their work and how to make tasks and problems more manageable. This, in turn, led to the avoidance of anxiety and, ultimately, a perceived improvement in academic work. Many students spoke of 'stress' and 'panic attacks' and welcomed methods to reduce these.

Control was partly achieved by introducing time management techniques, including breaking down tasks into smaller components and also simply realising that there is enough time in the day to do what is needed. Colin serves as an exemplar:

*Just setting small goals basically, setting small goals to do certain stuff by a certain date and just, generally just managing my time better, it's really just about setting small goals and then hitting them like doing the research for a paper and then like noting it out so doing a plan and then going on and actually finishing it and then handing in a first draft and getting it back and you know that sort of stuff helps immensely, immensely. Colin, 2D40*

The practical strategy of breaking issues down led to the students feeling less stressed about their work or aspects of their life:

*I think with outlook as well I'm more, because I can be quite a stressed person, quite an anxious person but I feel more relaxed than I was because I think I know how to address the problems if, Henry's taught me sort of how to break down issues in my life and aspects of my life to address them so it's made my outlook on life a lot more relaxed because I don't find it too hard to handle certain things. Hermione, 3D156*

Hermione became more relaxed as she had learnt how to handle issues that previously would have made her stressed. Natasha's coach worked with her to change her perception of how much time there is in the day, obviating the need to panic about not having enough time:

*Well it's just got me better at studying, I'm now not leaving everything till the last minute I'm taking more time, I'm like realising that I have a lot of time in the day so I can get quite a lot done and I previously thought that I couldn't so I'm better at studying and I can do the readings now, I can understand stuff better in lectures and seminars. Natasha, 3D124*

Thus, adopting time-management techniques helped her space out her work more and to decrease procrastination. Time seemed more stretched out for Natasha as she gained greater control over her work.

Both Natasha and Hermione talked about suffering from panic attacks and insomnia respectively:

*It's similar to a panic attack except all these bad scenarios keep going around in your head and you're just like, 'This is going to be the worst thing ever. When I have to go up and talk I'm going to fall, I'm going to forget my words. Everyone is going to laugh.' It's just not fun. One of the tips she gave me was to try and make myself laugh. It's weird because you look insane when you're doing it but that really does help. Natasha, 4D34*

*Things like breathing exercises. He had a whole list. I just remember a hot drink, a bath and*

*reading. Even though that's so simple, for some reason I just always remember that conversation and the list of things to help sleep. Hermione, 4D128.*

The students were given motivational tips which could be applied throughout their lives. Natasha kept coming back to a phrase that had been introduced in her coaching session 'you can have everything, just not right now' which became like a motivational mantra for her:

*Like this, this one phrase she said to me, it's like 'you can have everything, just not right now' which is, like that's quite important to me now because when I first started uni, okay I need to get this, this and this done. I need to do all these things, not important in my first year but I need to do them. I need to have everything down and I don't actually, like some things can wait until second year. Natasha, 2D168*

Natasha realised that although initially she wanted to be on top of everything straight away, there was no rush. She became empowered to engage in her life and take one step at a time through coaching which relieved the pressure she put on herself.

Claire learnt how to face problems through coaching:

*At first if someone tells you what you can do to deal with one problem, then gradually you will know how to deal with the problem yourself. It's important they teach you the skills to deal with problems. That's more important for me. Claire, 4D117.*

She was able to put these problem-solving skills into practice on her own outside the coaching sessions.

#### *Balance and focus*

Coaching also helped the students to focus on what was important to them which, in turn, gave rise to a sense of balance. Martin achieved balance between academic work and other pursuits:

*There's a better balance between doing work and... I've always felt really guilty when I'm not doing work, so I've always been doing work 24/7 but I feel like it's helped me balance that a bit better. So, now when I'm watching TV or something I'm not thinking, 'Oh my God! Maybe I should be...'* Martin, 3D110

The coaching sessions helped the students achieve focus and direction. Lynn spoke implicitly about feeling focussed:

*And like, it is sort of like, being able to sort of reorganise clutter in your head, I think, when you're able to talk about stuff in real life.* Lynn, 2D184

One interpretation of this is that she was taking stock of herself. The fact she was 'reorganising' the clutter means it was once organised, but now she needs to re-evaluate it and re-order it in light of her new way of being. The word 'clutter' evokes things taking up unnecessary space and things being higgledy-piggledy. Thus, for Lynn, focus was about taking stock and creating order in her life.

Colin's manifestation of focus was in terms of planning his work and knowing how to proceed:

*I just remember being very focused after our sessions and knowing what to do. It was nice it helped me to plan, definitely.* Colin, 4D94

Focussing for Colin and others was about zoning in on what next steps to take, that is, forward planning.

Coaching helped Natasha keep herself together and stay on an even keel. She felt she would have been a 'wreck' without coaching:

*'Yes I'm, I'm really happy because it's helped me quite a lot. It's I think, I don't feel that... if I didn't do the coaching I'd be a bit, not worse off but not doing as well as I am now. Especially with certain areas like the procrastination. I'd be, I'd be a wreck actually.'* Natasha, 2D160

The word 'wreck' conjures up images that Natasha would have had no compass, no anchor and would have lost her way in her first year. Coaching enabled her to feel whole, to navigate university and to survive any turbulent waters.

*Confidence: self-belief, assertiveness and reassurance*

The greatest area of convergence for many students was that coaching gave them confidence. This included a growing confidence in their studies and how university 'works' as well as the growing of an internal confidence, that is, self-belief. Holly serves as an exemplar:

*I think I've definitely become, become a lot more confident through the process and a lot more able to talk about problems that maybe I was too shy or I didn't think were important enough to talk about.* Holly, 3D170

She grew in her convictions about what was important to talk about, in other words her self-belief grew. Other students' confidence also manifested as an increase in self-belief:

*Yeah, just articulating stuff and I think when you do articulate stuff, it gives you confidence and belief in what you're saying. I think it helped in that sense as well.* Lynn, 4D228

Lynn felt that the very act of articulating her ideas and goals out loud increased her self-belief. Hermione's increase in confidence manifested as assertiveness which positively affected her social relationships and her participation in societies:

*H: Things, I'm 100 per cent sure I would not have done things that I've done this past six months, over the past six months without the coaching, I think that definitely....*

*I: Like, like what?*

*H: I've become more assertive, like, applying for this job, I probably wouldn't have done it because it's a lot of one-on-one, like going up to people you don't know, interacting so I wouldn't have applied when I applied in like December/Janu-*

ary. Going to certain societies, going to debate... I think eventually I would have got there but it's definitely sped up the process and yeah, just, just other social things, I think it's improved the way I react/relate to other people and actually say how I feel without worrying so much so yeah, it's, it's, I definitely feel like I achieved more with it. Hermione, 3D74-76

Neil's coach helped increase his confidence by challenging his belief that he should not contribute ideas to tutorials for fear of getting something wrong:

*One of the major things was more confident in lectures and tutorials at actually speaking because I explained how I won't say ideas in a tutorial in case they're wrong, you know and he'd be like 'why would they be wrong?' you know and 'other people get them wrong' and 'who would judge you like that?' you know, so that was a major thing. Neil, 2D151*

Thus Neil attributed his change in his academic interactions to coaching.

The students' perceived confidence also increased by gaining reassurance from their coaches. Martin exemplifies this:

*M: That [making a film] was, that was kind of feeding off of coaching because it was making me feel like, like I could do it, so I could have but.*

*I: And what, do, do you feel like you would have done it anyway? You know like, you needed this external encouragement to get going, is that right or?*

*M: I don't know really because... I've written things before but then I've just like, I just deleted them or given them to my brother because he makes films but I've never really. Because I could have done it last year and I never did. Martin, 2D276-298*

For some, the reassurance of the coach became internalised in the students such that they could hear the coach's voice as they were going about their activities:

*It's just really helpful it's like, it's like you have like a second guessing voice at the back of your head and it helps just like to not reinstate your ideas but like become more like confident in your ideas and that, okay I can do this. It's like a little pep talk now and then which is nice. Natasha, 3D138*

The characterisation of coaching as a 'pep talk' is similar to Lynn's use of the word 'cheerleader' in the previous superordinate theme. Reassurance for Holly was in the form of validation of solutions:

*Well you see, I think for a lot of things, it was less finding a solution and more validating a solution that I had already found but didn't really know if it was the right solution. So a lot of the time, even with social problems I would, we would talk about the problems and I would already have a solution in mind and that would most likely be the solution I ended up decided on. So a lot of the time it was validation. Holly, 3D106*

Thus, in the students' lived experience, the reassurance that coaching offered directly increased their confidence. Confidence, in the form of self-belief, assertiveness and reassurance, was a near-unanimous achievement of coaching.

#### *New perspectives*

The coaching sessions gave the students new insights and perspectives on their worlds and thinking. Both Hermione and Martin had considered university to be a 'stepping stone' – a temporary place to stop and a means to an end. Both students found that they could now enjoy university in its own right:

*My actual uni experience, I'm thinking more as a thing to really enjoy and just get really involved in 'everything uni' and not worry about the future. My view of uni has changed in terms of I see it to enjoy, rather than a stepping stone to a job. Hermione, 4D262*

*Well, that's the way I've always seen it, a stepping-stone but I feel like I can enjoy it. Martin, 3D140*

Just as Hermione and Martin had a shift in attitude about university, so other students experienced a change in outlook which they attributed to coaching:

*The thing that's really stuck with me is that way of thinking. The sheer breadth of not just jumping to a conclusion with a problem. Really considering every single thing you can do to make it easier on yourself or easier on other people, and figure out why you feel the way you do and not just accept that you do feel a certain way. Particularly helpful when figuring out how to come out to my parents and figuring out which way would be easiest for me and which way would be easiest for them. Things like that.*  
Holly, 4D148

Through coaching Holly learnt a new way of thinking and working through problems, which involved discussing the issue for longer and coming up with a several options (or letting go) before jumping to conclusions or premature action/inaction. It can be seen that Holly used what she had learnt from coaching to strategise how to come out to her parents, which is something she had been trying to do for years. Thus coaching had a profound outcome for her.

Zara did derive some benefit from coaching. She discussed losing her phone in one of her coaching sessions, which led to a general discussion about militating against risk. This had two ramifications. Firstly, she backed up her files electronically which was practically useful as she subsequently lost her laptop too. But more importantly, it led her to a change of outlook:

*Just I would say about the whole reacting to things. Like I was thinking of how, you just react to things that happen to you, that maybe we should prepare for them beforehand. That like gave me a different outlook on things.*  
Zara, 2D194

Thus, as a result of coaching, she decided to have systems in place to pre-empt whatever life threw at her.

Another shift in perspective was how students thought and felt about social relationships. For example, Colin, who was a mature student, already had a network of friends and was quite keen not to mix his social life with his university life. However, his coach suggested that making friends at university may enhance his experience:

*She just made me realise how useful it [speaking to people in his class] would be. Like I was saying, that thing about how you need to melt both lives together, it would help it a little bit. She's actually the one who said it would help a little bit and it has. I think it has and I think the more I do it, it will help more.* Colin, 3D109

Thus Colin directly attributed having an improved university experience to coaching.

In this superordinate theme, we have seen a great deal of convergence in how coaching benefited the students. Four emergent themes have been discussed: an increased sense of control, the achievement of greater balance and focus, increased confidence and seeing situations from new perspectives.

## Discussion

The phenomenon of the coaching experience was revealed by the lived experience of the students and comprised several features. Firstly, one feature was that coaching was a positive experience that led to perceived accelerated development. Secondly, the relationship with the coach, in most cases, increased the students' ability to open-up to them and was itself a source of motivation. Thirdly, the phenomenon disclosed how the students felt about coaching in relation to other sources of support such as therapy and friendship. Fourthly, it disclosed who they felt would benefit from coaching, that is, first year university students who lacked confidence and who could open up. Finally, the key feature of the phenomenon of the coaching experience to be revealed by the lived experience of the students was the specific 'wins' or outcomes they attributed to coaching. These covered four main areas: an increased sense of control, the achievement

of greater balance and focus, increased confidence and seeing situations from new perspectives. Confidence permeated the experience of coaching: for example, the students identified that people who wanted to work on confidence would benefit from coaching and it was one of the main areas of achievement attributed to coaching.

These findings confirm Gyllensten and Palmer's (2007) study which found that the coaching relationship was key to reaping the benefits of coaching. Furthermore, this study lends support to Franklin and Doran's (2009) and Fried and Irwin's (2016) findings that coaching positively affected academic performance as several students had the perception that their academic performance had improved as a result of coaching. It would be interesting to explore in a further study, whether their academic performance had, in fact, improved in real terms, or whether their perception of improvement, was a manifestation of their self-reported improved confidence. Either way, universities would do well to incorporate a coaching component to each undergraduate course. This paper also supports Fried and Irwin's (2016) findings that coaching improved stress management as many students reported that coaching had helped them in this regard specifically. Greene's (2004) findings that coaching increased confidence are also borne out by this paper, as students reported feeling increased confidence which they directly attributed to coaching. Greene's research focused on economically and socially disadvantaged undergraduates whereas this current paper does not focus on a 'special case' group. It should be noted that this does not mean that some students in this study were not economically disadvantaged, simply that this was not a criterion for inclusion. Moreover, this paper shows that non-clinical and non 'special case' students reported benefiting from coaching.

Furthermore, this study highlighted the issues with which students need support, namely increasing their sense of control by learning specific techniques, achieving greater

balance and focus, increasing their confidence and taking new perspectives. These issues may well be a key component of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000) which is a time of life when many people start university.

This paper has focused on the lived experience and active sense-making of the students which fleshes out the previously reported quantitative studies measuring the positive effects of coaching. Therefore, this paper has added to the literature by providing a fine-grained description of what coaching achieved, from the students' perspective, which can help inform universities how to support their students in specific ways.

### **Implications and conclusions**

The study has shown that one-to-one coaching can have profound effects on students and can also help them to maximise their time at university, as detailed by their first-person accounts. At most universities, careers services, counselling and personal tutoring are discrete entities and suffer from a lack of joined-up thinking. In this study, the coach became a tailored one-stop-shop for the students and helped the students make links between different parts of their life, for example, being low in confidence could affect career choices and relationships. If universities are seeking to improve the student experience, prevent student withdrawal and support their students in general, they would be wise to consider investing in one-to-one coaching for all their students, and not wait until issues become psychological problems. This will also help students to get the most out of their university experience. Universities could provide help in other forms, such as by arranging seminars and workshops on the specific issues detailed in this paper, or by arranging for students to have group-coaching (although the benefits of group coaching in the university context would have to be explored in further research). Furthermore, as an alternative to professional coaches, existing staff members could be trained to take a coaching approach.



### **Limitations of the study**

This study focused on a small group of highly articulate and academically able students at one university and may not be generalisable to other universities or types of student. In addition, this study focused on students studying Arts and Humanities subjects and these results may not be valid for students on more structured, vocational courses such as Medicine or Engineering. However, although the findings of this paper only hold true for this particular group in this context, Smith et al. maintain that 'theoretical generalisability' applies 'where the reader of the report is able to assess the evidence in relation to their existing professional and experiential knowledge' (Smith et al., 2009:4). In other words, to use Finlay's (2011) idea of 'resonance', if the study invokes professional or common sense resonance, then it would be reasonable to assume that similar findings may well hold true in similar contexts. Furthermore, the small sample was necessary for an in-depth qualitative study, which is highly appropriate for exploring a novel situation or phenomenon.

Importantly, no account was taken of the coaches' different coaching approaches and techniques and no attempt was made to make this uniform. Therefore, it is unclear if some coaching styles were more beneficial than others in this study but since this was an exploratory qualitative study, cause and effect of variables were not sought nor able to be clarified. Moreover, as the coaching sector has burgeoned in recent years, with many different coaching courses on offer, covering a range of approaches, the authors feel it would not be possible to achieve homogeneity in this respect. Since the students presented with different issues, it would also not be possible or wise to use the same techniques on them.

Furthermore, coaches were randomly paired with students without attempting to find a 'fit'. However, students were given the option to change coaches if they did not get

on with their coach. By the very nature of IPA, the data and analysis are subjective at two levels, that is, there is a double sense-making taking place – the participant is making sense of their experience and the researcher is making sense of that (Smith et al., 2009). If an independent assessment of the benefits of coaching students in the university context is required, it would be necessary to introduce some objective measures on a larger sample size to fully understand the benefits of coaching in this context. However, this study has enabled the students' perspectives to come to the fore and detailed how they experienced and made sense of coaching.

### **Future research**

Further research could explore the sustainability of the achievements of coaching, by conducting follow up interviews, for example, a year after coaching had ended. It would be interesting to map the effects of coaching at different stages of the coaching to see, for example, if confidence was built up slowly or whether confidence increased after a certain number of sessions as this could be an indicator of the optimum number of sessions. It would be highly relevant to explore the benefits of personal tutors (university staff) taking a coaching approach compared to the benefits derived when professional coaches were employed. The effects of coaching on other university cohorts, such as final year undergraduate students, Master's students, students from different subjects and from different universities could be explored in further studies.

### **Authors**

**Natalie Lancer & Virginia Eatough**,  
Department of Psychological Sciences  
Birkbeck, University of London, Malet Street,  
London WC1E 7HX.

### **Correspondence**

natalie.lancer@gmail.com

## References

- Arnett, J.J. (2000). Emerging adulthood: A theory of development from the late teens through the twenties. *American Psychologist*, 55(5), 469.
- Finlay, L. (2011). *Phenomenology for therapists, Researching the lived world*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Franklin, J. & Doran, J. (2009). Does all coaching enhance objective performance independently evaluated by blind assessors? The importance of the coaching model and content'. *International Coaching Psychology Review*, 4(2), 128–44.
- Fried, R. & Irwin, J. (2016). Calmly coping: A Motivational Interviewing Via Co-Active Life Coaching (MI-VIA-CALC) pilot intervention for university students with perceived levels of high stress. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring*, 14(1).
- Grant, A. (2003). The impact of life coaching on goal attainment, metacognition and mental health. *Social Behavior and Personality*, 31(3).
- Greene, T. (2004). Academic coaching: A new approach to supporting student success. *The National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development Innovation Abstracts*, 26(5).
- Gyllensten, K. & Palmer, S. (2007). The coaching relationship: An interpretative phenomenological analysis. *International Coaching Psychology Review*, 2, 168–177.
- Gyllensten, K., Palmer, S., Nilsson, E.-K., Meland Regnér & Frodi, A. (2010). Experiences of cognitive coaching: A qualitative study. *International Coaching Psychology Review*, 5(2), 98–108.
- Jackson, C. (2003). Transitions into higher education; gendered implications for academic self-concept. *Oxford Review of Education*, 29, 321–346.
- Lancer, N., Clutterbuck, D. and Megginson, D. (2016). *Techniques for coaching and mentoring* (2nd edn.). Oxford: Routledge
- Lizzio, A., Wilson, K. & Simons, R. (2002). University students' perceptions of the learning environment and academic outcomes: Implications for theory and practice. *Studies in Higher Education*, 27(1).
- Naidoo, R. Shankar, A. & Veer, E. (2011). The consumerist turn in higher education: Policy aspirations and outcomes. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 27(11–12), 1142–1162.
- Prochaska, J.O. & DiClemente, C.C. (1986). The transtheoretical approach. In J.C. Norcross (Ed.), *Handbook of eclectic psychotherapy* (pp.163–200). New York: Brunner/Mazel.
- Robinson, C. & Gahagan, J. (2010). In practice: Coaching students to academic success and engagement on campus. *About Campus*, 15(4), 26–29.
- Short, E., Kinman, G. & Baker S. (2010). Evaluating the impact of a peer coaching intervention on well-being amongst psychology undergraduate students. *International Coaching Psychology Review*, 5(2).
- Smith, J.A. Flowers, P. & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis*. London: Sage.
- Stevens, G. (2003). Late studentship: Academic aspiration, personal growth, and the death of the past. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, 34(2).
- Sue-Chan, C. & Latham, G. (2004). The relative effectiveness of external, peer, and self-coaches. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 53(2).
- Swartz, S., Prevatt, F. & Proctor, B. (2005). A coaching intervention for college students with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder. *Psychology in the Schools*, 42(6)
- Turner, A., Hammond, C., Gilchrist, M. & Barlow, J. (2007). Coventry University students' experience of mental health problems. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*, 20(3).
- US Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, What Works Clearinghouse (2012). *WWC review of the report: The effects of student coaching in college: An evaluation of a randomized experiment in student mentoring*. Retrieved 14 February 2017 from [https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/SingleStudyReviews/wwc\\_studentcoaching\\_080712.pdf](https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/SingleStudyReviews/wwc_studentcoaching_080712.pdf)
- Van Zandvoort, M., Irwin, J. & Morrow, D. (2009). Co-active coaching as an intervention for obesity among female university students. *International Coaching Psychology Review* 3(3), 191–206.
- Yardley, L. (2000). Dilemmas in qualitative health research. *Psychology and Health*, 15(2), 215–228.
- Yorke, M. & Longden, B., (2004) *Retention and success in Higher Education*. Maidenhead: SRHE and Open University Press

# Executive coaching and national culture in the United Arab Emirates: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Graham Dodds & Dasha Grajfoner

---

**Objectives:** *This study explores the interaction between national culture and coaching methods that executive coaches use in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The objective is to develop understanding regarding whether executive coaches varied methods or approaches depending upon a coaching recipient being an Expatriate or a UAE National citizen.*

**Design:** *The research took place in the UAE, using semi-structured interviews with four participants. The participants were executive coaches with experience and understanding of different approaches and methods used in coaching psychology practice.*

**Methods:** *A qualitative method of data collection and analysis, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), was used to examine the lived experience and making sense of rich individual narratives. The double-hermeneutic approach of IPA generated understanding via interpretation of the participant's perceptions.*

**Results:** *Cultural Values, Business Environment and Approach and Methods were three themes that emerged from the study. National culture is a significant feature of life in the UAE, is omnipresent in the complex, multicultural business environment and manifests itself in differences of cultural values and dimensions. Whilst national culture is important, it is only one of many layers that shape an individual. Participants prioritise and customise their coaching approach based upon the coachee as an individual and their current contextual situation. Only small differences are identifiable in the utility of certain coaching methods due to national culture, however, the approach to coaching is adjusted to address higher expectations of direction, different motivational factors, different value systems and the higher emphasis on relationships and trust amongst Emiratis.*

**Keywords:** *Coaching psychology; executive coaching; culture; United Arab Emirates; Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).*

THE CURRENT RESEARCH attempts to bridge a gap in existing literature regarding the impact of national culture on approaches and methods used in executive coaching. The aim is to leverage the multicultural business environment of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to develop understanding of this phenomenon. The study analysed the lived experiences of executive coaches working with UAE National citizens and Expatriates, seeking to understand if coaches alter their coaching approach and methods, such as cognitive behavioural, psychodynamic, personal construct, strategic, or positive psychology, depending upon the nationality of the coachee.

Culture can be framed as the collective and individual programming separating people from different groups (Hofstede, 1988), or more lucidly as how groups solve problems and reconcile dilemmas (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1997). National culture is an important influence over organisational practises and values (Hofstede, 1991), and evident in the UAE and across the Arabian Gulf, where family-oriented business relations and Islamic cultural values distinctively shape the business environment (Metcalf, 2006). This dominating influence of local culture over organisational practises and values pervades despite the dependence upon a 90

per cent expatriate workforce (UAE Interact, 2010) represented by over 200 nationalities (Abouzeid, 2008). The omnipresent influence of UAE cultural values in the business environment, despite the high percentage of foreign employees can be somewhat attributed to the propensity for senior roles in business units, boards and committees to be staffed by UAE Nationals.

Hofstede's socio-cultural, anthropological research provides a framework to relate national cultural values to workplace practise. Whilst observing that individuals only adhere to the culture of their nation in varying degrees, culture does set limits on normative behaviours, thus pressuring individual conformity to societal expectations. Whilst Hofstede's original dimensional work did not cover the UAE explicitly, the categories of; power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity form a useful reference. Such a simple framework can lead to stereotypical assumptions in coaching (Passmore, 2013), however, coaches can mitigate this by taking steps to recognise, accept, adapt, integrate and leverage cultural differences; (Rosinski, 1999). Additionally, research-based, prescriptive motivational approaches to cross-cultural coaching pose that typical coaching psychology techniques can be applied, but adjusted for cultural values and motivational factors (Coultras et al., 2011).

Whilst coaching has emerged as an important, growing leadership practise; so far it has assumed a North American and Western European worldview that doesn't hold universally (Rosinski, 2003), and could be harmful in different cultural settings, such as more collectivistic societies (Hofstede, 1993). Many executive coaches operating in the UAE are North American and European, thus encouraging consideration of how false assumptions based upon stereotyping can distort communication (Guirdham, 1999). Cultural diversity presents challenges to practise that are seldom considered in writings of coaching, however Rosinski and Abbot argue that culture is an omnipresent influ-

ence that presents opportunities to harness when coaching (Rosinski & Abbot, 2006). Rosinski's Cultural Orientations Framework builds on the work of eminent interculturalists, developing a common language to discuss culture and a framework of categories enabling integration of culture into coaching (Rosinski, 2003). More recently the Universal Integrated Framework (UIF) was developed from a critical review of a range of coaching methods, forming a cross-cultural coaching method underpinned by psychological learning theory (Law et al., 2007), and aligned with the British Psychological Society definition of coaching psychology (Palmer & Whybrow, 2005). The UIF integrates various coaching psychology methods, such as cognitive behavioural, gestalt techniques, narrative and existential approaches (Law, 2013).

David Peterson of PDI notes that coaching occurs at individual level, with culture a social or group level phenomenon, arguing that despite the potency of culture as a force shaping behaviour and identity, there are many other factors to consider. As culture is an unpredictable and unreliable factor in determining individual character, the role of a coach is to understand the individual regardless of what shaped them (Peterson, 2007).

The literature informs of the importance of remembering that an individual is not the culture, reflecting a basic psychological observation that individuals differ more within groups than groups differ from each other (Palmer & Arnold, 2013). Although national culture is likely to play a role in defining an individual's world view, many things shape the character, values, or behaviour of any particular individual, such as; personality, experiences, political, family, social, educational and economic background. Therefore, assumptions regarding the extent of national cultures' influence on individuals can be ill-informed. However, when working across cultures, cultural knowledge and sensitivity is required (Donnison, 2008).

This dynamic, multicultural backdrop, combined with the lack of research of cross-cultural coaching in the UAE provides

a rich research opportunity at the intersection of culture and coaching psychology. In addition to growing the body of emerging theory in an important topic, an improved understanding of whether approach and/or methods are varied potentially identifies optimisation opportunities for coaching programs, such as in selection, matching coach and coachee, tailoring programs and managing issues that arise in coaching interactions.

As the research is somewhat philosophical in nature and subsequently utilises qualitative research methodology, no hypothesis or secondary research question was proposed.

### **Methods**

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) allows for deep analysis and interpretation of personal experiences and perceptions of participants rather than objective account formation (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Therefore IPA is well suited to the small available population size and idiosyncratic subject matter. The semi-structured interview format enables engagement in conversation, probing relevant, important areas (Smith, 1996). IPA combines the theoretical orientations of phenomenology, hermeneutics and ideography in an interpretative overlay of how individual experiences appear to others. This expression of double-hermeneutics (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012) is particularly appropriate, allowing the richness and complexity of human sense making in emergent situations (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

### **Participants**

Due to the rich subject matter, small population of suitable participants and depth of immersive analysis required with IPA, the research gathered input from four participants. Whilst noting sample size as contextual, the research adheres to guidance of between three and six participants for IPA (Smith, et al. 2009), enhancing quality by analysing fewer participants in greater depth, rather than shallower, descriptive analysis that can result from more participants (Reid et al., 2005).

Participants were purposively selected,

fulfilling the criteria of being UAE based, expatriate executive coaches, with experience and understanding of coaching psychology methods. They were recruited through the network of the researcher and all are experienced in coaching executives within prestigious organisations in the UAE.

### **Equipment**

Interviews were recorded using a digital sound recorder, anonymised and transcribed.

### **Procedure**

After having received approval from Heriot Watt University Ethics Committee, participants were contacted directly, the background of the research explained, example interview questions sent in advance, permission sought and consent forms signed. Data was collected from individual, semi-structured interviews of between 40 and 80 minutes in Abu Dhabi and Dubai, UAE, in December 2016. The interview approach aimed to stay on target whilst remaining flexible and conversational (Ruben & Ruben, 1995). The conversation was broadly framed around the questions in Table 1.

### **Analysis**

IPA involves several stages of data analysis, moving the researcher from identifying the uniqueness of participant perspectives, to what is shared across participants, making meaning in a particular context (Cooper, et al., 2015). Recordings were listened to and transcriptions read multiple times, immersing the researcher in the data. This was followed by textual analysis with notes made on important points from an individual participant's perspective. These notes were transformed into emerging themes and lifted to higher levels of abstraction whilst remaining grounded in the text. Themes were coded and connections sought, before a table of themes was produced. This was followed by a detailed, interpretative exami-

Table 1: Interview questions

Questions for coaches	
Main questions	Additional questions
Tell me about your experience of coaching in the United Arab Emirates (UAE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ What kind of coaching interventions have you led in the UAE?</li> <li>■ Who is it typically initiated by and why?</li> <li>■ What were the main challenges you were addressing through these coaching interventions?</li> </ul>
Talk to me about the typical coaching process that you go through?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ What is your style of interaction?</li> <li>■ What (if any) coaching psychology methods do you use?</li> <li>■ What frameworks and tools do you typically use?</li> <li>■ Why do you select these approaches?</li> <li>■ Are these approaches different to what you would employ in other countries?</li> <li>■ Do you consciously use different methods depending upon whether the coachee is Emirati or expatriate?</li> </ul>
How effective do you think coaching is in the UAE?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Do you feel that your coaching is as successful in the UAE when compared to that provided elsewhere?</li> <li>■ Has the topic of national culture arisen during coaching in the UAE?</li> <li>■ Do you feel that national culture plays a role in coaching in the UAE?</li> </ul>
Do you feel that national culture plays a role in coaching in the UAE?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ If so, what role and how does it play out?</li> <li>■ Your culture or theirs?</li> <li>■ If not, tell me more about that</li> <li>■ Was it a factor in your choice of methods?</li> </ul>
With hindsight, would you change your approach or methods?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ What do you wish went better?</li> <li>■ What would you do differently if repeating the coaching now?</li> </ul>
Do you have any other thoughts or insights on coaching practise in the UAE?	

nation of the data through the lenses of the themes, connections and groupings (Smith, et al., 2011). Every stage was repeated for each participant, returning to the beginning when new themes emerged from later participants and when themes were consoli-

dated and merged into a final master table of themes (see Table 2). This intense, iterative, yet rewarding process of analysis continued into the write up of the results and discussion.

Table 2: Abstraction leading to final master and sub-themes

Master and sub-themes	Coach # 001	Coach # 002	Coach # 003	Coach # 004
Cultural Values				
Cultural Dimensions	✓	✓	✓	✓
Different Value Systems	✓		✓	✓
Relationships	✓	✓	✓	✓
Business Environment				
Significance of Cultural Dynamics	✓	✓	✓	✓
Challenge of Multicultural, Transitory Environment	✓	✓	✓	✓
Motivational Factors	✓	✓		✓
Culture is One Layer of Many	✓	✓	✓	✓
Approach and Methods				
Consistent Application of Methods	✓		✓	✓
Customise for Individual and Context	✓	✓	✓	✓
Address Culture Directly / Early	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cultural Understanding and Adaptation	✓	✓	✓	✓

## Results

The narrative analysis from the participant interviews resulted in the emergence of sub-themes, subsequently revealing three superordinate themes (see Figure 1);

- Cultural Values,
- Business Environment,
- Approach and Methods.

### *Cultural values*

The first superordinate theme of Cultural Values consists of three sub-themes (see Figure 1);

- Cultural Dimensions,
- Different Value Systems,
- Relationships.

All participants talked of cultural dimensions, stating the impact on the coaching process, both explicitly and implicitly;

*'power distance is much more acute in this region.'* (004)

Participant 001 also refers to the Hofstede dimension of power-distance;

*'something that I notice oftentimes come up when I'm working with gulf nationals, is the whole notion of power distance... ..we do have to recognise that meritocracy and shared responsibilities is not a cultural norm.'* (001)

Then describing a direct impact on the coaching dynamic resulting from high power-distance;

*'I find that high power distance automatically places the coach in a role of authority, something that doesn't fit with classic global methodologies around coaching.'* (001)

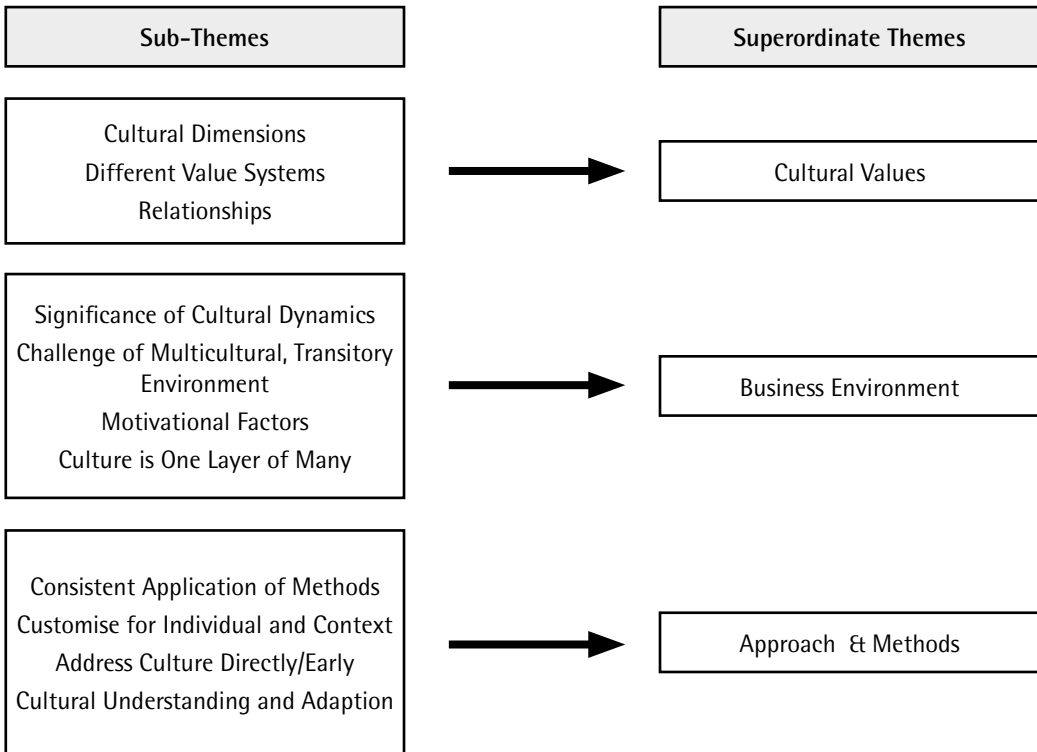


Figure 1: Sub and superordinate themes

Similarly, Participant 002 experienced expectations of playing the authority figure in the coaching relationship;

*'I asked if we were to work together, what do you think we should work on. She replied to say, isn't that your job?'* (002)

The expectation of direction and of the coach to play a lead role is also described by Participant 001;

*'I once worked with an Emirati CEO who said during our very first session: 'I hired you to give me answers – not to ask me questions!''* (001)

Participant 004 highlights impacts related to the Hofstede dimension of uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 2001);

*'I do think that when it comes to confrontation, people will move away from confrontation here.'* (004)

Providing a direct example of the impact on coaching conversations;

*'here you almost get the feeling that people want you to come off the accelerator and put on the brake and you see a visible relief when you do those sorts of things.'* (004)

Participant 001 spoke passionately of differences in value systems between UAE Nationals and Expatriates. Firstly in terms of consciousness of values;

*'it's a very values driven society and I think that there is a consciousness around values here that I don't find so much when working with people from other parts of the world.'* (001)



Then with examples of differences in the values;

*'the value of commitment is different from what I would see when I'm working with people from Western countries.'* (001)

All participants referred to the importance of relationships, family and trust to UAE Nationals;

*'of course family matters, it's hugely important to the Emiratis.'* (002)

Participant 001 elaborates, relating individualism-collectivism to the fear of losing face;

*'Relationship is very important here. The need for love and belonging, it shows up everywhere. Wanting to be part of and be accepted by my community, my family, that is such an important piece here. So the fear of losing face is of course coming from that place. Whereas expats, westerners, we are, we can pretty much carve our own lives to the extent that we are individualistic, they only exist because of the collective. It's a big difference.'* (001)

The theme of saving face continues with Participant 003 describing a dimension that would necessitate judgement from the coach on approach;

*'There will be some who know they need help and even though they need to save face, they would prefer to lose face with their coach so that they can save face outside.'* (003)

The importance of trust was explicitly stated by all, with a temporal implication also emerging;

*'Trust is important; don't do anything different in terms of having faith in the integrity of the coaching methodology that I have set up front.'* (004)

*'I terms of my ability to build... it takes longer. That is for sure.'* (004)

*'I think it comes down to intent vs content. If people believe that you are on their side, if they trust you, you can pretty much say anything.'* (002)

*'I would say that the success of the assignment is actually very much depending upon can you establish that relationship and can you build that level of trust with someone.'* (001)

Participants observe significant differences in cultural dimensions and values, particularly the importance placed upon family and relationships. This impacts the coaching approach, content and nature of the coaching conversations.

### **Business environment**

The second superordinate theme of Business Environment consists of four sub-themes (see Figure 1);

- Significance of Cultural Dynamics,
- Challenge of Multicultural, Transitory Environment,
- Motivational Factors,
- Culture is One Layer of Many.

All participants commented on the omnipresence and major impact of culture in the UAE business environment;

*'Culture is a huge part of it.'* (002)

*'Culture, it's something that's got to be known and treated with great respect.'* (004)

Participant 002 agreed on culture's importance, speaking passionately about it being one factor of many and potentially overplayed.

*'Yes I think it is an aspect, an important aspect, but not the only aspect.'* (002)

*'I think in this multicultural environment that we work in, we run the risk of thinking that culture outranks everything else, and it doesn't.'* (002)

All participants referred to the UAE's challenging, multicultural business environment. Participant 001 describes environmental complexity and subsequent challenges for Emirati Leaders;

*'I think operating in an environment where there is a lot of transition and it is constantly changing. There is all the ingredients for dysfunctional teams, dysfunctional organisations.'* (001)

*'we have to acknowledge the complexity of being a UAE National leading a multicultural team. I've come across teams with twelve different nationalities in one team, and everyone is coming from different parts of the world, with different beliefs.'* (001)

The challenge of cultural understanding due to the significance of differences arose. Participant 003 talks of guardedness;

*'I think, it might be more guarded with Emiratis simply because the difference in the culture.'* (003)

Participant 004 talks of how the absence of a shared culture can make building trust more challenging;

*'When you are deep in that relationship, you just see sometimes how humour, metaphor, sporting analogies, whatever it may be that you use to build trust in another culture, a shared culture is off the table here.'* (004)

Whilst Participant 002 describes how differences present in a multicultural environment make building trust harder;

*'I think that the more similar you are to someone or they are to you, the more easier it is to trust. You've got the same language, same skin colour, same experiences.'* (002)

Different motivating factors for UAE Nationals was classified it as a key difference by Participant 004;

*'typically an Emirati executive will have gotten that job because he or she, he typically, is capable, he'll have gotten that job probably younger than his peer in the West, he'll have gotten it because he's smart, because he's got wasta<sup>1</sup>, because he's connected and he'll have gotten the job for that. Chances are that the individual will also be independently wealthy.'* (004)

*'Finding the burning platform with an Emirati is more difficult than with say finding a burning platform for a guy who went to a comprehensive school in Manchester and became the CEO of British Gas, because you've got carrot and stick, there's other things inside that persons make-up that you can leverage.'* (004)

Maslow's hierarchy of needs was referenced in some interviews (Maslow, 1970), seemingly implying that high levels of independent wealth and job-security result in automatic fulfilment of basic-needs.

*'We can't think about higher order of needs until we've paid the bills.'* (004)

Participant 001 reflected on the leadership potential of UAE Nationals given their higher purpose values;

*'lower level values are survival values, whereas the higher level values are at the top. I see a lot of the higher level values centred here. This is what is really, really going to make a difference in the organisation, because if you have leaders who can operate here, they can pull other people up with them.'* (001)

All participants commented in some form that while national culture is important, it is only one consideration of many when coach-

<sup>1</sup> Wasta = Arabic for connections, influence. Seen as a contributing factor in decision making (Cunningham & Sarayrah, 1993)

ing an individual. Organisational culture was highlighted as a key consideration;

*'organisations have their own business culture so there are similarities between expats and Emiratis within the same business cultures.'* (003)

Participant 001 describes culture as a layer;

*'we cannot ignore that while systems are extremely important and complex, then people add to the complexity, then you put on another layer of culture, it's not easy to navigate.'* (001)

While Participant 002 sees it as a filter;

*'The way I see it is that culture is a filter. It is a filter, but it is not the only filter that is out there... Education, who your parents are, how they treated you, how tall you are, your gender, the colour of your skin, where you went to school, who you hung out with, what job you have.'* (002)

Elaborating with an example of how filters vary in importance and influence depending upon context;

*'If I'm dealing with an 18-year-old Indian and I'm dealing with a 6-year-old Indian, they're different people, they're both Indian, they both have the Indian culture but the generation is probably more important at that stage.'* (002)

Participant 003 describes steps;

*'You have your family, you have your extended family, you have your neighbourhood, your society, then you have your nation, your country, then you have your, the world you know. It just builds up, step by step.'* (003)

Whilst Participant 004 describes the cultural ecosystem;

*'Personality is primary importance, number two is national culture and number three is the person temporarily enters organisational culture.'* (004).

The influence of national culture is strong and omnipresent, the multicultural, transitory environment creates challenges and differences in values and circumstances of UAE Nationals generate different motivational factors. Consistently, national culture is deemed to be only one factor of many that influences the coaching relationship.

## Approach and methods

The third superordinate theme of Approach and Methods consists of four sub-themes (see Figure 1);

- Consistent Application of Methods,
- Customise for Individual and Context,
- Address Culture Directly / Early,
- Cultural Understanding and Adaptation.

Participants consistently state that underlying coaching methods do not change much based upon the national culture of the coachee;

*'methodology; there are certain things that are off the table, but there are 80 per cent the same as it would be anywhere.'* (004)

Then elaborating;

*'There is what and a how of coaching. I think the what is pretty steadfast, you know there's a process that one must go through. I think there is questions that one must ask, there is a repertoire of tools that one can choose from and then use and then there is a flow and pursuit of whatever the end game is. I think where culture arises is in the how.'* (004)

Participant 004 observes the preparation phase being impacted with Emiratis due to a desire to save face and high-power distance;

*'what I do find is very limited here is the utility of 360s, and also in junior executive interviews... I did an exploration, a discovery process for a CEO two weeks ago and he had zero appetite to do a 360... due to the confrontational nature of it...he wanted to save face, which is a big theme, so 360 was off the table right away.'* (004)

All participants stated in a form that the individual always comes before the culture;

*'I find that there is more predictive meaning to be found in knowing that a guy is an ENTJ for example, or an introverted CFO is more meaningful than knowing the guy is Swiss, or knowing that he's Emirati.'* (004)

*'always try to just deal with the individual wherever they came from.'* (003)

The customisation or tailoring of coaching based on the individual and the context is described by all participants;

*'I can't say that I have one standard approach that I use with every single client because it really is a very customised approach that I am using.'* (001)

*'There are tools in the toolbox... but then again you tailor the way you go through it.'* (003)

Participant 002 reiterates the individualised approach, adding views about being straight and direct;

*'You have to treat individuals as individuals. Some people will try too hard to not offend and they become a bigger problem by being too vague.'* (002)

The participants all describe the need to address coaching directly and in the early stages of the engagement;

*'when I start a coaching engagement with someone, particularly if it is a male gulf national, I would ask him, I would basically put on the table that we come from two very different cultures so from a scale of one to ten how direct can I be with you?'* (001)

*'a lot of that cultural stuff, that how honest can I be stuff should take place in that before stage, you should have done your mental and physical preparation prior.'* (004)

Whilst maintaining a level of cultural adaptability;

*'bringing the difference in culture to the table and also make it clear that while I tend to be very direct, that is my style, that's what you will get if you work with me.'* (001)

The importance of understanding and adapting to cultural dynamics emerged as a theme;

*'the way that I do direction when I don't know the person very well and I don't know the culture very well, or I don't know the filters. I ask, is this a thing that you can do, or why could you not do this thing?'* (002)

However, the extent of the differences can mean that it is not fully possible to understand the others perspective;

*'There are an awful lot of minefields where just a verbal faux-pas, because they're non-confrontational they may not say, then it festers, it becomes toxic and you either get to know about it, or you don't get to know about it, but that cultural faux-pas was the deal breaker.'* (004)

Participant 001 attempts to attribute the reason for challenges in understanding;

*'The fear of failing and the fear of losing face when you are holding a responsibility that you may have been given at a very early age, or stage in your career. The fear of not being able to do that and do it well is a significant amount of pressure to put on someone. We cannot possibly understand what that is like, because we are here for a while and we know that we will leave and go on somewhere else, but for the UAE National it is there, this is their home, this is where their reputation is everything.'* (001)

Participant 004 conveys acceptance that there are things an expatriate will never fully know or understand;

*'you don't understand the culture as deeply as maybe you could, and you don't understand the boardroom practices once the door closes and all of the expats leave the room.'* (004)

Participants strongly stated that national culture affects coaching methods either not at all, or very little with the only examples being the impact of power distance and uncertainty avoidance on the use of 360 feedback. However, the impact on approach and content is evident. More time is taken to build trust, motivation needs to be worked upon differently, certain topics are off the table and while cultural understanding is necessary, gaining a full understanding is challenging if indeed possible at all.

### Discussion

This discussion integrates the theories identified in the literature review with the themes contained within the results, highlights the limitations of the study and proposes how the results may inform practise.

### Cultural values

Although Hofstede's original and Trompenaars' subsequent cultural dimension work did not cover the UAE specifically (Trompenaars, 1997), Hofstede's work covering the Arab world is a relevant proxy, demonstrating high levels of collectivism and power-distance in the UAE (Hofstede, 1980).

Significant differences in power-distance and individualism were evident in the research, with practical examples of both dimensions appearing in the interviews. These differences indicate that Executive Coaches need to be mindful that high power-distance can change relationship dynamics, reducing openness, increasing expectations on the coach to take the position of power in the relationship and to provide more advice and direction. The low levels of individualism are reflected by the participants discussing the importance of relationships and family. The research indicates the importance of coaches understanding that high relative levels of collectivism is a key differentiator, leading to fundamentally different vantage points for decision making, surfacing in a fear of failure and need to save face that differs for an expatriate from a more individualistic society (Hofstede, 1980).

A relationship of trust and understanding was identified as essential to success, aligning with theory that trust is one of the most crucial elements of coaching across cultures (Hicks & Peterson, 1999). Every individual client has their own expectations on how trust is built, a challenge that is accentuated across cultures, therefore an understanding of cultural differences and an appreciation that trust may take longer to develop across cultures will help a coach to anticipate issues and navigate smoothly (Hicks & Peterson, 1997).

Table 3: Comparison of Hofstede Cultural Dimensions\*\*

	Individualism	Power-Distance	Uncertainty Avoidance	Masculinity
Arab World*	38	80	68	52
USA	91	40	56	62
UK	89	35	35	66
Japan	46	54	92	95

\*Countries included: Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates (Hofstede, 1980)

\*\* Data sourced from Hofstede, 1980)

Once trust is established, the higher level values referred to by participant 001 can be worked upon, offering great potential for UAE Nationals to develop excellence in leadership, becoming strong role models (Scott-Jackson, 2008).

Organisations in the UAE tend to be hierarchical with higher levels of power distance than is common in 'western' business practise (Weir, 2003; Weir & Hutchings, 2005). The UAE is a collectivist culture, with a business culture that is well encapsulated as 'hard on issues, soft on people' (Al Omari, 2008). The impact of this is seen in the research, with coachees less likely to provide open, direct feedback to seniors or to directly address employee performance issues.

### **Business environment**

The multicultural, transitory business environment in the UAE was referred to by most participants as presenting challenges to the coachee, such as managing extremely diverse teams. The significant cultural differences resulting from diversity present challenges to relationship and trust building between coach and coachee as certain tools and common connections to build rapport are less plausible. Indeed, all participants spoke of challenges in developing cultural understanding, consistently asserting that differences are so large that it is impossible to fully understand.

Motivation theory is an important factor in Executive Coaching and is impacted by contextual differences facing UAE Nationals. Several participants referred explicitly or implicitly to the hierarchy of needs theory developed by Maslow which remains one of the most popular motivational theories (Pinder, 1984). Maslow asserts that humans are self-actualising subjects that can transcend national culture (Maslow, 1970). However, the theory has been subject to controversy regarding whether it is transferable across cultures (Adler, 1986; Steers & Porter, 1987). An adapted theory developed for Chinese culture that placed the need for belonging before physiological needs due to the high relative

levels of collectivism (Nevis, 1983), could be more applicable to the UAE and would be interesting for further research. It could be argued that the challenge to the hierarchy of needs theory is accentuated by the unusually large levels of individual wealth, financial independence and job security amongst UAE Nationals for many of whom safety and physiological needs are met comfortably. This changes the approach and levers available to the coach to work on motivation with coachees and offers an interesting opportunity for further research.

Triandis (1996) argued that self-actualisation is a primarily Western, individualistic construct and accordingly may be fundamentally flawed. Later bridging the theory of cultural values to motivation, by summarising different value sets into two broad categories; East; including group achievement, harmony, long term relationships, and West; including personal achievement, advancement, dominance, autonomy, self-reliance (Triandis, 2004). It could be argued that in a more collectivist culture, self-actualisation is realised in terms of meeting societal needs and expectations, rather than by more intrinsic or extrinsic individual attainment. This is reflected in the research results with participants describing the abundance of higher consciousness values, such as sustainability and concern for future generations amongst Emiratis.

Many participants observed that, whilst national culture is a significant factor, it remains one dimension of many that influences an individual and the coaching process, aligning with Peterson's assertion that an individual is shaped by many things other than culture, such as personality, life experiences, education, profession and social status (Peterson, 2007). Organisations have their own cultures and preferred leadership styles (Schein, 1992), with stronger corporate cultures more likely to significantly influence the behaviour of employees, particularly as they reach more senior levels (Peterson, 2007). Most participants view that organisation and/or sector is a key factor, demon-

strated by the culture of certain industries having a stronger influence than national culture, for example in Investment Banking, or Law firms.

### **Approach and methods**

The participants use a wide range of coaching and coaching psychology methods, including psychoanalytic, personal construct, NLP, transactional analysis, psychometrics and psychosocial theory, yet consistently asserted that national culture does not have much or any impact on the coaching psychology methods that they use. The only example given was the lower utility in 360 degree feedback due to high power-distance and potential loss of face. This is consistent with the view of Hoppe, who sees 360 as well suited to North America's low context, explicit, individual focus, and less suited to collectivist, high context cultures where family and relationships have greater importance (Hoppe, 1998).

The highest level of consistency, passion and conviction from the participants was in their assertions that the individual comes first when designing coaching interventions. This aligns well with Peterson's assertion that the coach's challenge is to know the individual regardless of the culture, as whilst culture can be a strong influence on identity and behaviour, it remains an unpredictable factor in determining an individual's values, character or behaviour (Peterson, 2007).

Hofstede's dimensions have been criticised for placing too much emphasis on culture as a source of difference. However, similar to the participants, Hofstede does place personality before national culture and human nature. Therefore, perhaps it is the overuse and universal acceptance of Hofstede's cultural dimensions that is problematic, not the framework itself (Hofstede, 1991).

Whilst asserting that the selection of coaching approach and methods is always based upon the individual first, generalisations of cultural dynamics are present and seem to serve as a useful guide with it described by Participant 002 as a form of shorthand to understanding differences. Accordingly, cultural

norms can help a coach generate hypothesis about the coachee, such as; is this coachee more likely be more motivated by a collective goal than an individual one, or might this coachee prefer authoritative, clear direction rather than an open, free conversation. Testing these hypotheses can help to avoid pitfalls (Hicks & Peterson, 1997).

Many participants stated that they would alter their coaching approach to include direct inquiry early in the process to address how cultural differences may impact the coaching relationship. Placed alongside an expectation of more explicit guidance and direction than would be expected in a western business setting this suggests that directiveness is more accepted than would be expected from a culture with such high levels of power distance. This would indicate that a different ratio should be considered when coaching UAE Nationals compared with UK nationals, where a survey of coaching psychologists showed 67.9 per cent describing their approach as facilitational, and 17.4 per cent as instructional (Palmer & Whybrow, 2006).

Participants referred in varying degrees to the importance of cultural understanding and awareness, and the requirement to maintain adaptability. The interview responses indicate that all participants avoid the ethno-centric pitfalls and operate with an ethno-relative approach in a range between recognising, accepting and integrating differences. This places them in the higher ranges of Rosinski's (1999) model of dealing with cultural differences, adapted from the work of Milton Bennet (1993), however there would seem to be space for the coaches to grow into operating at the highest level of the model and leverage differences, looking to make the most of cultural differences (Rosinski, 1999).

Finally, the research findings can be summarised by explaining that whilst methods are broadly unchanged, the approach is significantly impacted;

*'The **what** stays much the same, the **how** changes significantly.'* (004)

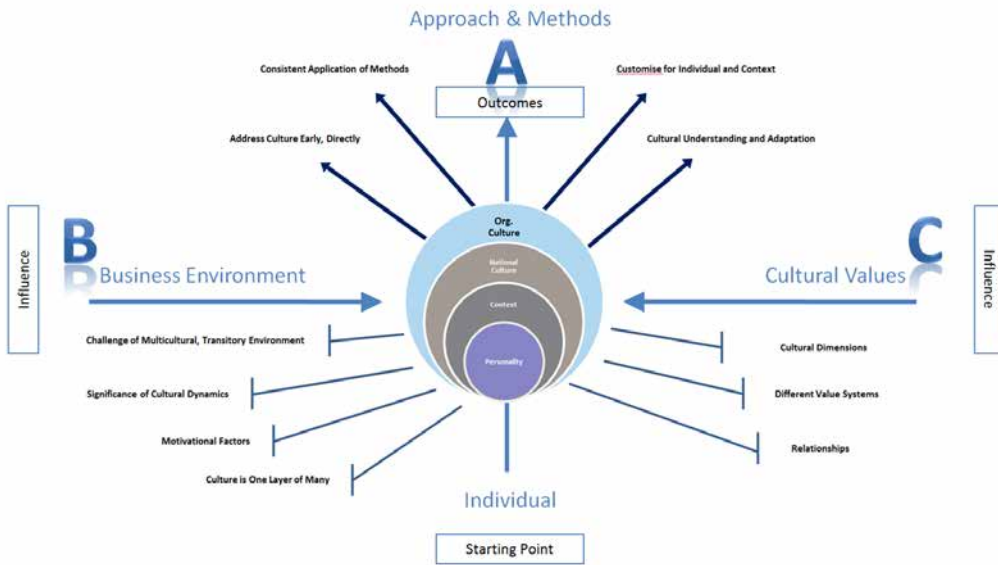


Figure 2: The ABC model of coaching in the United Arab Emirates

### Limitations of the study

Research of this nature could be criticised for having less prominence on external validity and scientific controls due to its business setting, qualitative and philosophical nature. However, IPA is concerned with the interpretation of an experiential account of a small number of participants, allowing an under-researched topic to be explored. Accordingly, the small number of participants results in limited data, and therefore the emergent model is limited in its generalisation and would need to be tested further.

Another consideration is the broad, generalised definition of expatriate that has been used. In such a multicultural business environment, there are also many cultural differences within the expatriate community.

### Implications for practise and future research

The community of UAE-based Executive Coaches can reference the proposed model to inform their understanding of the factors that can influence an individual coachee, to consider appropriate adjustments to coaching approach and the minor impact of cul-

ture on coaching approaches and methods. For the UAE business community, this study can provide a additional information to consider in internal executive coaching programs and coach selection.

Further research could consider both qualitative and quantitative methods with a broader range of participants. There is also scope to explore the effectiveness and utility of different approaches in coaching psychology in the UAE.

### Conclusions

This qualitative study explored the intersection of coaching psychology practice and national culture in UAE to further our understanding how coaching approaches and methods are used by Executive Coaches with UAE National or Expatriate coachees.

This understanding can represent first steps to building a model of Executive Coaching in the UAE with three emerging themes: Cultural Values, Business Environment and Approach and Methods.

The results show that the issues of culture are addressed directly, with coaches demonstrating understanding, awareness and adaptation to cultural differences, and supplying



higher levels of instruction and direction to UAE Nationals.

Adjustments to approach and methods (A) are driven by the external factors of the UAE's multicultural business environment (B). National culture plays a large role, creating different challenges to address and different motivational considerations for UAE Nationals. Large differences exist in cultural values (C), between UAE Nationals and Expatriates on Hofstede's dimensions, and there are differences in the importance of relationships, trust and family.

Whilst there is notable impact to the approach, the coaching psychology methods are reported as being largely unchanged. Culture does not seem a major influence on methods, despite the large cultural differences amongst nationalities in the UAE. However, all participants describe significant differences in approach and content based upon the national culture of the coachee.

## References

- Abouzeid, R. (August 24 2008). Job training for Emiratis 'fails in key subjects'. *The National*. Retrieved 10 January 2017 from <http://www.thenational.ae/news/uae-news/education/job-training-for-emiratis-fails-in-key-subjects>
- Adler N.J. (1984). Understanding the ways of understanding: Cross-cultural management methodology reviewed. *Advances in International Comparative Management*, 1, 31–67
- Al-Omari (2008). *Understanding the Arab culture: A practical cross-cultural guide to working in the arab world*. Oxford: How To Books.
- Bennett, M. (1993). Towards ethno-relativism: A developmental model of intercultural sensitivity. In R.M. Paige (Ed.), *Education for the intercultural experience*. Yarmouth, Maine: Intercultural Press
- Cooper, R., Fleischer, A. & Cotton, F.A. (2015). Building connections: An interpretative phenomenological analysis of quantitative research students' learning experiences. *Qualitative Report*, 17(1), 1–16
- Maintaining focus on the individual, whilst being culturally aware and adaptable seems a recipe for successfully coaching across cultures in the UAE. National culture is clearly an important factor in Executive Coaching, however it is only one of many dimensions to be considered and incorporated in effective coaching process.

## Authors

**Graham Dodds and Dr Dasha Grajfoner.**

## Correspondence

**Graham Dodd**, Island TH 24, Al Muneera, Abu Dhabi, PO Box 3600, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates; email: [graham@oceansinside.com](mailto:graham@oceansinside.com)

**Dr Dasha Grajfoner**, Centre for Business and Coaching Psychology, Department of Psychology, Heriot Watt University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, EH14 4AS; email [D.Grajfoner@hw.ac.uk](mailto:D.Grajfoner@hw.ac.uk)

- Hicks, M.D. & Peterson, D.B. (1999). Leaders coaching across borders. In W.H. Mobley, M.J. Gessner, & V.J. Arnold (Eds.), *Advances in global leadership 1*, (pp.295–314). Stamford, Connecticut: JAI Press.
- Hofstede, G. (1980). *Culture's consequences: International differences in work-related values*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Hofstede, G. (1991). *Cultures and organisations: Software of the mind: Intercultural cooperation and its importance for survival*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Hofstede, G. (1993). Cultural constraints in management theories. *Academy of Management Executive*, 7, 81–94.
- Hofstede, G. & Bond, M. (1988). The Confucius connection: From cultural roots to economic growth. *Organisational Dynamics*, 16, 5–21.
- Hofstede, G. (2001). *Cultures consequences: Comparing values, behaviours, institutions and organisations across nations* (2nd edn.). London: Sage.
- Hoppe, M.H. (1998). Cross-cultural issues in leadership development. In C.D. McCauley, R.S. Moxley & E. Van Velsor (Eds.), *The Centre for Creative Leadership handbook of leadership development*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Law, H.C., Ireland, S. & Hussain, Z. (2007). *Psychology of Coaching, Mentoring & Learning*. Chichester: Wiley.
- Law, H.C. (2013). *Coaching Psychology: A Practitioner's Guide*. Chichester: Wiley.
- Maslow, A.H. (1970). *Motivation and personality* (2nd edn.). New York: Harper & Row.
- Metcalf, B.D. (2006). Exploring cultural dimensions of gender and management in the Middle East. *Thunderbird International Business Review* 48(1), 93–107.
- Nevis, E.C. (1983). Using an American perspective in understanding another culture: Toward a hierarchy of needs for the PRC. *Journal of Applied Behavioural Science*, 19, 249–64
- Palmer, S. & Whybrow, A. (2005). The proposal to establish a Special Group in Coaching Psychology. *Coaching Psychologist*, 1, 5–12.
- 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.
- Palmer, T. & Arnold, V.J. (2013). Coaching in the Middle East. In J. Passmore (Ed.), *Diversity in coaching* (2nd edn.). London: Kogan Page
- Passmore, J. (2013). *Diversity in coaching*. (2nd edn.). London: Kogan Page.
- Peterson, D.B. (2007). Executive coaching in a cross-cultural context. *Consulting Psychology Journal*, 59, 261–271.
- Pietkiewicz, I. & Smith, J.A. (2012). Praktyczny przewodnik interpretacyjnej analizy fenomenologicznej w badaniach jakościowych w psychologii. *Czasopismo Psychologiczne*, 18(2), 361–369.
- Pinder, C.C. (1984). *Work motivation: Theory, issue and applications*. London: Scott, Foresman & Co.
- Reid, K., Flowers, P. & Larkin, M. (2005). Exploring the lived experience. *The Psychologist*, 18, 20–23.
- Rosinski, P. (1999). Beyond intercultural sensitivity: Leveraging cultural differences. *International Journal of Coaching in Organisations*, 1(4), 4–16.
- Rosinski, P. (1999). *Coaching across cultures*. London: Nicholas Brealey.
- Rosinski, P. (2003). *Coaching across cultures* (2nd edn.). London: Nicholas Brealey.
- Rosinski, P. & Abbot, G. (2006). Intercultural coaching. In J. Passmore, M.A. Pena, P. Rosinski, & A. Szabo (Eds.), *Excellence in coaching: The industry guide* (pp.175–188) London: Kagan Page C. (1960)
- Rosinski, P. & Szabo, A. (Eds.), *Excellence in coaching: The industry guide* (pp.175–188). London: Kagan Page C. (1960).
- Rubin, H.J. & Rubin, I.S. (1995). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data*. London: Sage.
- Scott-Jackson, W.B. (2008). The Gulf Arab management style as a source of strategic advantage: Building global strategic capabilities on the foundations of local culture. In P. Schrijnen & E. Leigh (Eds.), *Bridging the gulf: Theories and practices for learning across organizations, sectors, and cultures, society for organizational learning* (SoL). Cambridge, MA: Academic Press
- Schein, E.H. (1992). *Organisational culture and leadership* (2nd edn.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Smith, J.A., Flowers, P. & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretive phenomenological analysis: Theory, method, and research*. London: Sage.

- Smith, J.A. & Osborn, M. (2003). Interpretative phenomenological analysis. In J.A. Smith (Ed.), *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods*. London: Sage.
- Smith, J.A. (1996). Beyond the divide between cognition and discourse: using interpretative phenomenological analysis in health psychology. *Psychology and Health, 11*, 261–271.
- Smith, J.A., Flowers, P. & Larkin, M. (2011). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis; Theory, method and research*. London: Sage.
- Steers, R.M. & Porter, L.M. (1987). *Motivation and Work Behaviour*. USA: McGraw-Hill.
- Triandis, H.C. (1996). The measurement of cultural syndromes. *American Psychologist, 51*, 407–415.
- Triandis, H.C. (2004). Foreword. In D. Landis & J.M. Bennett (Eds.), *Handbook of intercultural training* (3rd edn.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Trompenaars, F. & Hampden-Turner, C. (1997). *Riding the waves of culture: Understanding cultural diversity in business* (2nd edn.). London: Nicholas Brealey.
- UAE Interact (May 20 2010). *Emiratization of Workforce 'Pillar of Growth.'* Retrieved from [https://www.uaeinteract.com/docs/Emiratization\\_of\\_workforce\\_pillar\\_of\\_growth/41096.htm](https://www.uaeinteract.com/docs/Emiratization_of_workforce_pillar_of_growth/41096.htm)
- Weir, D. (2003). *Management development and leadership in the Middle East: An alternative paradigm*. Paper presented to the Leadership in the Management Theory at Work Series Conference, Lancaster University, Lancaster June 2003.
- Weir, D. & Hutchings, K. (2005). Cultural filtering in the Arab World and China: Exploring the interrelationship of the technological knowledge age and traditional cultural networking and interpersonal connections. In S.G.M. van Bunt-Kokhuis & M. Bolger (Eds.), *World wide work* (pp.90–98). The Hague: Free University of the Netherlands.

## Report

# SGCP Chair's Note

David Webster

---



**T**HE BRITISH Psychological Society (BPS) is, and will continue to undergo major structural change. The historic organic growth of parts of the member networks in the form of divisions, sections, regions, faculties, and special groups has led to there being 146 groups in total. Each, of course, seeks to serve their membership and strengthen the impact psychology has on society – whether it be through conferences and workshops, advocacy or publications. The challenge is that the picture becomes fractured and thereby difficult to co-ordinate, and navigate. Too much complexity has slowed decision making and increased the administrative burden.

The SGCP has benefitted from some great administrative support yet we also are acutely aware of the complexity, slow decision making and reduced ability to co-ordinate activity between member networks that can be a challenge both for the BPS itself as well as the member networks. We are very hopeful that these changes will bring the kind of ‘empowerment to act’ that the Structural Review team at the BPS has as its bold ambition for the Member Networks. We are hopeful of benefitting directly from the changes because not only are we the sixth largest member grouping in the Society but the public interest both in psychology as well as coaching continues to rise.

So, to capitalise on the changes that the BPS is undergoing and continues to consult on as we go into a New Year, some of our own hopes for 2018 are as follows:

- Refreshing of the Register and Continuing Professional Development offer to enhance the development path for all our members.
- Building relationships with other interested organisations in the UK and around the globe to strengthen our position, advocacy, nationally and internationally.
- Continuing to develop a robust research platform by engaging our membership, supporting them to contribute to the body of knowledge from which we all draw.
- Ensuring our publications are on a sustainable footing for the years to come, offering insight, community connection and professional resources for members.
- Clearer engagement of our burgeoning student population, and enhancing the richness of debate and adjusting the age profile both of the membership and the Committee in the process.
- Creating a great conference for 2018 and one that all can be involved in.

This year end, as is often the case, is also an opportunity to say a fond farewell to those who are leaving the Committee: Andy Colville, Paul Phillips, Gurcharn Dillon and Margaret Macafee. All of made a huge contribution to the work of the Committee and experience of members of the SGCP, and share our heartfelt thanks for all their hard work. We have also been delighted to welcome new members to the Committee this

year, either in elected or co-opted positions – Dr Marie Stopforth, Dr Yi Ling Lang, Dr Laura Rees-Davies and Professor Jonathan Passmore. We also are happy to welcome Natalie Lancer as the PsyPAG representative. Do please get in touch if you would like to contribute as a Committee member or to contribute to the publication through the new assistant editor role.

**David Webster**

*Chair, Special Group in Coaching Psychology*  
*sgcpchair@bps.org.uk*

**The British  
Psychological Society**

Promoting excellence in psychology

## Your structural review

We need to change. And we need to change quite significantly in many areas. This starts with what we are here for.

Our vision is for people, organisations and communities to be equipped with the everyday psychological knowledge to navigate a complex world. To achieve this we need to be better at focusing on our aims and have a structure that supports activities designed to achieve those aims.

Your input in this process is vital so please add your voice [structuralreview@bps.org.uk](mailto:structuralreview@bps.org.uk)  
Further information here <https://beta.bps.org.uk/about-us/our-structural-review>

[www.bps.org.uk](http://www.bps.org.uk)



The British  
Psychological Society

## Report

# Interest Group in Coaching Psychology News

Vicki de Prazer

---



**A**S 2017 DRAWS to a close the Coaching Psychology Interest Group are excited to be planning for our next International Coaching Psychology Congress, around the Theme of Complexity.

We are excited to be developing the Congress along side an aligned group of professionals, also interested in examining this notion. By reviewing complexity through the lenses of organisational psychology, neuroscience, mental health in the workplace and the challenges of digital environments; via this forum, we seek to understand ways of achieving optimal performance for individuals and organisations across an array of endeavors and environments.

We are seeking speakers and participants for the Congress. The event is scheduled for mid October and the date and the speaking criteria will be confirmed and available very soon. I was very pleased to be attend the Harvard Medical School Coaching Congress this year, which were both outstanding events and believe I have found some excellent speakers for our 2018 Congress.

Our state representatives, have throughout the year offered fantastic events for our members. These innovative and informative events, encouraging networking and professional development have included the following topics:

- Evidence based practice, Practice based evidence and Belief based practice in Coaching.
- Coaching both sides of toxic Leadership. (leaders and targets ).
- Building high performance in the Business World.

- Coaching in Action – this was a new style of event; with two experienced and well respected coaching addressing two scenarios through role play, demonstrating how they would coach ‘Challenging and Difficult People’.

All these events effectively delivering on our mission: ‘To explore and expand the contribution of psychology to best practice coaching within all areas of coaching’.

Reiterating the message contained in my last report; we recognise and appreciate the great wealth of talent and expertise within our membership and network and are looking at new ways to access the knowledge of these practitioners, educators and researchers, to create many more options and opportunities for the exchange of information and ideas.

Following discussion with other International Coaching groups this year, we will in 2018 be inviting contributions from practitioners, researchers and educator against a specified criteria set, for a biennial publication. Our aim being to showcase the work of ‘thought leaders in coaching’; authors, researchers and experienced coaches in an accessible and evidence based resource.

I want to again acknowledge the outstanding contribution of Dr Sandy Gordon from the University of Western Australia as coordinating editor for *ICPR, International Coaching Psychology Review*; and remind you that Sandy will be stepping down from this role in the next few months. See information re this position from Sandy below.

### **Call for Co-editor ICPR**

This exciting role involves co-ordinating the bi-annual publication in line with the Coaching Psychology Interest Group (CPIG) and Australian Psychological Society (APS) policy and strategic aims. The publication is one of the foremost coaching publications of its kind and seeks to reflect the dynamic and progressive nature of the profession of coaching psychology. The person appointed would, in partnership with the UK Co-ordinating Editor, co-ordinate the peer-review process, liaising with the BPS 'Preparation For Publication' (P4P) team, and working with the CPIG committee to review and lead the strategic direction of this publication.

The person appointed would need to be a Full Member of the CPIG and should have experience of writing and publishing within both practitioner and scientific journals, as well as experience of reviewing articles for publication. It would suit an individual who sought to make an invaluable contribution to the future of Coaching Psychology and of the CPIG.

To apply for this role please complete a statement of interest and send to Vicki de Prazer: [vicki@deprazerconsulting.com.au](mailto:vicki@deprazerconsulting.com.au)

For further queries concerning the role please contact Sandy Gordon: [sandy.gordon@uwa.edu.au](mailto:sandy.gordon@uwa.edu.au)

Warm wishes.

**Vicki de Prazer**

Australian National Convener

APS Coaching Psychology Interest Group



The British  
Psychological Society  
Promoting excellence in psychology

# Research. Digested. Free.

Now  
including  
PODCAST  
and APP



[www.bps.org.uk/digest](http://www.bps.org.uk/digest)



**'Easy to access and free, and a mine of useful information for my work:  
what more could I want? I only wish I'd found this years ago!'**

Dr Jennifer Wild, Consultant Clinical Psychologist & Senior Lecturer, Institute of Psychiatry

**'The selection of papers suits my eclectic mind perfectly, and the quality and clarity  
of the synopses is uniformly excellent.'**

Professor Guy Claxton, University of Bristol



# what can the **psychologist** do for you?

## **Access The Psychologist:**

Your Psychologist, your way:  
in addition to The Psychologist website at <http://thepsychologist.bps.org.uk>, Society members can read via app, digital edition and more by logging in using their Society web details at [tinyurl.com/yourpsych](http://tinyurl.com/yourpsych).  
Not a member? Become an E-subscriber or Affiliate via [www.bps.org.uk/join](http://www.bps.org.uk/join)

## **Connect with The Psychologist:**

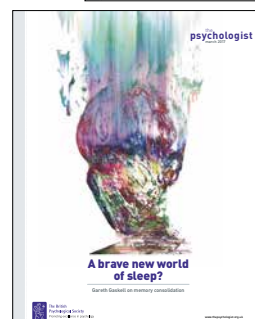
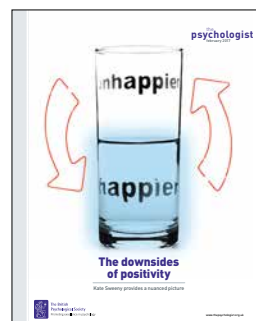
Find us on Twitter (@psychmag)  
and Facebook ([tinyurl.com/psychmag](http://tinyurl.com/psychmag)).

## **Write for The Psychologist:**

We publish a wide range of news, views, reviews, interviews and much more.  
To reach 50,000 psychologists,  
see [www.thepsychologist.org.uk/contribute](http://www.thepsychologist.org.uk/contribute)

## **Advertise in The Psychologist:**

Want to tell our large, prime audience about a job, course, conference or product?  
See [www.thepsychologist.org.uk/advertise](http://www.thepsychologist.org.uk/advertise)



The British  
Psychological Society

[www.thepsychologist.org.uk](http://www.thepsychologist.org.uk)

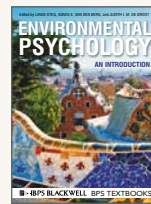
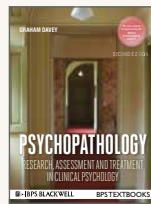
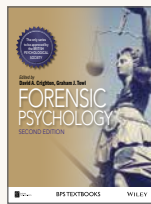
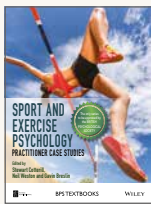
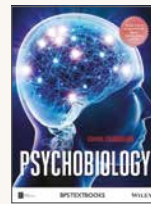
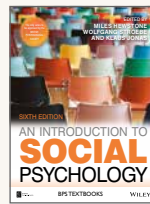
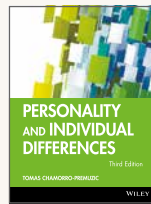
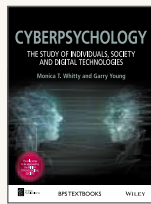
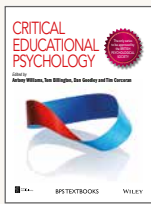
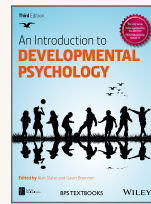
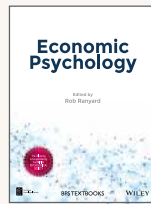
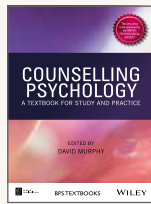
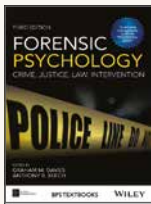
# BPS Textbooks in Psychology

No other series bears the BPS seal of approval

Refreshingly written to consider more than North American research, this series is the first to give a truly international perspective. Every title fully complies with the BPS syllabus in the topic. Each book is supported by a companion website, featuring additional resource materials for both instructors and students.

The only series to be approved by the British Psychological Society

Special Discounts available for BPS members\*



\*For member discounts and to view the full list, go to [www.wiley.com/go/bps](http://www.wiley.com/go/bps)

WILEY Blackwell

WILEY

## 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](http://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 difference*. 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.  
Passmore, J. (2010). A grounded theory study of the coachee experience: The implications for training and practice in coaching psychology. *International Coaching Psychology Review* 5(1), 48–62.
- 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 'Accepted' version at any time without permission. For permission to reproduce 'Published' versions please email [permissions@bps.org.uk](mailto:permissions@bps.org.uk). 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.

# Contents

- 4 Editorial  
Jonathan Passmore & Sandy Gordon

## *Papers*

- 6 Trust your gut, listen to reason: How experienced coaches work with intuition in their practice  
Claire Sheldon
- 21 Developing self-compassion in leadership development coaching: A practice model and case study analysis  
Karol M. Wasylyshyn & Frank Masterpasqua
- 35 Reciprocal peer coaching: A constructivist methodology for enhancing formative assessment strategy in tertiary education  
Lisa Matthewman, Jenni Nowlan & Katriina Hyvönen
- 48 How is behavioural change sustained over time? Coachee perceptions of the effects of coaching one year later  
Ventaka Nanduri
- 61 Coaching for health and lifestyle change: Theory and guidelines for interacting and reflecting with women about their challenges and aspirations  
Reinhard Stelter & Vinnie Andersen
- 72 One-to-one coaching as a catalyst for personal development: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of coaching undergraduates at a UK university  
Natalie Lancer & Virginia Eatough
- 89 Executive coaching and national culture in the United Arab Emirates: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis  
Graham Dodds & Dasha Grajfoner

## *Reports*

- 106 SGCP Chair's Note  
David Webster
- 107 Interest Group in Coaching Psychology News  
Vicki de Prazer