

An examination of some of the factors that affect the sustainability of perceived benefits of coaching over time

**Postgraduate Certificate
in
Work Based Learning Studies (Coaching Practice)
Research Project**

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Main Research Questions and Key Findings

1. Did the respondents believe that they and their organisations gained any benefits from their coaching and if so what were they?

- All respondents said they benefited from coaching - including improved self confidence, raised profile and visibility, improved stakeholder management and working more strategically.
- All respondents believed their organisations benefited from their coaching – including more driven business results, better organisation capability e.g. through their coaching and feedback to others, and their increased confidence making a greater impact on the organisation as a whole.

2. How long lasting were these benefits?

- All respondents said that the benefits continued at the time of interview (8 to 78 months after coaching ended) and helped them resolve issues through, for example, better influencing skills, more proactivity, greater confidence and self awareness

3. What factors did the respondents cite as affecting the sustainability of these coaching benefits over time?

- 22 “helping” factors were cited. The most significant was the ability to “self coach”. Others included support from family, friends, colleagues, peer groups, action learning groups and managers; development opportunities, taking care of self, positive achievements and openness to, and willingness to engage in, the coaching process.
- 16 “hindering” factors included excessive workload, variable/lack of support from the line manager, or others in the organisation, and organisational change.

4. Did the respondents believe that an extra coaching session, after their coaching had ended, would have helped sustain the benefits? If so how and after what time period?

- The majority of respondents believed that there would have been a benefit in having an extra coaching session after their coaching had ended to reflect on, review, refresh and reinforce their coaching. 6 months was considered the optimum time for the extra coaching session.

5. Other findings

- the importance of the client/coach relationship
- valuing their coach’s independence, confidentiality and fresh “eye”
- a desire for more organisational interest in, and evaluation of, their coaching programmes.

Summary

This research project attempts to identify and explore factors which effect the sustainability of executive coaching outcomes, after coaching ends, as perceived by a small sample of an executive coaching consultancy's past coaching clients. Data was gathered by means of a small scale exploratory survey by interview and the resultant factors were described as either helping sustain coaching outcomes or hindering them. The report concludes that the most significant "helping" factor was the ability to "self coach". Other "helping" factors included support from family, friends, colleagues, peer groups and managers, development opportunities, taking care of self, positive achievements and openness to, and willingness to engage in, the coaching process. "Hindering" factors included excessive workload, variable/lack of support from the line manager, or others in the organisation and organisational change. In addition, the majority of respondents believed that there would have been a benefit in having an extra coaching session after their coaching had ended to reflect on, review and reinforce their coaching. The report recommends areas for follow up research such as the ability to self coach and its link to adult learning theory. Some of the project findings will be used to inform my own coaching practice and that of my sponsors.

Chapter 1: Introduction

So far my academic studies and applied coaching have focussed on the lead up to, and the actual coaching intervention itself, rather than the client's experience beyond it. This is reflected in the literature which seems to show very little, if any, research in this area, other than from a Return on Investment (ROI) angle. Curious to learn more about some of the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that help or hinder the sustainability of coaching over time, I conceived this modest research project which follows up a small sample of my sponsor's clients, after coaching ends. The clients are senior leaders in both private and public sector organisations.

This project draws upon my existing knowledge and skills in the areas of coaching, Human Resources (HR), Organisational Development (OD) and leadership and extends my knowledge, and that of my sponsors, on factors which effect the sustainability of executive coaching outcomes. My sponsors and I hope to use some of these factors to inform the design of future coaching interventions/programmes and to illustrate the longer term impact of coaching to our clients. I hope too that the clients themselves may also benefit from reflecting on, and reviewing, their earlier coaching experiences.

Chapter 2: Project Aim and Literature Review

Project Aim

To explore factors that may help sustain, or hinder, the perceived benefits of executive coaching over time, and to use this to inform my future coaching practice.

The main **research questions** I asked in order to achieve this aim were:

1. Did the respondents believe that they and their organisations gained any benefits from their coaching and if so what were they?
2. How long lasting were these benefits?
3. What factors did the respondents cite as affecting the sustainability of these coaching benefits over time?
4. Did the respondents believe that an extra coaching session, after their coaching had ended, would have helped sustain the benefits? If so how and after what time period?

Stakeholders

My sponsors, the Directors of Keary Harper executive coaching consultancy, are the main stakeholders in my project (other than myself). They supported my research by attending meetings with me and providing access to past clients; the respondents in my research. My sponsors did not influence the aims and objectives of my research project or contribute any specific interview questions nor stipulate any boundaries within which I should operate. The ones I chose for myself were to operate as I do as a coach; providing a safe, calm and non-judgmental space for the interview to take place as well as accuracy and anonymity in my presentation of the data.

Literature Review

I searched the internet and University of Middlesex's web-based library using key words such as "sustainability of coaching", "after coaching ends" and "longitudinal coaching research" and found nothing on factors which sustained coaching benefits over time.

Fillery-Travis and Lane (2006) examined whether coaching works or whether this asked the wrong question. Their research showed that "everyone likes to be coached and perceives that it impacts positively upon their effectiveness", and they posited a framework of practice to develop a more structured and useful question, in particular to ROI. Whilst I chose not to follow up ROI in any detail in my research, I used the study to predict that the respondents would report positive outcomes of coaching. I also expected my research to show that clients gained other positive outcomes from coaching, not anticipated at the start of the process, as suggested by Smith's research (2003).

The paucity of relevant research was corroborated by my sponsors who have extensive knowledge and experience of coaching, and by my tutor who is very familiar with the literature herself, having recently gained a doctorate in coaching. Instead I turned to my professional and academic studies and drew on two main

sources: adult learning theory, and OD as lines of enquiry for factors sustaining coaching benefits.

According to Kolb (1984) the most effective learning takes place after the whole learning cycle is completed. Thus applied to coaching, the client describes and notices their experiences (Concrete Action), reflects on these experiences (Reflective Observation), links these reflections together by noticing patterns and themes (Abstract Conceptualisation), and then tests the insights they have gained (Active Experimentation) before applying them to future experiences, thus starting the learning cycle again. This theme also occurs in the concept of learning loops (Agyris & Schon: 1974) and (Hargrove: 2003). In single loop learning the client reflects on performance and then acts differently; in double loop learning their thinking begins to change through reframing; and in triple loop learning they recognise underlying themes and patterns, change their perceptions and thus “learn how to learn”. Clients in these “transformational coaching” circumstances will be empowered to coach themselves after coaching ends. I therefore included the ability to self coach as a factor to investigate.

OD suggested several possible sustaining factors including organisational and line management variables which I used as prompts. Cheung-Judge (2001) postulates that by supplementing formal professional learning in a number of ways, e.g. striving to be self aware; seeking to integrate one’s values and beliefs; and by taking care of oneself, individuals can maximise their effectiveness as OD practitioners. I therefore included “taking care of self” as a prompt and also “Support Networks such as Action Learning sets”, a method of shared problem solving for managers, based on Revans work (1982).

Chapter 3: Methodology

Prior to finalising my research design, I approached Keary Harper, for whom I have undertaken associate work, to discuss my proposals. They agreed to be my sponsors and provide access to some past clients.

My desire to learn, in some depth, about clients’ experiences of the sustainability of their executive coaching outcomes, illustrated with their own contemporary “real-life” experiences, led me to favour a qualitative research approach. However, I was also keen to collect, and analyse, some data in quantitative form. I compared case studies with surveys as approaches and finally chose to conduct my fieldwork by means of a small scale exploratory survey, by interview and this enabled me to interview more individuals than a very in-depth case study approach would allow. This methodology is critically appraised later in this Chapter. I interviewed 10 clients who were selected by my sponsors on the basis of opportunity sampling, against 2 key criteria: availability within my project timeframe and their proximity to London.

I chose interviews as my means of data collection as I was keen to create a setting similar to that of a coaching session to enable the clients’ best reflecting to take place; i.e. face-to-face, in a non-judgmental and calm space. A stated by-product of my research was that the client might benefit from reflecting on, and reviewing their earlier coaching and I offered to use my experience as a coach to support them with

this during the interview. The interviews were semi-structured, using the same questions to enable direct comparisons and theme identification. A strength of using semi-structured interviews is that it allows flexibility to “follow up ideas, probe responses and investigate motives and feelings” (Bell: 2005: 157) in the same way as I would as a coach. A strength of my research design is that my expertise in coaching both informed the questions that I asked and also my understanding of the interview process.

Whilst my research was not based upon a specific hypothesis, I postulated that there were likely to be a range of factors which helped or hindered the sustainability of coaching over time. Whilst I did not want to pre-judge the factors, I used my knowledge and experience of coaching, leadership, HR, OD, and relevant literature to generate some possible factors such as organisational/ managerial support and the client’s ability to “self coach” by the end of the programme as prompts for my interview; using positive and negative examples of each one. In addition I brainstormed others with my learning group and also designed the interview so that respondents could add their own factors. I piloted the draft interview questions, which also covered other related areas, with my sponsors and three coaching colleagues. My final version (Appendix 1) resulted from three earlier drafts. The main changes during the process were additional interview prompts, improved question clarity and question re-ordering to improve the interview flow.

A strength of this approach was that clients had a prompt, if they wanted (as all did), of possible factors affecting coaching sustainability, to which they added other factors. One of the limitations was that I used the original list of prompts with all respondents, but did not include the subsequent additional factors. Had I done so it is very likely that respondents would have chosen some of these unprompted factors, thus affecting the overall ranking (See Chapter 5).

Data Analysis

The interview data was put to both descriptive and analytical uses. I created a Word database to capture the descriptive text and an Excel spreadsheet for the rest of the data and used this to produce tables. Data analysis was thus undertaken using both qualitative and quantitative means; all qualitative data was considered on a question by question basis and then cross compared for various coaching themes, and some data was analysed in numeric form, e.g. the clients’ chosen factors were ranked in order of importance.

Ethical Considerations

I declared my working association with my sponsors in my introductory letter (printed on their headed paper), and said they hoped to use some of the factors identified in the project to inform their coaching practice. I explained to the clients that whilst my sponsors would be consulted on my report, they would not have access to any individual’s data or be shown the collected data in a way that might make identification of individuals possible, thus ensuring anonymity of clients’ responses. I said that my completed standard academic report would be kept in the university library/resource base, considered to be in the public domain, and offered to send them a completed copy of my report. I also said I might write an article for the

sponsors newsletter and/or a coaching publication. I did not believe this project raised any other ethical concerns.

My Role as Researcher

The clients were senior leaders in 8 different organisations, both private and public sector, and I was not an insider researcher with any of them. As a work based researcher I had extensive, relevant pre-understanding of the subject and the contacts with which to instigate my research. I hoped that the clients might also gain some benefit from a review of their coaching and said that I would be very happy to support them with this during the interview; another useful by-product of having coaching expertise myself.

Critical Appraisal of Methodology

The final research design included an element of quantitative methodology but was primarily qualitative and I believe that using a “coaching-like” interview was the most appropriate means for this particular piece of exploratory coaching research. Nevertheless there were some limitations. The first was that by aiming for depth of understanding I could only survey a small number of individuals within the context of this small scale research project; thereby forgoing a key advantage of the survey approach, the ability to gather data from a wide range of representative respondents. A second limitation was that by using opportunity sampling of clients from one particular consultancy, I would not be able to generalise the results beyond those interviewed, nor claim a representative sample across all coaching clients. Thirdly, as one of the key aims of Keary Harper is to empower the client to coach themselves it is perhaps not surprising that all respondents rated the ability to self coach as very important in sustaining coaching benefits. Although, to counter this, the adult learning literature had already suggested this was likely to be a very important factor. With hindsight it would have been interesting to interview some clients who had been coached by individuals who did not enable/encourage client empowerment, and see how this might alter the findings. In practice I suspect that it would have been difficult to secure access to such coaches and clients as this would be highlighting poor coaching practice.

Chapter 4: Project Activity

I started this project by preparing two documents: a timeline to track progress and a learning log to capture my research reflections. I updated both frequently and believe that this planning, organisation and reflection contributed to the smooth running of the project by helping me anchor and analyse the activity. Research design took place in November and December, clients were identified and contacted during December, interviews were conducted from January to early March, first chapters were drafted in February/March and data analysis and final drafting took place between March and May.

The first main project activity involved my sponsors phoning 10 of their past clients to explain the purpose of my project and seek their participation. I followed this up with a letter giving further details and seeking to arrange a one hour meeting. I compiled

a schedule to record interviewee contacts, appointments and other interactions and telephoned/e-mailed the clients to arrange interviews.

The interviews mainly took place at the clients' offices, with one at the sponsor's office and one at the client's home. Eight interviews took place in London and two in neighbouring counties. During the interviews I made handwritten notes on a form I had designed, which I typed up shortly afterwards and sent to the clients to agree or amend. 7 clients responded immediately; the remaining 3 responded to gentle reminders. Of the 10 respondents, 6 agreed the original notes, 3 made small amendments and 1 added a further observation. The clients were positive about the conduct and content of the interviews, which averaged an hour in length.

The project afforded me a key learning experience, which was how energised I was to conduct the research. After months of computer-based work, it was very liberating and stimulating being in work-based environments again and I thoroughly enjoyed meeting each of the clients and learning about their coaching experiences.

Chapter 5: Project Findings

The characteristics of the respondents and their industry sector are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Characteristics of the respondents

Gender		Industry Sector			Job Title			Months since coaching ended	
F	M	Public	Private	Public Private Partnership	CEO	Main board Directors	Heads of Function	Range	Mean
7	3	6	3	1	2	2	6	8 - 78	22.8

The prime purpose of the respondents' coaching was generally to support their executive agenda, particularly during transition, or as part of a leadership development programme. See Appendix 2 for illustrative examples attributed to achieving the prime purpose of coaching, including from one respondent who said that as a result of coaching s/he:

“successfully restructured the (name) department, the attitude survey results for his/her team showed huge rises in motivation and other positive indicators as a result of his/her efforts with the team, now manages his/her stress levels really well and is pulling his/her weight on the executive team”

Findings against the main **research questions**:

1. Did the respondents believe that they and their organisations gained any benefits from their coaching and if so what were they?

All the respondents believed that they benefited from their coaching, as I had predicted from Fillery-Travis & Lane's research (2006), and in all cases this also

included some positive outcomes not anticipated at the start of the process, in keeping with Smith’s research (2003). For instance, one respondent said that:

“S/he is also much better at verbal communication and is better at engaging his/her brain before opening his/her mouth! Overall, s/he has a much more effective communication style now”

Respondents cited 35 individual coaching benefits, of which 9 were prompted (the term “positive outcomes” is used synonymously with “benefits” in this research). There were many singular benefits in the unprompted responses; the 3 most prevalent themes being active relationship management, increased self awareness and empowering/coaching others. Table 2 shows those individual coaching benefits cited by 3 or more respondents. See Appendix 3 for the full list of reported individual benefits.

Table 2: Individual Coaching benefits – (cited by 3 or more respondents)

Positive Outcomes/Benefits	No of respondents
Improved self confidence*	8
Raised profile and visibility*	7
Improved stakeholder management*	7
Working more strategically*	5
Active relationship management	5
Developing own authentic leadership styles*	4
Managing individual/team performance*	4
Gaining new roles within organisation*	3
Better work life balance*	3
Increased self awareness	3
Able to empower/coach others	3

*prompted

One respondent said coaching benefited her thus:

“Went from expert analyst to nurturing/empowering, visible leader as shown by improved 360 degree feedback”

Only one respondent believed that s/he had suffered a detriment as a result of coaching and this was when s/he failed a Talent pool assessment and received feedback that “s/he thought too much” – a skill s/he had developed in coaching. At the time the organisation was looking for quick decision making.

All respondents believed that their organisations had benefited as a result of their coaching, citing 23 benefits, of which 3 were prompted. The 3 most prevalent themes were more driven business results, better organisation capability e.g. through their coaching and feedback to others, and their increased confidence making a greater impact on the organisation as a whole. One respondent said his/her:

“.. ability to drive results is much improved because(I am) more aware of others strengths and what motivates them to do their best”

Table 3 shows those organisational coaching benefits cited by 2 or more respondents. See Appendix 4 for the full list of reported organisational benefits.

Table 3: Organisational Coaching benefits – (cited by 2 or more respondents)

Positive Outcomes/Benefits	No of respondents
Better able to drive business results	5
Building the capability of others	4
Increased confidence leading to greater impact	3
Improved stakeholder management*	3
More effective relationship management	2
Promotion, believed to be largely due to the effects of his/her coaching	2

*prompted

Respondents did not cite any detriments to their organisations other than investment and time, which they believed were outweighed by the benefits.

2. How long lasting were these benefits?

All the respondents said that the benefits were ongoing at the time of interview. Respondents answered in general terms and were not asked to assess these on a benefit by benefit basis. All respondents gave examples of how their coaching had helped them resolve issues after coaching had ended; the main themes concerned influencing, proactivity, confidence, self awareness and using tools and techniques such as MBTI (Appendix 5 for full text). An illustrative example follows:

“Subsequent to the merger (I) was asked to take on an interim role and bring together the two different organisations. There was intense pressure from senior management for (me) to succeed... (I) quickly showed that (I) was a safe pair of hands and gained their respect; all this was helped by the work....done in coaching on influencing and communicating effectively, as well as assessing how best to get things done. Very useful.”

3. What factors did the respondents cite as affecting the sustainability of these coaching benefits over time?

This question addressed the primary aim of my research and is shown in 2 tables; those that helped and those that hindered.

The “**helping**” factors are shown in Table 4. Of the 22 factors listed, 11 were from the prompted list and 11 were generated by the respondents. Each of the prompted factors was chosen by at least one respondent. Respondents then ranked their chosen factors from 10 (most important), to 1 (least important) and the Table shows the total of their rankings.

Table 4: Factors respondents cited as helping the sustainability of coaching benefits over time, in rank order

Qs. 6&7 If you benefited from your coaching programme, what factors have helped you sustain these benefits since it ended? Ranked (10 high)	Total ranked points	No of respondents citing factor
Ability to self coach by end of programme	85	10
Support from family - partner (and in one instance, also parents)	50	7
Personal and/or professional development (examples)	46	7
Good health/taking care of self	36	6
Support from others in the organisation (if so, whom (titles))	35	5
Positive events/achievements in or out of work (examples)	26	4
Support of line manager	25	3
Open to coaching in the first place and willingness to engage in the process *	25	3
Support from friends	21	3
Support networks such as Action Learning Sets (examples)	19	3
Line manager stability	18	3
Using tools and techniques learned in coaching*	13	2
Network opportunities afforded by Keary Harper e.g. Topic discussion dinners *	13	2
Informal relationship/friendship with coach*	10	1
More self and organisationally aware*	9	1
Opportunity to start afresh with new line manager*	7	1
Organisational position – used the opportunity of new job to be on the core executive team where can share knowledge and exercise influence and be at the heart of decision making*	6	1
Having a team to practice on*	6	1
Confidence and network to bring in additional help when needed*	5	1
Applying for jobs and undertaking assessments reinforced the insights about self gained through coaching*	5	1
Sense of humour*	4	1
Organisational stability	2	1

* Unprompted factors

The 10 top rated “helping” factors

“The ability to self coach” was the only factor to be cited by all respondents, and was ranked highest as helping to sustain coaching benefits. This seems to support Kolb’s adult learning theory and the concept of triple loop learning, that when the client has learned to learn, or in a coaching context, has developed the ability to self coach, coaching benefits are more likely to be sustained.

2nd was “Support from family” which for 6 respondents was their partner, and in one case their parents. One respondent said a helpful relationship with their partner allowed the sharing of issues outside of the work situation, in complete confidence. The numbers are not statistically significant, nevertheless it is interesting that only 1 male respondent chose this compared to 6 females (33% males, 86% females).

3rd was “Personal and/or professional development” which for some included attending workshops on relevant subjects such as giving and receiving feedback, and coaching others, thus building on their original coaching.

4th was “Good health/taking care of self”, with examples such as exercise and de-stressing activities, giving some indirect support to the concept that supplementing formal professional learning in a number of ways, e.g. by taking care of oneself, can be important in maximising effectiveness (Cheung-Judge: 2001).

The 5th factor, “Support from others in the organisation”, included mainly Development and HR professionals, who helped build on what the individual had learned. Support also came from peers, Directors and team.

“Positive events/achievements in or out of work”, the 6th factor, included improved attitude survey results within one respondent’s team and for another, seeking out new challenges and issues to apply the new learnings to, which seems to suggest the importance of opportunities to apply new skills as well as seeing them reinforced positively.

“Support of line manager” was 7th. One respondent said that his/her line manager gave feedback about the progress s/he was making, having seen it in the business and welcomed it; another example of positive reinforcement.

The only unprompted factor to be ranked in the top 10 was “Open to coaching in the first place and willingness to engage in the process”, ranked 8th, which suggests that a person’s willingness to learn can also be helpful in sustaining the benefits, again possibly relating back to adult learning theory. One respondent said:

“s/he was interested in learning more about him/herself and becoming more self aware. Saw coaching as a life opportunity.”

“Support from friends” was ranked 9th and included people to talk to, especially outside work.

The 10th factor was “Support networks such as Action Learning Sets”, which for two respondents included belonging to the Windsor Leadership Trust, giving a variety of opportunities to share experiences with people from other organisations, and for one, a women’s group “that counterbalances the men’s network groups which tends to revolve around rugby”. No-one specifically mentioned belonging to an Action Learning Set, which only formally existed in one of the 8 organisations represented. Networking opportunities also featured in the 12th factor which specifically referred to events, such as discussion based dinners, organised by Keary Harper for past and present clients.

In last (22nd) place, was “Organisational Stability” which respondents suggested was a thing of the past.

The top 10 “helping” factors can be summarised as willingness/ability to learn, support from others, relevant development, the opportunity to practice newly acquired skills and positive reinforcement of these. Caution must be exercised

however as there was no investigation of whether these factors were solely responsible for sustaining coaching benefits or whether, as is likely to be the case, they interacted with other variables.

The “**hindering**” factors are shown in Table 5 (of the 16 factors listed, 11 were from the prompted list). 3 respondents said they hadn’t experienced any hindering factors; the other responses are as follows, using the same ranking as in Table 4.

Table 5: Factors respondents cited as hindering the sustainability of coaching benefits over time, in rank order

Qs. 8&9 If you benefited from your coaching programme, what factors have hindered you from sustaining these since it ended? Ranked (10 high)	Total ranked points	No of respondents citing factor
Excessive workload*	20	2
Variable/lack of support of line manager	19	2
Lack of support from others in the organisation (titles)	19	2
Organisational change	16	2
Negative events/disappointments in or out of work (ex.)	10	1
Tends not to actively seek support from friends and family*	10	1
Time away from coaching can make learnings go stale, lack of exposure*	10	1
Line manager change	9	1
Ill health/not looking after self	9	1
Would have been easy to forget about it so had to make efforts to keep going*	9	1
Coaching wasn’t part of the review process e.g. Around objectives and the ways s/he gets things done. Now ensures that s/he does do this with own subordinates who are being coached – helps make their development plans more personal and specific*	9	1
Lack of support networks such as Action Learning Sets	8	1
Lack of support from friends	0	0
Lack of support from family	0	0
Inability to self coach by end of programme	0	0
Lack of personal and/or professional development	0	0

*unprompted

Of the 16 factors, 4 were cited by 2 respondents, 8 by individual respondents and 4 (prompted) by no-one. Excessive workload was considered to be the most significant factor, perhaps even more so as it was unprompted. One respondent said that excessive workload caused them to default to their pre-coaching approach of doing everything themselves, not useful in the long term.

The next 2 most highly rated factors were variable/lack of support from the line manager, and others in the organisation. However whilst lack of line manager support was a hindering factor for two respondents, another was actually spurred on to benefit from coaching to prove his/her unsupportive manager wrong. One respondent’s “macho” work culture did not understand, or acknowledge, the benefits of coaching, despite paying for it. This meant s/he had to continually explain it to colleagues – using the sports analogy of “coaching talented people for excellence”.

The 4th and last factor to be cited by 2 or more respondents was organisational change. One respondent said this could undermine the good work done when the skills that had been developed in coaching, e.g. people skills, were no longer considered top priority, and other skills were given priority.

4. Did the respondents believe that an extra coaching session, after their coaching had ended, would have helped sustain the benefits? If so how and after what time period?

7 respondents believed that there would have been a benefit in having an extra coaching session after their coaching had ended. The reasons are shown in Table 6, which include reflecting, reviewing, reinforcing and refreshing. 5 respondents said that the most beneficial time period would be after 6 months; 2 said after 3 months.

Table 6: Respondents reasons for believing an extra coaching session would have benefited them, after coaching had ended

Reasons why an extra coaching session would have benefited the individual, after coaching had ended	No of respondents
To review, what has been achieved	2
To consolidate/reinforce learnings and behaviours	5
To check s/he wasn't slipping back into bad habits	1
To refresh thinking	2
To test oneself out against coach for self reliance	1
To reflect on original coaching	1

One respondent believed it would also be useful to have an additional coaching session every 6 months in order to keep up with new challenges, since the more senior a person is, the fewer people there are to confide in, in the organisation. S/he believed that the ability to self coach does not detract from being coached subsequently in different circumstances e.g. after being in a new job for 12 months or as a useful injection at different points of a career.

3 respondents did not believe that they would have benefited from an extra coaching session; 2 because they were already self sufficient and 1 with an active line manager who reinforced their coaching.

Finally, respondents were asked if they wanted to add anything else that might be relevant to my research, and all did; mostly to reiterate their positive experiences of coaching and their enjoyment of the opportunity to reflect on them as encapsulated by one respondent who said:

“S/he found the opportunity to reflect on his/her coaching very useful as s/he had forgotten certain incidents/achievements, e.g. considering what the benefits were for his/her organisation.”

Another said s/he had found the coaching to be great fun and had extracted “little nuggets” to help herself going forward.

Other key themes were the importance of the client/coach relationship, valuing their coach's independence, confidentiality and fresh "eye", and a desire for more organisational interest in, and evaluation of, their coaching programmes.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

My project's aim " To explore factors that may help sustain, or hinder, the perceived benefits of executive coaching over time, and to use this to inform my future coaching practice" has been achieved by this research.

The most significant "helping" factor, cited by all the respondents, was the ability to self coach". The other "helping" factors can be summarised as willingness/ability to learn, support from others, relevant development, the opportunity to practice newly acquired skills and positive reinforcement of these. "Hindering" factors included excessive workload, variable/lack of support from the line manager, or others in the organisation and organisational change. These factors were drawn from a very small sample of clients and so caution should be exercised in making generalisations. Nevertheless I believe that this research has provided me with enough useful data to inform my own coaching practice, which I will do by:

- a) Supporting my clients develop the ability to self coach by the end of our coaching sessions
- b) Exploring fully with clients, both during coaching and at the final evaluation and closure session, the other factors that are likely to help them sustain the benefits of coaching over time and encouraging them to make full use of them, whilst avoiding those that are likely to be a hindrance
- c) Offering my clients an extra coaching session 6 months after coaching ends as an extra means of helping them sustain the benefits of coaching

A secondary aim was to provide my sponsors with new knowledge and longitudinal data on a sample of their clients to inform their own coaching practice. Whilst it is not my remit to make specific recommendations to them, their stated aim of empowering clients to self coach seems to be successful and they may wish to offer clients a follow up coaching session after coaching ends. Keary Harper's clients were also very appreciative of the high quality coaching and networking opportunities afforded to them. Perhaps they could consider other offerings for their "alumni".

This was a modest piece of research which, I believe, could be followed up. For instance whilst I chose not to major on the ability to self coach and its link to adult learning theory, to the exclusion of other factors, I believe this could be a fruitful research area for those primarily interested in the interaction of adult learning style on the client's ability to eventually self coach. Questions could be devised to probe clients' learning styles and explicit evidence sought to test triple loop learning. Similarly, many of the other factors would also lend themselves to more in depth research.

Key words: coaching, sustainability, longitudinal

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INTERVIEW QUESTIONS/PROMPTS

Interviewee: (Name) Date: Job Title and Organisation: Coaching start and end dates:

Intro - TC to reiterate purpose of project, building on information in letter they have received. Assure confidentiality again and say that this form, once completed, will only be seen by TC. Any data presented in report will be anonymised. Thanks again for participating in project. Any questions before we start?
1. What was the prime purpose of the individual's coaching programme? E.g. to prepare for jobs at next level of organisation, to enhance leadership skills etc
2. Was this prime purpose achieved as a result of the coaching programme? a. If so please explain when and how and/or give examples b. if not please can you talk through some of the reasons why not achieved
3. Did you, as an individual, achieve any other outcomes as a result of the coaching programme? E.g. outcomes might include a. Improved self confidence b. More authentic leadership styles c. New roles within organisation d. Raised profile and visibility e. Better work life balance f. Tackling business objectives e.g. ➤ Managing ind/team performance ➤ Working more strategically ➤ Stakeholder management ➤ improving the range and methods of effective staff engagement ➤ Any others? g. Any others- positive? h. Any others - negative?
4. How long lasting were the benefits, if any, of the coaching programme? (Explain that term "benefits" = positive outcomes) a. Did not last beyond the programme b. Up to 12 months after c. 12-24 months after d. More than 24 months after
5. If applicable, please give an example of where the coaching you had helped you deal with/resolve an issue after the programme ended.
6. If you benefited from your coaching programme, what factors have helped you sustain these benefits since it ended? E.g. a. support of line manager b. support from others in the organisation (if so, whom (titles)) c. line manager stability d. organisational stability e. support networks such as Action Learning Sets (examples) f. support from friends g. support from family h. ability to self coach by end of programme i. personal and/or professional development (examples) j. taking care of self k. positive events/achievements in or out of work (examples) l. any others? (examples)

7. Please rank any factors listed above/described from 1 – least important to 10 – most important as factors which helped sustain the coaching benefits
8. If you benefited from your coaching programme, what factors have hindered you from sustaining these since it ended? E.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Variable/lack of support of line manager b. lack of support from others in the organisation (titles) c. line manager change d. organisational change e. lack of support networks such as Action Learning Sets f. lack of support from friends g. lack of support from family h. inability to self coach by end of programme i. lack of personal and/or professional development j. lack of care of self k. negative events/disappointments in or out of work (ex.) l. any others? (examples)
9. Please rank any factors listed above/described from 1 – least important to 10 – most important as factors which hindered the sustainability of the coaching benefits
10. Were there any disadvantages/detriments to you, as an individual, as a result of the coaching programme? If so please give examples/details
11. Were there any disadvantages/detriments to your organisation as a result of your coaching programme? If so please give examples/details
12. Do you think there would have been a benefit to you if you had had an extra coaching session after the coaching programme had ended? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. If so what would the benefit have been? b. And what timing would have been best – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. after 6 months – ii. or after 12 months – iii. or any other time? c. If not, why not?
13. In what ways do you believe that your organisation benefited as a result of your coaching programme? These might include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. New roles within organisation b. tackling business objectives e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Managing ind/team performance ii. Working more strategically iii. Stakeholder management iv. Staff engagement v. Any others? c. Any others?
14. Is there anything else that you would like to mention that might be relevant for my research?
15. Are you happy for anonymised quotes to be used if helpful in illustrating a point in the project? ...Yes/No
Are you happy to see a typed copy of your answers before I produce report? Yes/No
Any other questions or points of clarification before interview ends?
Thank again and recap on timescales for getting a summary/full version of report as preferred

ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLES ATTRIBUTED TO ACHIEVING THE PRIME PURPOSE OF COACHING

<p>Q.2 Was this prime purpose achieved as a result of the coaching programme? a. If so please explain when and how and/or give examples b. if not please can you talk through some of the reasons why the prime purpose was not achieved</p>
<p>Yes. X definitely benefited – an example is that s/he became more confident to speak up at meetings</p>
<p>Yes, s/he successfully restructured the (name) department, the attitude survey results for his/her team showed huge rises in motivation and other positive indicators as a result of his/her efforts with the team, now manages his/her stress levels really well and is pulling his/her weight on the executive team</p>
<p>Yes, both achieved. Re visibility, did some work on relationship mapping, including around line management, and adjusted the time and quality of his/her contacts as appropriate. S/he also took opportunities to speak to people, e.g. by giving presentations. S/he is naturally introverted so developed tactics to counteract this. Linked to how s/he presents him/herself and here s/he got some specific training</p>
<p>Yes, Leadership tools were acquired and has strategies in place as well as the confidence to carry them out. S/he is a different person now from when s/he started. S/he found mapping out relationships with his/her stakeholders a very useful experience and now understands those relationships better and can allocate the appropriate investment in them and thus try and manage the overload.</p>
<p>Yes – s/he was able to understand other people’s perspectives and how his/her own behaviours were viewed by others. By “getting into their thinking” s/he was able to achieve success in a number of areas. S/he also spent a lot of time dealing with a particularly tricky individual.</p>
<p>Yes, it was an opportunity to have support, to build his/her confidence and get some practical tools on stakeholder management and influencing (MBTI).</p>
<p>Yes, an example of improving his/her personal effectiveness in meetings, was that s/he developed tactics to use that enabled him to cut in and make a contribution at appropriate places. His/her ability to handle Finance has also improved following a refresher course. Plus about 80% of his/her personal development plan has been achieved.</p>
<p>Satisfactorily achieved. It resulted in X leaving his/her job as s/he realised that there were leadership style issues in his/her organisation that were incompatible with his/her own. X learned how the style of the leader can impact on talented people; also how to understand team dynamics such as how they interact and their differences. It also defined what sort of work environment s/he flourishes in (creative, not stifling) and that s/he wasn’t a maintenance person.</p>
<p>Yes, it was a huge benefit being asked questions that people would shy away from asking him/her at work – and for time to reflect. S/he also undertook MBTI level 2 which helped him/her understand him/herself and his/her impact on others. Used coaching to play to his/her strengths and change certain aspects so as to enhance his/her impact on others</p>
<p>Yes, coaching helped tremendously. S/he achieved both a mindset change and behavioural changes, as well as getting some external references after being with the company for a relatively long time.</p>

APPENDIX 3

FULL LIST OF REPORTED INDIVIDUAL BENEFITS OF COACHING (*prompted)

Q.3 Positive Outcomes/Benefits to individual	No of respondents
Improved self confidence*	8
More authentic leadership styles*	7
New roles within organisation *	7
Raised profile and visibility *	5
Better work life balance *	4
Managing ind/team performance*	4
Working more strategically *	3
Stakeholder management*	3
Improving effectiveness of staff engagement*	1
Has also benefited X outside work as getting own thoughts into perspective and in order helps with transition from work to home	1
Being more assertive	1
Had an “epiphany” moment with coach when s/he had been feeling tired and low and was seriously considering a different job. S/he brainstormed his/her skills and realised that s/he would be well suited to being a coach herself. As a result ended up enjoying current role much more.	1
S/he is also much happier	1
Much better at seeing and taking opportunities e.g. speaking at conferences and positioning him/herself e.g. at restructurings	1
Also thinks about, and actively manages, relationships rather than just letting them happen	1
Time out to think about him/herself – offsite in a safe environment when his/her organisation was going through huge change. There was a negative environment at work e.g. trying to understand/deal with other people’s agendas, individual survival etc.	1
The investment in X as an individual	1
Increased self awareness. E.g. a) used Myers Briggs to understand him/herself better and his/her interactions with other MBTI types. Learnt a lot about him/herself. b)Used insights albeit uncomfortable from peer	2
S/he has kept up an informal relationship with his/her coach since the formal coaching ended which has had many positive outcomes	1
S/he is also much better at verbal communication and is better at engaging brain before opening his/her mouth! Overall, s/he has a much more effective communication style now.	1
Went from expert analyst to nurturing/empowering, visible leader as shown by his/her improved 360 degree feedback	1
Has helped him/her become a better coach to others	1
Now looks at issues from different perspectives	1
S/he has also taken on new roles within his/her existing job	1
Was very task focussed before coaching e.g. reducing (subject); now much more aware of the need to develop	1
Now has a portfolio of approaches at his/her disposal	1
Better relationships with senior management team and managing up	1
Managing his/her boss	1
Greater awareness of those around him/her and how to press the right buttons	1
Now uses some coaching techniques with his/her own staff	1
KHA networking dinners allow him/her to meet people from other organisations	1
Coaching also helped with X’s career planning	1
Also developed effective ways of working with peers in order to achieve what s/he needed	1
Coaching also helped him/her outside work by giving him/her a framework s/he could use	1
Understanding what was important to him/her in a work environment/ culture coaching helped him/her choose to move on to a new organisation with a less abrasive/macho culture	1

APPENDIX 4

FULL LIST OF REPORTED ORGANISATIONAL BENEFITS OF COACHING

Q.13 Positive Outcomes/Benefits to organisation	No of respondents
Increased confidence enabled him/her to make a greater impact	3
Stakeholder management*	3
Relationship management	2
S/he was promoted which s/he believes was largely down to the effects of his/her coaching	1
Managing ind/team performance*	1
Staff engagement*	1
Now supports the exec team much better in terms of supporting them with their issues e.g. through using coaching techniques his/herself (and how best to work with the CEO)	1
Managing better through clarity of purpose	1
Enhanced business performance	1
Became a more rounded manager him/herself which gave him/her the opportunity of a demanding interim role for a year after the merger which M does not believe s/he would have got otherwise.	1
S/he is building the capability of others (200 staff)	1
S/he is an improved emissary for his/her department	1
S/he is a coaching enthusiast and now encourages others to develop	1
S/he is a better coach his/herself	1
His/her 360 degree feedback improved over 12 months and his/her peers and direct reports picked up on his/her changed practices (his/her line manager too as mentioned in 6. above but s/he was aware s/he was addressing the issues, whereas his/her peers and direct reports were not)	1
Gives much more useful and challenging feedback to others now	1
Views the feedback that receives as much more valuable than before and follows it up	1
Was able to plan his/her exit and leave without acrimony The organisation had an opportunity to bring in someone who better fitted their environment/culture – although the specific impact of coaching on T was not discussed with them.	1
S/he brings a different perspective to issues and challenges the status quo	1
Has become a better line manager through being more self aware	1
His/her ability to drive results is much improved because s/he is more aware of others strengths and what motivates them to do their best	1
Some people felt intimidated by his/her and so s/he now modifies his/her reactions and approach when with them; is more sympathetic in his/her approach to others	1
Becoming more effective helped the organisation. Energy s/he had used worrying about things was now used positively, driving results and change. The organisation got the most out of his/her through his/her improved decisiveness and enhanced performance	1

* Prompted

FULL TEXT EXAMPLES OF HOW COACHING HAD HELPED RESPONDENTS RESOLVE ISSUES AFTER COACHING HAD ENDED

<p>Q.5 If applicable, please give an example of where the coaching you had helped you deal with/resolve an issue after the programme ended.</p>
<p>S/he was promoted but wasn't offered the appropriate level of pay and his/her boss did not "hear" what s/he had to say. Using strategies s/he had learned in coaching found a way to handle it. S/he rehearsed the situation in his/her head and had the confidence to carry it out and her boss did rectify his/her pay situation</p>
<p>Spent time in coaching working on how best to deal with (description) matters. Was in a complete state the first time, found it hard the second time, Facing his/her third one now and is much more confident and calm. Also dealt with a work crisis whilst having a day off for his/her birthday very differently from before coaching. After worrying for a while s/he calmed down, slept well and dealt with it the next day when back at work</p>
<p>Had an issue with his/her line manager and his line manager and their hierarchy. S/he made a conscious decision to say what his/her expectations were of line manager and what s/he needed. This resulted in a significant difference. S/he also built a stronger relationship with his line manager to achieve a 2 way, rather than a 1 way, relationship. S/he wouldn't have done this before as his/her instinct would have been that s/he couldn't resolve it herself</p>
<p>Doing another re-structuring now. A new person had some misconceptions that could have impacted adversely on X's work. X used approaches from coaching to intervene rather than be passive as might have been previously. As a result has established status quo with no detriment to X. Also has more confidence now to deal with staff issues.</p>
<p>Subsequent to the merger X was asked to take on an interim role and bring together the two different organisations. There was intense pressure from senior management for him/her to succeed and it was also closely supervised and regulated financially. S/he quickly showed that s/he was a safe pair of hands and gained their respect; all this was helped by the work s/he had done in coaching on influencing and communicating effectively, as well as assessing how best to get things done. Very useful.</p>
<p>Used tools and techniques to improve his/her management of meetings. Also now allows people time to follow good practice i.e. X facilitates the solutions rather than imposes them</p>
<p>The partnership example mentioned earlier. By deciding to lead this project him/herself s/he could be seen to be leading the work.</p>
<p>X used the learning when s/he constructed his/her senior management team at (org). S/he was able to identify the different personalities and their interactions and was able to resolve conflicts through the use of MBTI. S/he managed a series of sessions to promote constructive team working whilst also encouraging team to accept their differences and play to strengths.</p>
<p>X went to a meeting feeling cross because s/he had not been invited in his/her own right but to give a presentation. As a result s/he gave a bad presentation despite his/her work being good. Used his/her coaching experiences to analyse what went wrong and to understand the effect of his/her mood on his/her performance and also his/her impact on others at the meeting to avoid such an instance happening again.</p>
<p>S/he decided to leave his/her job before getting a new job in order to undertake a thorough search for the right role. As a result of coaching s/he had absolute confidence that s/he would find the right job and used a number of coaching techniques to clarify his/her thinking about what s/he was looking for. S/he used revelations and insights gained through coaching to shape his/her next move e.g. how best to manage and communicate up and how best to promote him/herself</p>

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