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Executive Coaching Effectiveness: a pathway to self-efficacy

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Abstract

Evaluation of executive coaching is a new area of research that promises to enhance coaching practice and increase the value of coaching as an instrument for organisational change. An ongoing benchmarking study including a survey and in-depth interviews has been developed by the Institute of Executive Coaching (IEC), Sydney. The results so far indicate that coaching has a major beneficial impact in the workplace. In particular, coaching is valued by coachees for its building of self-efficacy with particular outcomes being identified in the area of increased ability to communicate assertively and confidently with colleagues and staff. Significantly, these benefits around self-awareness, self-belief and communication are perceived as more valuable by coachees than impacts on work organisation and planning or overall work adjustment factors such as workplace stress.

The IEC survey also uses measures based on the Common Factors research in psychology which show that in executive coaching, as in therapy, client responsiveness and the qualities of the coaching relationship have the major influence on effectiveness outcomes.

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Executive coaching has experienced exponential growth over the last ten years. In the US it is estimated as an industry reportedly worth over \$1 billion dollars a year ('Corporate Therapy', 2003;

ICF Coaching Study, 2007). Contextual reasons for the emergence of the cultural phenomenon of

executive coaching (Armstrong, 2006) include matrix organisational structures (which mean people

have more relationships to deal with), increasingly complex work environments, the information

explosion as well as lack of time to deal with people issues, globalisation and the lack of 'elders' in

organisations, who traditionally fulfilled the role of mentor or coach. (Orenstein, 2006; Fitzgerald

2002)

In the face of its widespread practice, it is surprising how little empirical research into the efficacy of

executive coaching has been carried out. (Kampa-Kokesh & Anderson 2001, McGovern et al., 2001; Orenstein, 2006) However, the studies undertaken, albeit small in number, do suggest a

range of potentially positive benefits of executive coaching. Some of these include overall improvements in coachees' performance, productivity and interactions with others, an

enhanced

ability to prioritise and manage time, an overall development of skills and new perspectives, higher

levels of self-awareness and personal growth as well as increased self-confidence. (Gegner cited

in Feldman & Lankau, 2005; Olivero, Bane & Kopelman, 1997; Hall, Otazo & Hollenbeck, 1999).

Whilst this study did not set out to explore explicitly the link between executive coaching and self

efficacy, it emerged as the most significant finding. There also appears to be limited research undertaken that explores coaching and its impact on self efficacy even though it has been

suggested that it is the key psychological variable in coaching. (Popper & Lipschitz, 1992)

Steinwedel (2001) reported an increase self efficacy and the ability to achieve goals amongst an

experimental group of 12 college students who participated in weekly coaching sessions over 16 weeks. Similarly, Evers, Brouwers & Tomic (2006) found that in a study of 30 managers in a government department in the Netherlands that coaching was effective in increasing self-efficacy

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beliefs with respect to setting one's own goals. Dingman (2004) surveyed 104 executives to explore the impact of executive coaching and the quality of coaching relationship on self-efficacy

and four job-related attitudes including job satisfaction, organizational commitment, work/family

conflict, and family/work conflict. She found that the quality of the coaching relationship related to

higher self-efficacy in the executives.

In the academic arena, fewer than 20 studies have utilised a systematic qualitative and/or quantitative method to investigate executive coaching putting academic research well behind the

practitioner literature. (Feldman & Lankau 2005) Coaches do show a definite interest in the effects

of their coaching. In a study of 1,338 coaches in 2002 by Gale et al., (2002), 36% of coaches reported following up with their clients within 1 month of completion of the coaching

engagement,

33% of coaches reported following up between 1 and 3 months and only 16% reported not following

up with their clients. However, Gale et al., (2002) note that the coaches who did follow up on their

coaching did not do so in a systematic fashion.

The majority of the empirical research into the benefits of executive coaching, has been undertaken

in the US; (Gegner 1997; Olivero, Bane and Kopelman 1997; Hall, Otazo and Hollenbeck 1999;

Kampa-Kokesh 2001; McGovern et al 2001; Thach 2002; Anderson 2001a; Anderson 2001b; Wasylyshyn 2003; Smither et al 2003; Luthans and Peterson 2003; Bush 2004; Laske 2004; Bougae 2005; Wasylyshyn, Gronsky and Haas 2006; Orenstein 2006; and Sullivan 2006).

There

are fewer studies in Europe (Wales, 2003; Bush 2004) and almost none in countries such as Australia. Of the two studies in Australia, neither is directly measuring coaching effectiveness from

the perspective of the individuals in organisations who are the direct recipients of coaching services

(i.e the coachees). One (Sue-Chan and Latham 2004) examined the effects of coaching on MBA

students in Canada and Australia, and the other (Dagley 2006) sought HR practitioners reports of

the effectiveness of coaching.

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IEC Coaching Framework and Method

Within the field of executive and business coaching there are different approaches and emphases.

Some organisations and clients focus specifically on tools and skills directly related to work task

performance and coaching is viewed as an individual development process achieved through a

semi-prescriptive program of skills or behaviour development. The Institute has shaped its training

and practice in executive coaching to reflect an integrated approach that addresses the whole person within a context. Using Wilber's (1996, 2000) Integral Model as a landscape for the coaching

process, the Institute takes into account that people both influence and are influenced by personal,

organisational, social and cultural demands. Executive coaching, for the Institute, is a transformational process that regards the coachee as an actor in a whole system that includes the

culture, systems and social context of their situation.

The IEC coaching framework identifies 3 domains of outcomes from coaching; the intrapersonal, interpersonal and instrumental domains. These outcomes are shaped by factors that include resource factors brought to the coaching and relationship quality factors, and cumulatively they produce outcomes for the person and organisation. The outcomes are not cumulative in a linear sense but build on each other, often in a circular fashion to produce outcomes.

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IEC Integral Coaching Framework

This more holistic approach focussing on the whole person and their relationship within their work

context was something we wanted to focus on for the research. Besides contributing to the field as

a whole, the Institute had three broad purposes for evaluating coaching research:

- To evaluate and continuously improve its coaching approach and practice
- To develop benchmarks for coaching effectiveness which serve as professional standards
- To understand the benefits of coaching from the point of view of the client and how the benefits are achieved.

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As well as the Integral Model, the Institute's understanding of the coaching process is informed by

evaluation studies in the closely related areas of organisational training evaluation and psychology.

Most evaluation of training in organisations today is informed by Kirkpatrick's (1976, 1994) 'levels' of

criteria framework. This framework defines four levels of training outcomes: qualitative assessment

– the extent to which participants were satisfied; indicators that learning has taken place, the extent

to which the learning has been applied including demonstration of behaviour change, and measures

(e.g. ROI) and impact on the broader organisation goals and objectives. Kirkpatrick's model, although shown to have limitations (Cannon-Bowers, Salas & Tannenbaum 1995), is relevant to

coaching effectiveness evaluation. Furthermore the limitations that it has, such as its oversimplification, assumptions of causality, lack of contextual factors, and unjustified emphasis on

Return on Investment (ROI) as the most significant outcome measure, can be overcome by incorporating other models of evaluation, including the use of the Integral Model, and common

factors research.

Frustration with the continual contest between exponents of different therapeutic modalities, lead a

group of researchers (Hubble, Duncan and, Miller; 1999) to approach the evaluation of effectiveness from a new angle. Instead of the modality, they focussed on what was happening in

the therapeutic process and identified what they called "common factors" of effectiveness across all

therapeutic modalities. In particular, the factors associated with the presence of a client and the

therapeutic relationship accounted for most of the effectiveness of therapy. Client factors, (ego

strength and resilience leading to readiness for change) were found to account for 40% of the

variance in success; characteristics of the relationship (engagement, empathy, positive regard, and trust) accounted for a further 30%. The remaining 30% included 15% depended on any circumstantial life changes of the client about positive change, and 15% was due to differences in therapeutic technique.

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Method

The research is a mixed method design with a survey and qualitative, semi-structured interviews.

The survey questionnaire was designed by the Institute to measure the various elements of the

model and to address the range of contextual and other factors. It was developed through a process of interviews and focus groups with coaches and coaching clients, and coachees and offers a variety of ways of measuring coaching effectiveness, which, together give it the capability of being a relatively sensitive diagnostic instrument. It includes:

1. Overall measures of coachee satisfaction and subjective assessments of change
2. Measures of effectiveness in relation to the range of specific changes/goals that coaching is expected to address
3. Measures of coachee expectations and attitudes which indicate of coachee readiness and receptiveness to coaching
4. Measures of qualities in the coaching relationship that contribute to effectiveness, and
5. Demographic data to facilitate sub-group comparisons.

The way the questionnaire offers these measures will be at least partly evident in the discussion of

the results below. The survey was conducted on-line and was sent to coachees to complete (in

approximately 15 minutes) after they completed a program of coaching from accredited Institute

coaches. The survey includes a section for added comments, and was supplemented by semistructured

face-to-face interviews conducted by an independent researcher of a random sample of 30 coachees. Results are based on analysis of the surveys completed by 111 coachees up to January 2007.

Further refinement of the survey is currently under way, building on knowledge gained from this research.

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Results

Overall Effectiveness

There are strong indications in the survey results of the overall effectiveness of coaching. A high

proportion of respondents, 92%, expressed overall satisfaction with coaching. Of this, 58% gave it

the top rating of "very satisfied". Two additional comments from surveys indicate the kinds of response coachees had:

"It has been the most rewarding development experience in my career. Like a shrink at work!"

"Possibly the most effective development I have received in my professional life"

Another compelling indicator of overall effectiveness is the 57% of respondents who said that they

were "surprised at the amount of benefit" they gained from their coaching. Of these 25% were "very

surprised" at the extent of the benefit they gained. This element of surprise suggests that coaching,

possibly an unknown experience for many, exceeded their expectations. A survey respondent commented:

"I commenced the coaching sessions with little expectation and a great deal of apprehension.

On completion of 4 sessions, I was extremely surprised how much benefit I gained from them

and would absolutely recommend the process to a colleague".

Another measure of overall effectiveness is reported benefit. Coachees report that coaching changed them. A high proportion of respondents (78%) reported that they found that coaching "benefited their work performance and professional development". One respondent added the comment that:

"I found the overall experience to be very positive and rewarding across many facets of my life, personally and professionally".

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Likewise, a high proportion (71%) said coaching had had "a substantial influence on the way I approach work and colleagues". This can be understood more fully through a statement from one of

the interviews,

"Coaching gave me the tools and confidence to have different kinds of conversations with staff."

These reports of high satisfaction with coaching are not unusual. Since the first recognised field

study in executive coaching by Gegner in 1997, there have been positive reports of coaching effectiveness. In this study, 84% of executives were positive about their involvement in coaching. In

Smither et al's 2003 study, which sought feedback from 404 coachees, 86.3% wanted to work with

their coach again indicating that the executives generally had a favourable reaction to the coaching

process. In another study, of a professional services firm, coachees rated the overall coaching

experience highly with 86% rating it as 'very effective'; (Anderson 2001b). However, while overall

satisfaction is considered a good indicator of effectiveness (Leedham 2005), it does not address the

specific learnings that this overall satisfaction consists in, or how coachees see learning benefits as

being produced by coaching. (Kraiger, 1993)

Specific Benefits

Specific learning outcomes ("benefits") are assessed by the 36 items included in the survey.

These

were grouped under the following broad headings.

- **Intra-personal benefits:** self awareness, and mindfulness leading to action or agency
- **Inter-personal benefits:** engaging confidently with others, assertive communication and social and emotional literacy
- **Instrumental focus:** self organisation and focus on work priorities and performance
- **Leadership:** team organisation, motivating others and managing teams
- **Career Direction:** more conscious career goals and professional direction
- **Adaptation to Work life:** job Satisfaction, stress levels and work/life balance

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Items have been grouped under headings (six in all) of "areas of benefit". While this assignment of

items generally works well there are some caveats. For example, some benefit items could be placed under more than one of these headings. "Confidence to pursue goals" could be placed under personal agency with its reference to "confidence" and "pursue" or even career. We have

located it under "self organisation" because the reference to "goals", and pursuing them, is a feature

that applies widely in work activity. Other items including "visible improvement in my own and my

team's performance" don't fit easily under any heading although we placed it under team organisation. "Capacity to see the bigger picture of the business" is similarly, an item considered

important by participants in the survey design process, which does not obviously belong in any of

the identified groups.

The survey invites coachees to rate these specific benefit items in terms of both the extent to which

they believed that they had gained that benefit and the significance, (or importance) of that benefit

to their working lives. Diagram 1 provides an overview of the survey results in relation to the specific

benefits. It locates all of the specific benefit items on two axes according to their aggregate extent

and significance scores. This score is the percentage of respondents rating the gain of benefit “very

considerable” of considerable”, (the top two of a five point scale). The items are identified by key

words and the full test is in the following tables.

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DIAGRAM 1 Benefit items according extent and significance

The scatter diagram shows that there is a broad positive relationship between the extent and significance ratings that coachees which gives the overall direction of the items from bottom left to

top right in the table. That is, participants seemed to be reporting that the things that executive

coaching were providing were also things that were significant to them in their work.

Significance

was similar to or greater than extent on every item except ‘Awareness of my **underlying personal**

issues’. Items in the top right section of the diagram are ones that coachees rated highest in both

extent and significance of benefit.

The diagram illustrates a general comparison between the ratings of the items on the survey. It

shows that the intrapersonal and interpersonal domains score highest in both extent and

Unit Effectiveness
Delegate Tasks
Bigger Picture
Negotiate
Empathise
Team Dynamics
Career Path
Solve Problems
Performance Priority
Priority Tasks
Mentor Staff
Model Behaviour
Action Plan Pursue Goals
Negative Self Talk Workplace Conflict
Career Ints
Visible Improvement
New insights
Enhance Relationships Prod Work
Relationships
Look Openly
Underlying Personal
Issues
Look New Ways
Give Feedback
Heated Issues
Speak Openly
Communicate Ideas
Motivate Others
Morale Strategies
Respect Diff
Monitor Tasks
Work/Life Balance
Satisfaction
Job Satisfaction
Work Stress

40

45

50

55

60

65

70

75

40 45 50 55 60 65 70 75 80 85

Significance (% of Respondents)

Extent (% of Respondents)

80

85

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significance, but with a difference. Three of the four highest scores (69 - 73%) in extent of benefit involve intrapersonal factors, while 4 of the 5 which have greatest significance (77- 81%) concern face-to-face communication. Scores in both areas are similarly high and quite substantially higher than other areas of benefits.

TABLE 1 Coachee Ratings of Intrapersonal Benefits

Intrapersonal benefits Top 2

Extent

Top 2

Significance

Ability to **look in new ways** at the issues and problems I am facing

73% 77%

Awareness of my **underlying personal issues** 71% 66%

Look openly at personal strengths as well as challenges

69% 74%

Awareness of **negative self-talk** that stops me acting to my full potential

58% 61%

In comparing Tables 1 and 2, it can be seen that the significance rating varies between the two

groups, in that there is a generally higher rating of significance given to the assertive communication benefits than to the intrapersonal benefits.

TABLE 2 Coachee Ratings of Interpersonal Benefits

Interpersonal Benefits

Extent Significance

Ability to **give** personal and professional **feedback** 71% 81%

Ability to discuss **heated issues** constructively 63% 79%

New insights and understanding of colleagues' behaviour 63% 74%

Speak openly to superiors and colleagues 60% 77%

Ability to **communicate ideas** persuasively to others 59% 77%

Improved ability to deal with **workplace conflict** 59% 70%

New ways to **enhance relationships** with colleagues 59% 69%

Capacity to **empathise** with colleagues and their concerns and issues

50% 61%

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Capacity to **respect different** points of view even when I don't agree with them

50% 59%

These results indicate that coachees see themselves as gaining capability in their face-to-face

communication with colleagues through executive coaching and that this is something that they

consider to be even more important than their gains in self awareness and agency. There are indications of a positive correlation between these factors and it is interesting that respondents are

rating the interpersonal benefits as the most significant.

The survey findings are confirmed anecdotally by the comments that respondents write in the space

provided for "additional comments" in the survey. Quite a number of these additional comments

concerned self awareness and convey the extent of benefit that coachees report.

"I was reasonably self aware but [my coach] opened my eyes to other things, especially around personal power and self-promotion."

"I was able to have time to focus on myself. It improved my self awareness"

Early exponents of coaching firmly embedded it in the intrapersonal development domain

(Whitmore, 1996; Gallwey, 2002) but self-awareness and agency have long been considered as marginal in the organisational context, demonstrated by the little attention they receive in the organisational learning literature (Bachkirova 2004). This is perhaps misguided because these intrapersonal benefits are closely associated with gaining confidence and the ability to act in the workplace.

"Coaching gave me greater confidence in who I am. I can now take action. We explored my lack of confidence and [the coach] said 'don't be afraid to take action'."

"I see huge benefits in it. Coaching develops and reinforces skills. It reinforced my thought. It's about not getting bogged down: are you addressing the bigger issue. [Coaching] gives you more assurance, confidence through the reinforcement."

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There appears to be a close relationship between self awareness/agency and what we are calling assertive communication. In fact, the connection means for many coachees a new capacity to make their presence felt in relationship to colleagues:

"Coaching gave me the tools and confidence to have different kinds of conversations with staff."

"I came out much less afraid to ask for what I need, which is quite strange for me."

It is tempting to say that the gains in self-efficacy which coachees are reporting are leading directly to the positive benefits they are experiencing in their more assertive communication and their improved self organisation, overall leadership and improved team management. We make a distinction between what we call "assertive communication" and the other "receptive" aspect of communication, which we call social and emotional "literacy" (awareness and the ability to "read" the social and emotional aspects of self and other). The two items reflecting the latter, "capacity to empathise" and "respect for difference", score substantially lower in both achieved benefit and rated importance than assertive aspects of communication. The greater importance assigned to assertive forms of communication speaks to the culture of organisational contexts today; an increasing reliance on systems of performance management and individual development

plans introduced to improve individual accountability in the workplace, as well as an imperative for individuals to "stand out". Within this context many managers find themselves having to give open

feedback to staff including conducting "challenging conversations" about behaviour and performance. The more receptive items of communication are therefore not rated highly as separate

items on the survey, but in interviews they were often recognised as part of the skills of assertive communication. As one coachee said;

"Coaching gave me the opportunity to talk through how I deliver the message to managers. I learnt to see it from the other person's point of view; how they would hear what I was saying. ... I developed empathy."

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There are four other areas of benefit explored through the survey; two of them dealing directly with task performance capacity, and two with associated aspects of work life.

TABLE 5 Benefits of Self, Team Organisation, Career Direction and Work-life Adjustment

Benefit - Self Organisation

Top 2

Extent

Top 2

Significance

Development of an **action plan** that will enhance my work performance

58% 65%

Ability to establish, and work towards key **performance priorities**

53% 67%

Ability to focus my concentration on **priority tasks** 52% 68%

Improved capacity to **solve problems** I come up against at work

51% 67%

Capacity to systematically **monitor task** performance 46% 56%

Benefit - Team Organisation

Visible improvements in my, and my team's performance 63% 73%

Confidence in my ability to model/**mentor** appropriate behaviours and work styles

56% 69%

Awareness and understanding of **team dynamics** 50% 61%

New strategies to build collaboration and **morale** in my team

45% 61%

Capacity to see the **bigger picture** of the business 43% 61%

Development of new strategies to enhance **unit's effectiveness**

43% 59%

Delegate tasks to others and **monitor** performance 43% 59%

Benefit – Career Direction

Deeper appreciation of my real professional and **career interests**

60% 68%

Confidence to **pursue goals** wholeheartedly 59% 67%

Clearer vision of my professional development and **career path**

54% 61%

Benefit - Work Life Adjustment

A better sense of balance between my work, home life and leisure (**work-life balance**)

47% 56%

An increase in the **satisfaction** I gain from work 47% 57%

Improvement in levels of **job satisfaction** 42% 57%

Ways of reducing my levels of **stress at work** 41% 50%

The range in the item scores in both self and team organisation is similar for both extent and significance. However while these items are rated less highly than the intrapersonal and interpersonal benefits, they are on the whole still considered significant by more than 50% of

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coachees. The benefits in these categories follow Kirkpatrick's (1976) level 3 benefits, in that they

are visible applications of coaching in the workplace. In terms of self-organisation, there is a large

gap between the significance of these items and the benefit received in coaching. The

development of action plans is an exception with people rating these more highly in terms of benefit

and significance than the others items in this category.

“Coaching taught me to be more organised in how I spend my day. It's important to be constantly aware of my responsibilities to be thinking strategically, not absorbed in day-today details. It's constantly challenging.”

“Clarifying things in my own mind: I developed a long list of things that I have got to do, fifty of them. But then when I looked at it [in coaching], I was able to narrow those down to four,

four main drivers".

While these are the areas of coaching that many managers expect will lead to "results" they are not the areas that are considered most important by these recipients of executive coaching. As can be

seen in Table 5, the scores for extent of benefit range from 63% down to 45% compared to a range

of 81% down to 58% (excluding "empathy" and "difference") for self awareness/communication.

There is a similar difference in the range for significance. Both however have a similar level of "gap"

to communication, indicating that the level of benefit being achieved is not fully matching the level of

importance attributed to the items by coachees. The areas of assertive communication, self and

team organisation have larger "gaps" than the other three areas of benefit. This is an area for further analysis and consideration.

While the results suggest that self and team organisation, prioritisation and monitoring of tasks are

of lesser importance to coachees, they are not seeing these things as disconnected from improved

self efficacy. The management of others (team organisation) is connected to self-awareness and

assertive communication, in as much as respondents stated in both additional comments and in

interviews that the two are dependent on each other, in that benefits gained in relation to self

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organisation and team organisation derive from an increase in self-efficacy and assertive communication. As one respondent said:

"The coaching experience was very rewarding in that it provided me with the confidence as well as critical tips in how to conduct difficult conversations and my team is performing better now"

This connection verifies the integral and transformative approach that the Institute takes to coaching. Other coachees specifically made the connection between new ways of thinking, broadening of their horizons, and an expansion of options and team effectiveness.

"Coaching helped in setting up my new team and to think through how to manage people"

"[Coaching] gave me options to deal with a personally challenging personnel issue that was impacting on a lot of people"

The benefits associated with career aspirations and goals are identified as significant to coachees,

but less so in this analysis than in previous analyses. They may be more significant to particular

groups of coachees. For example, when the survey was first piloted with a group of 25

coachees from a financial institution, career benefits were given greater importance in terms of extent

and significance, rating 4th and 5th in the top ten benefits for this group. Interestingly, 10

coachees in that group applied for promotion at the end of that year. One respondent made one direct

reference

to this;
"I received a promotion this year and I think that it was due to my coaching - not fully but a large part of it was. Before the coaching, I would have never approached senior management. The coaching helped me to be direct and go for what I want"

Interestingly, the organisation reported back to us that there was a higher success rate amongst

applicants (8 out of the 10 were successful) than the previous average for the organisation. The

data allows us to identify sub-groups. In the following year, another smaller talent pool sub-group

again gave greater emphasis to benefits in this area suggesting that this difference might reflect the composition of these two groups.

"Clarity about my career direction; what I need to do to get my promotion"

"Coaching helped me get clear about what I really want and where I want to go"

"I now have a clear career plan and know what I have to do. Before it was all hazy."

Benefits in relation to what we are calling "work life adjustment" are rated lowest, perhaps because they do not occupy a strong place in the conscious awareness of coachees, or because "stress"

was identified more specifically (for example, giving constructive feedback or dealing with heated issues) and not as a generalisation. It may be that, increased enjoyment of work, greater ease, less

stress and even spending more time with family are not rated as highly because they are incidental, taken for granted consequences of the improved self-efficacy brought about by coaching.

Further evidence for self-efficacy is shown in the first breakdown of the overall satisfaction scores.

The areas of coaching that coachees express satisfaction with follows the same sequence of ranking. After overall satisfaction (92%) "learning about yourself " ranks next (86%). This is followed by "developing communication skills" (76%) and "improving your work organisation and planning" (66%). See Table 4. .

TABLE 4 Satisfaction Ratings of Different Coaching Benefit Areas

	Very Satis.	Satisfied	Neither	Dissatis	Very Dissatis.	N/A
Learning about yourself	42	44	13	0	1	0
Developing communication skills	24	52	18	3	3	0
Improving your work organisation and planning	18	48	30	3	1	0
Understanding context/strategy of your business	10	40	44	3	3	0
The coaching experience overall	58	34	2	4	2	0

This confirmation of the findings of the rest of the survey are supported in comments from respondents.

"Just putting issues on the table which is what coaching helps me do. I can articulate the actual issues better. That means, identifying what the real problem is. The coach helped me do that; simplifying"

"Coaching brought structure to my thinking, new ideas and new ways of looking"

"I now think of options, avoid tunnel vision. I take time out to get out of the day-to-day stuff and think more strategically. I wasn't doing any strategic thinking before"

Factors Contributing to Coaching Effectiveness

The data in Table 3 also confirms this. Table 3 shows the relative importance of different relationship features that contribute to the effectiveness of coaching. These factors have been grouped according to whether they are more likely enhance exploration of the intra-and interpersonal domains of learning, or whether they refer to processes and structures more likely to

have a direct effect on skill development and particular actions at work.

TABLE 3 Coaching Relationship Descriptors

Contributing Relationship features

Supports Intra/inter personal change

Very

consid.

%

Consid

erable

%

Some

%

Slight

%

Nil

%

N/A

%

Person who asked reflective questions 59 33 4 2 0 2

Safe place to talk about problems and issues 55 32 5 4 1 3

Person who challenged assumptions I was making 47 39 8 2 1 3

Someone I could depend upon to give me support 36 34 20 6 1 3

Supports Instrumental/learning/ business

Sounding board to express and test ideas 46 39 11 1 0 3

Person interested and able to monitor my learning 41 39 10 5 2 3

Brainstorming ideas for work/professional future 36 39 11 9 1 4

Someone who understands my situation 29 43 14 9 1 4

Structured learning framework 21 37 22 14 3 3

Total

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The features that contribute most to coaching effectiveness are those that appear to promote coaching as a space for a meaningful personal and private conversation in which assumptions and

constructions of self and relationship to the world are tested. Features that emphasise coaching as

conventional learning, skill development or direct help with work organisation and planning generally rank lower in the contribution coachees see them as making to the benefits they gain.

In another paper, the significance of people strongly identifying the coaching relationship with aspects such as “a safe place”, “reflective questions” “challenge” and “support” (Armstrong 2006)

has been discussed. The frenetic nature of much working life does not give people spaces for the

reflection and re-assessment of their “daily strivings” (Grant 2006) and the reflective time that coaching provides is an essential dimension for learning and growth. The high rating assigned to

these items indicates that how they see coaching working best is through qualities that enhance the

intra-and interpersonal domains.

Conclusion

The results of the survey and qualitative data strongly suggest that the influence of coaching is first

and foremost in the domain of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is the perception/belief people have about

their capacity to achieve in relation to actions and goals. A strong sense of self-efficacy enhances

personal well-being and accomplishment in many areas and work is one of them. Bandura, as far

back as 1986 emphasised the important role in workplace performance of a person's perception of

his or her capability to perform a given task. Executive coaching, according to the majority of respondents in this study offers a powerful opportunity to enhance the self-belief that leads to improved performance.

The principal evidence for the primacy of self-efficacy is that the benefits rated the most highly were

those to do with self-perception and how this is played out in the workplace especially in terms of

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conducting oneself in relationships with colleagues and superiors. This suggests what may be the

most important finding of the survey: that the impact of coaching conversations and the change they

produce is less in the domain of management techniques and tools and more in the domain of intraand

interpersonal relationships. However, pursuing career goals and interests and setting direction

for self and others through prioritising and guiding subordinates are also rated highly followed by

integrity in relation to others.

Less important appear to be general management tasks such as measuring team effectiveness,

delegating or monitoring tasks, or strategic context issues (see chart below). Also in this group, and

perhaps surprising, are issues of job satisfaction, stress and work/life balance! While some psychological literature emphasises the impact of coaching in reducing stress either directly or

indirectly (Grant, 2001; 2003; Gyllensten and Palmer, 2006), respondents in this study so far have

not rated this benefit highly. However, as one study (Jex and Bliese, 1999) shows, the ongoing

development of self-efficacy may have a moderating effect over time on the stressors. In their study

with 2,000 Army officers in the US, the researchers concluded that those officers with high self-efficacy

were not as threatened by stressors and developed more effective ways of coping with them. This may be the case with coachees in this study.

While these results may appear may seem contrary to some conventional wisdom about coaching,

it does not diminish the effect it has. In fact by enhancing self-efficacy in the conduct of workplace

relations (the two being not mutually exclusive) coaching may have a more powerful effect on workplace effectiveness than conventional wisdom would have us believe. This is a

particularly

significant finding in the context of leadership development if it is considered that the development

of self-efficacy is a pre-requisite for leadership. After all, an individual's belief in their ability to lead

is not only the basis for their ability to be a leader, but fundamentally their wish to be one.

(Popper &

Lipschitz, 1992). Research undertaken by Hartsfield (2003) supports the positive correlation between self-efficacy and leadership. He indicates from his research of 124 leaders in the US that

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self efficacy is second only to emotional intelligence as a key attribute of transformational leaders

and transformational leaders are those that can inspire, influence and engage others through positive contributions to organisational life.(Bass cited in Hartsfield, 2003

The second kind of evidence for self-efficacy is the difference in ratings between different coachees. Coachees who expected that coaching would benefit them, rated the extent of the benefits more highly. This confirms the common factors research of Hubble et al. (1999).

Moreover, coachees who were satisfied overall with coaching, rated the extent of the benefits more highly than those who were not. The concept of self-efficacy is seen in the connection between the overall satisfaction results and the ratings given to the benefits. The first tenet of self efficacy is that success breeds success. People who are offered coaching by organisations are considered people who are worth investing in - whether the coaching is a remedial project or a part of a talent retention program. People who are worth investing in are those with potential and usually a proven track record. One could predict then that people who are selected or asked to engage in coaching are achievers who will approach coaching as an endeavour for further achievement and therefore will rate it as a satisfying or a very satisfying undertaking. This turns out to be the case. Within this overall summation, coaching appears to be a highly effective form of intervention to change workplace attitudes and behaviours through the development of self-efficacy. Perhaps this is not surprising in light of the research (Bandura, 1994) that says there are four ways to promote self-efficacy (a solution-focus to build on successes, modelling achievement, advocacy for existing strengths, setting goals and aspirations with affective buy-in). These are all basic principles of integral executive coaching. Furthermore, with the strong interconnection between the different benefits there is a strong case for coaching to be framed as a holistic, integral and transformative activity. The benchmarking is

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telling us so far that intrapersonal skills are important, but particularly in so far as they can be brought into relationships with other people in the workplace. Therefore coaching should always

contain an intrapersonal element as well as just behaviour and skills development.

Further research development

In these results we have only begun to show the interrelationship between coaching and self-efficacy.

There are a number of other ways to do this including the correlations between factors, the connections between satisfaction, expectations and benefits, and the analysis of the gap between extent and significance of benefits. These are all further topics for expansion of this research.

As to the development of the research instrument as a whole, these results are from coachees only.

We have already followed up a number of the original pilot group to research the sustainability of

coaching. Alongside this follow-up we have an organisational diagnostic that allows us to look at

this sustainability alongside the results of a 360 feedback instrument. In addition, we are presently

developing a pre coaching survey and a 360 degree instrument to be used alongside the existing

survey with another sub-group of coachees that begin in mid 2007.

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