

# **The Benefit of Coaching Participants on a Leadership Programme**

**Research**

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**Project Title:**

**The benefits of coaching participants on a leadership development program**

A project submitted to Middlesex University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for  
the degree of **Masters in Work Based Learning:**  
**Professional Coaching [WBS 4861]**

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Submitted May 2007

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**Keywords:**

Leadership Development

Leadership Coaching

Triple loop learning

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## SUMMARY

This Case Study explores the benefits of coaching twenty two participants on a specific Leadership Development Program, in a global financial services and banking organisation, over a three month period.

The *objectives* for this research are to identify the benefits gained by participants who received coaching, understand the impact sense making conversations have on their learning and self awareness, and provide a base line measure of perceptions associated with coaching during this pilot phase. The organisation also called for a critical assessment of the benefits of the coaching component and recommendations going forward.

Grounded theory was used to inform the data collection and analysis techniques. Reflective questionnaires were used to generate the qualitative data from both the coaches' and participants' perspectives.

The belief that is tested is "*coaching will provide participants with a deeper level of self awareness and learning which in turn will lead to improved leadership capability*". The findings suggest that the coaching offering significantly deepens the participants' learning on the program and enhances the likelihood for leaders to be able to manage both intellectual and emotional complexity and therefore to act appropriately in context. Those participants who are open to coaching and have engaged the process fully demonstrated a return on investment for the business that is line with its strategic objectives. However the reality is that not everyone is able or even willing to benefit from coaching and therefore we need to trust in the wisdom of the individuals that they will learn what they need to when they are ready. The recommendations suggest a more informal approach to coaching, where the boundaries of coaching lies within the structure of the Leadership Development Program.

Fellow researchers are cautioned against generalising these findings and are encouraged to rather relate their decision-making to that described in this particular case study.

*Word count = 298*

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

This chapter puts the project into context, explains why the project area is important and what the main themes are that the project is investigating.

The organisation is one of four major banking organizations, providing banking and financial services across 4 countries in Southern Africa. It has 38 000 employees in 755 branches and is lead by the Executive in Johannesburg.

The organisation has undergone significant changes since 2000 starting with the integration of four separate local banking organizations, followed by being acquired by a global bank in July 2005.

The organisation views leadership and change leader development as a strategic imperative and has identified this as one of its critical success factors in achieving the large scale synergies resulting from the acquisition.

### **1.1 The Leadership Imperative**

The organisation has dedicated significant resources to leadership development since the 1990's. These programs aim to develop a leader's ability to manage both emotional and intellectual complexity at the same time thereby acting appropriately within context.

To date this has included two key programs:

#### a) Development Initiative (ADI)

This 3 year program running for 11 years, has focused on young leaders (under 35 years) who have been identified as having potential for senior leadership positions. ADI has been highly successful and is deemed to be one of the organisations key competitive advantages by its Executive. ADI has earned an external reputation across South Africa as a highly effective

leadership development program. Head-hunters continually research and entice program participants away from the organisation.

#### b) Accelerated Leadership Development Program (ALD)

In January 2007 the two year ALD program was introduced for leaders 36 years and older and focuses on “leading large-scale change”. Participants predominantly come from South Africa and Africa (areas such as Zimbabwe, Kenya, Mauritius and Mozambique). This program extends the learnings and successes of ADI.

### **1.2 The Coaching Component**

Given the degree and nature of the changes facing the organisation, it was critical that its leaders be able to effectively deal with an increasingly complex work environment. Leaders are required to become more effective more quickly in order to meet the changing requirements.

To facilitate this, formal coaching has been included into the ALD program. It's purpose is to further *accelerate the participants' personal growth and learning throughout the program* so that participants become more aware of their own growth in emotional intelligence thereby influencing how they take up their leadership coaching roles and lead large scale organisational change.

Coaching makes use of learning conversations, i.e. the art of personal reflection after the first and second workshops, in order to facilitate deeper learning and emotional development. Further coaching support is provided to contain any emotional deconstruction and reconstruction initiated by the process.

### **1.3 Relevance of this Research**

As ALD is a new program, it makes sense to test our assumptions and research the results and benefits realized through the coaching component. Coaching is a new

initiate within the organisation, and therefore needs to be evaluated to determine both its efficacy and the return on development investment.

This research topic should therefore provide insight into:

- a) Providing a base line evaluation of the coaching component of ALD, thereby enabling more effective evaluation of the program in the future;
- b) The benefits gained by the participants during the process;
- c) The program design in terms of what works and what is less effective in achieving the desired outcomes.

The main areas of research therefore cover:

- a) The impact that coaching has on the development of the participants change leadership capability
- b) The benefits the participants gain as a result of the coaching processes.

#### **1.4 My Role within the Organisation**

I have been employed for 6 years in the organisation as an Organisation Development Consultant, working primarily in leadership, culture change and transformation. I am interested in senior leadership development including coaching and how it impacts on performance. I co-facilitate ALD and ADI with my colleague, Lorenza van Schalkwyk.

As Coaching and Mentoring Custodian I have selected this research in order to further develop my journey to signature presence as a Leadership Coach.

#### **1.5 Levels of Support and Co-operation**

For Work Based research, co-operational collaboration is critical (DLRP, 2003, p. 22). There are many levels of collaboration and demonstrated support for this research. These include:

- The Head of Leadership Development = project sponsor.
- Co-facilitator of ADI and ALD program = project owner and has been deeply immersed in the research process.
- Colleagues in the Leadership Development department. The results gained should enrich their specific areas of work.
- Group Exco are the ultimate sponsors of the ALD program. They are particularly interested in the results as one measure of it's level of influence and success.
- Participants on the ALD program. Previous experience shows participants are fully committed to ADI and should therefore support the research project.

These supporters all expect this research to illustrate the benefits coaching will offer to participants and their learning which should increase leadership capability. The project owner is aware that the research findings may recommend changes to the program and we have agreed upon a process to consider these. This frees me to continue my research as I am cautiously comfortable that no significant barriers exist within the organisation towards my research.

There are only a few constraints associated with the research:

- a) Financial constraints meant Lorenza and I have multiple roles, namely as group facilitator, coach and researcher. This may impact on participant's learning.
- b) Action based research always develops new insights and potential areas of additional work over time.
- c) Time is a natural constraint, as the ALD workshop dates were set and could not be changed.
- d) As a result of the acquisition, the organisation is experiencing a major culture transformation which may influence how the participants view the value in maintaining their changed behaviours.

*Word count = 963*

## CHAPTER TWO: OBJECTIVES AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter sets out the specific aims and objectives of the study and includes a literature review.

### 2.1 Specific Aims and Objectives

The *specific aim* of this research project is to explore the benefits of coaching participants on the ALD program.

The *objectives* for this research are to:

- a) Identify the benefits gained by participants who received coaching;
- b) Understand the impact sense making conversations have on learning and self awareness;
- c) Provide a base line measure of perceptions associated with coaching during the ALD pilot phase;
- d) Critically assess the benefit of the coaching component on the ALD program and make appropriate recommendations going forward.

The research results are directly applicable to my work, in terms of how I coach, how I structure the facilitation for the participants and for future coaching programs. I anticipate that it may have an immediate influence on participants, other coaches and facilitators within the organisation. The results will therefore influence the ALD program and the organizations Coaching Framework.

### 2.2 Research Statement and Questions

I believe that “*coaching will provide participants with a deeper level of self awareness and learning which in turn will lead to improved leadership capability*”. This belief naturally influences both my research statement and the nature of the questions asked throughout the process.

The following *research questions* were asked via questionnaires:

- A. To what extent do the coaching sessions facilitate a deeper level of self awareness and a deeper learning experience for participants on the program?
- B. How do participants experience the coaching?
- C. What are the perceived benefits (specifically in terms of their own effectiveness as change leaders)?

## **2.3 Literature Review**

### **2.3.1 The business imperative**

Argyris (1991, p.5) reports that companies aspiring to succeed in the tougher business environment of the future first need to resolve a basic dilemma: “success in the market place increasingly depends upon learning, yet most of the smartest people don’t know how to learn”. He argues that in addition to learning about problem-solving, leaders also need to reflect critically on their own behaviour, including how they contribute to the organisation’s problems. This is called double loop learning, which includes a reflection of how people feel and how they think. What’s important is the reasoning they use to design and implement their actions. They then need to determine what and how to change their behaviour. When things don’t go according to plan, leaders typically respond with defensive reasoning which blocks learning, even if individual commitment is high.

I think organizations should build the art of reflection into their cultures in order to better compete in the new economy. Reflection is a thoughtful deliberate consideration of one’s experience which leads one to explore the meaning of an experience. It also provides the possibility of viewing that experience from other perspectives (Sanderson, 2004). We know that reflecting on experience encourages deep learning (or double loop learning) which in turn involves exploring underlying norms and assumptions in order to generate new meaning.

We know from literature that learning starts when our desired results reinforce our behaviour. We act with intentions and measure the results achieved. When the results fall short of our intention, we change our behaviour (in a more or less trial-and-error way) in an effort to modify the outcomes. Rationalisation often occurs, resulting in the first learning deficiency, namely *we don't adjust our behaviour, but our intentions*. Herholdt expands Argyris's model into triple loop learning where a person's insights are further developed to identify the relevant principles that underpin their worldview and therefore change their intentions ([Appendix A](#)). Reflecting on results and identifying related principles should be a standard part of excellent leadership practice in the New Economy (Herholdt, 2006).

### **2.3.2 The ALD program**

The ALD program uses experiential learning and principles of Adult Learning ([Appendix B](#)). Specific emphasis is given to participants being responsible for their own learning. As facilitators, we try to create the context for learning, which aligns with the Self-Organised Learning environment described by Harri-Augstein and Thomas (1991).

This program attempts to enable leaders to manage both emotional and intellectual complexity in order to act appropriately within context. We work towards accelerating participant's emotional development (based on Goleman's work, 1996) and deepening their levels of self awareness thus improving their learning. This process attempts to build their reflection skills through slowing down their thinking processes to become more aware of how they form mental models. Dialogue is the ability to have conversations where views are openly shared in order to understand each other's assumptions and meaning (Senge, 1994).

Senge (1994) believes individuals not comfortable with reflective thinking and dialogue have difficulty hearing what others actually say. Rather, they hear what they expect to hear. A limited tolerance for multiple interpretations of events results in them often only 'seeing' their own interpretation. Dialogue

and reflection are therefore seen as critical skills for participants on the ALD as they are required to take up a role as change leader in an environment with multiple perspectives and issues of complex diversity.

William O'Brien, former CEO of Hanover Insurance Company, summarises his own experience in leading change: "The success of an intervention does not depend on its design, but on the interior of the intervener". This supports the principle of the ALD program that Leadership Development IS Personal Development.

### **2.3.3 Why coaching?**

Senge et al (2000, cited in O'Flaherty & Everson, 2005) argue that coaching is an essential skill that leaders need to deal with an ever-changing global reality.

The theoretical concepts that underpin my personal coaching framework have significantly influenced my thinking in this study. The learning philosophy, tools and processes that enable leaders to master the art of coaching are inspired by the same principles which research has shown facilitates adult learning. I have summarised the main theoretical concepts below.

### **2.3.4 What is coaching?**

I believe that coaching involves reflective conversations for the construction and reconstruction of personally significant, relevant and viable meaning through negotiation and exchange (van Oudtshoorn, 2005). This definition is synonymous with Harri-Augstein and Thomas's definition of learning (1991, p.6). Therefore coaching is about learning, and learning comes through the construction of meaning.

### **2.3.5 Approach to coaching**

My approach to coaching is based on learning conversations which "is a sustained activity creating an increasing awareness of the whole experiential process of learning" (Harri-Augstein & Thomas, 1991, p.3). A learning

conversation can only be achieved by “having a go”, reflecting on the experience, informing the experience with the theory and then having another attempt, revising one’s personal theory to do it better each time. This process enables learning and is illustrated by Kolb’s (1993) learning cycle ([Appendix C](#)). Kolb defines learning as a process by which knowledge is created by transforming learning into meaning. After moving through a cycle, a new personal perspective is formed, showing internalisation has taken place. This results in sustainable learning and behaviour change.

As individuals move through this adult learning cycle, they experience the various responses to change, which is illustrated by the Conscious Competence Learning Model ([Appendix D](#)). Coaching assists the individual to move through this process without getting either “stuck” or overwhelmed. This process involves deconstruction and reconstruction and the individual benefits from containment which is offered by the coach. Coaching therefore enables individuals to develop their own support framework as well as the skills to coach both themselves and others over time.

These views led to the research questions being a measure of the extent to which participants were engaging in this process and demonstrating changes in behaviour.

### **2.3.6 Benefits of coaching participants on a leadership development program:**

In consultation with Craig O’Flaherty (director of the Centre for Coaching at the UCT Graduate School of Business) he indicated British American Tobacco (BAT) demonstrates international best practice when implementing coaching within organizations. BAT has seamlessly integrated leadership coaching in its leadership development program in order to drive leadership behaviours determined within the leadership framework. Therefore the purpose of the coaching and the measures of success are clear to the organisation, client and coach. South African Breweries (SAB) is another global organisation in South Africa that has implemented coaching in this manner.

According to Frisch (2001), a key challenge when implementing an internal coaching program as part of a leadership development program is executive support and buy-in. Meyer and Fourie (2004) describe the benefits that Fraser Alexander Bulk Mech has achieved through adopting this approach:

- Leadership focus, direction and alignment improves;
- Their change process was accelerated by nine months and there were no destructive team dynamics in the midst of pressure and challenges;
- Sustainability was further improved as a result of building a high performance culture at the company.

### **2.3.7 Some conflicting issues in the literature**

I have learnt through experience that the success of coaching relies heavily upon the client-coach relationship. This is widely supported in the literature (De Haan & Curd, 2007, Flaherty, 1999, Hargrove, 2003, Peltier, 2001, Whitworth, Kimsey-House & Sandahl, 1998, O'Neill, 2000, Nelson-Jones, 2004). Literature suggests that clients have the right to choose whether or not to be coached and they need to be open towards coaching in order for it to be effective. They should have the opportunity to choose their coach. Literature also cautions coaches against taking up dual roles as this may result in role confusion.

On the ALD program, participants are expected to have coaching as part of the program and are required to choose between two coaches who are also the facilitators. I have designed my questionnaires to explore the effect of this on their learnings and experience.

A further issue for consideration is the influence organisation culture has on coaching effectiveness. The emerging culture in the organisation, following the acquisition, does have an influence on how the participants view the value in maintaining their changed behavior (Hudson, 1999). This is not explored in this study, but requires consideration as it will have a systemic impact on the findings.

*Word count = 1637*

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

This chapter describes and justifies the research approach, data collection and analysis techniques.

### **3.1 Research Approach**

According to Bassey (1981, cited in Bell, 1999) individual researchers need to work to a limited time scale to produce research structured in response to an existing problem so results might be of value to the organisation. The *specific aim* of this research project is to explore the benefits of coaching participants on the ALD program, therefore my main concern is to evaluate the benefits of the coaching component and make recommendations to the organisation. Given the stated research objectives and the fact that coaching is an emerging field, my secondary concern is to generate data that helps towards the development of theory, and hence make use of an inductive process (Gray, 2004). As a result, I selected the case study approach which is best suited as it allows for flexibility of research methods (DLRP, 2003) combined with grounded theory as the style of data analysis. The research approach was qualitative and consisted of both deskwork and fieldwork.

When writing my research proposal, I ignored the Case Study approach as my mental model saw Case Studies as “non-academic”. Upon reflection, I realized the power my own mental filters had regarding both my research experience and the decisions I made.

#### **3.1.1 Case study**

Gray (2004) states the case study approach is best served when exploring subjects and issues where relationships are ambiguous or uncertain, seeking to attribute causal relationships rather than describing a situation. I chose to use the single embedded case study design as there are a number of different units of analysis (Gray, 2004) stemming from the coaches' and participants' reflections within the context of the ALD program. These multiple sources of data need to be focused in some way and therefore case studies benefit from the prior development of a

theoretical position to help direct the data collection and analysis process (Gray, 2004). Grounded theory influenced this study as it can be viewed as a theory in the sense that the preferred approach to theory development is via the data you collect (Robson, 2002).

According to Bassegy, an important criterion for judging the merit of a case study is the extent to which the details are sufficient and appropriate for a researcher working in a similar situation to relate his/her decision-making to that described in the case study. Therefore, “the relatability of a case study is more important (and likely) than its generalisability” (1981, cited in Bell, 1999).

a) Advantages:

The case study method involves using a planned and structured approach to identify the interactive processes at work (Bell, 1999). In this research, I have concentrated on the coaching experiences of ALD participants and how it impacted on their awareness and capability as change leaders. According to Bell (1999), case studies can be invaluable when they inform, illuminate and provide a basis for policy decisions within organizations.

b) Disadvantages:

This approach has not been universally accepted by researchers as a reliable, objective and legitimate form of research as it is difficult to generalize or replicate the findings (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992). Researchers are cautioned not to claim more for results than is warranted, and not to attempt generalisations based on insufficient data (Bell, 1999). Furthermore there are no standardized techniques which requires researchers to possess a wide range of skills and flexibility, including being able to disengage their own interpretive filters when collecting or analyzing data (Yin, 1994, cited in Gray, 2004).

## **3.2 Data Collection Methods**

Triangulation is the combination of more than one method of data collection, which allows for cross-checking of findings and therefore ensures the analysis is reliable and valid (Bell, 1999). Multiple sources of data also assist with construct validity (Gray, 2004). For each of the five data collection methods used, I asked the question “how valid and reliable is this procedure for collecting data?” This study had two researchers using the same questionnaires to generate the data (to achieve the same result). My stakeholders also worked through the questions upfront and agreed on face validity.

### **3.2.1 Principles of grounded theory that were adopted**

Some of the principles of grounded theory were advantageous to this study and therefore influenced the data collection methods.

- a) The theoretical sampling procedure is purposive rather than random to ensure additional information can be obtained when determining the conceptual categories (Robson, 2002). Due to the dynamic nature of this study, the sample size changed throughout the study.
  
- b) Grounded theory does not begin with prior assumptions about hypotheses, research questions or what literature should underpin the study (Gray, 2004). One of the problems using grounded theory is that it is not possible to start a research study without some pre-existing theoretical ideas and assumptions (Robson, 2004). Researchers do have a competent level of knowledge about the topic (Gray, 2004). As insider-worker researcher I strived to suspend my own preconceived ideas and bias throughout the process. This research commenced with a defined purpose, and through data analysis new theoretical positions emerged. This is one of the attractive features of grounded theory as it is particularly useful in applied areas of research where the theory is scarce.

- c) Grounded theory is different to traditional linear research where the literature study informs data collection and then analysis. Grounded theory is a more “common sense” approach when working with complex unstructured issues (Robson, 2002) where analysis prompts the sampling of new data, resulting in a more dynamic iterative process which fits comfortably with my research style. For this study, new data continuously prompted new literature analysis and as a result the data collection methods were continuously adapted. However, the data collection methods illustrated below were planned at the onset of the study with a definite end point which does not take into account the degree of saturation of categories. In grounded theory, researchers have been criticized for not knowing when a category is saturated and therefore dragging out the research. My approach was an attempt to limit this disadvantage and to ensure this case study would be completed on time and in line with the organization’s expectations.

### **3.2.2 Data collection methods utilized in this study**

The field work commenced with the launch of the ALD program in January and ended in April 2007. Participants attended two workshops and a coaching session after each workshop respectively. I ensured all data relating to specific participants was kept strictly confidential, and I captured the data in such a manner as to ensure complete anonymity.

- a) Observations of group: We observed the group of participants during both workshops. We were clear about the purpose of the observations and were guided by questions ([Appendix E](#)). According to Bell (1999) the use of categories upfront presupposes what the researcher will observe. Although we didn’t set the categories upfront, we also didn’t go into pure observation (pure grounded theory). This data was captured into a spreadsheet for analysis. These observations helped us to identify themes and patterns at a group level.
- b) Participants’ reflections: Participants emailed me their reflections according to a defined structure ([Appendix F](#)) after each workshop and coaching

conversation respectively. The data was captured into a spreadsheet in the same structure.

- c) Reflective questionnaire on coaching: Participants were asked to complete a reflective questionnaire (*Appendix G*) at the end of both workshops and coaching sessions (the final step in the data collection process). A further questionnaire (*Appendix H*) was designed during the research process for participants who did not participate in coaching conversations. (Our approach did not expose those participants who did not have coaching). The data was captured into a spreadsheet in the same structure.
  
- d) Coaches' reflections: Both coaches' reflected on all participants learning and emotional development at the end of each coaching conversation and again at the end of the data collection period. The structure of our reflections was guided by a set of questions (*Appendix I*). The data was captured into a spreadsheet in the same structure.
  
- e) Literature review: I reviewed the available literature on the benefits of coaching participants on leadership development programs. I also reviewed research projects that made use of the case study approach to prepare for potential hurdles on this project. Grounded theory influenced this method as literature was reviewed continuously throughout data collection and analysis stages (Kinach, 2001).

### **3.3 Data Analysis Techniques**

Based upon the inductive process, I attempted to establish patterns, consistencies and meanings as I collected the data. Data was analyzed to see if any patterns emerge that suggest relationships between variables. In this way, the researcher moves towards discovering a binding principle using caution not to make hasty conclusions based on the data (Gray, 2004).

### **3.3.1 Influence of grounded theory on data analysis**

In an attempt to introduce more structure to the data analysis process, I explored grounded theory which is theory that arises when inspecting and analyzing data. There is no prior theory thereby allowing it to emerge directly from the data (Kinach, 2001). An attractive feature of grounded theory is that it offers specific steps and procedures for generating theory and analyzing data which are flexible, systemic and dynamic (Robson, 2002, p.192). Robson states that grounded theory as a qualitative approach is both a strategy for conducting research and a particular style of data analysis. Grounded theory is not a theory in itself, except in the sense that the preferred approach to theory development is via the data you collect (Robson, 2002, p.191). According to Gray (2004), grounded theory may be incorporated into a case study as a means of handling and interpreting data. Robson (2002) indicates that it is possible to design a study which incorporates some aspects of grounded theory while ignoring others. In this study I chose to make use of some aspects of grounded theory as a style of data analysis.

Grounded theory analysis involves three sets of coding:

#### **a) Open coding:**

The researcher forms initial categories of information about the phenomenon being studied from the initial data gathered (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, cited in Robson, 2002). Two analytical procedures are involved, namely constant comparison of categories and repeatedly asking questions “what is this about? What is being referenced here?” (Huesser, 1999).

#### **b) Axial coding:**

This involves assembling the data in new ways after open coding (i.e. linking categories to sub-categories). By looking at the data, the researcher begins to ascertain patterns in the data that can lead to general concepts about it. The object is to uncover causal relationships between categories, i.e. to fit things into a basic paradigm of generic relationships (Kinach, 2001). Strauss & Corbin (1998, cited in Gray, 2002) provide a model for exploring the

relationships between the phenomenon and its causes, context, actions and consequences. Grounded theory has been criticized for using these particular types of prescribed categories as components of the theory which may not be appropriate for a particular study. As researcher, my preferred approach when making sense of data is to use causal loop diagrams and therefore I did not make use of this model provided by Strauss and Corbin. When researchers work strictly in accordance with a particular approach, they are largely sheltered from criticism. Therefore this may be one of the criticisms of this study as I chose not to apply all the aspects of axial coding.

**c) Selective coding:**

This step requires the researcher to choose the core category and relate all the other categories to it (the integration of the categories emerging from the axial coding). The essential idea is to develop a single storyline around which everything else is draped (Kinach, 2001). The data collection and analysis process is interwoven and the analysis continuously prompts the sampling of new data until the categories are saturated. In this study, the iterative process was limited by a definite end date for data collection.

### **3.4 Insider-worker researcher**

The issues around being an insider-worker researcher were explored in detail in the research proposal and make up a significant part of my research portfolio. An extract has been included ([Appendix J](#)). Some of the key issues follow.

- a) My role as researcher needed to be clearly defined and clarified throughout the research process in order to avoid potential conflict (DLRP, 2003, p22). I co-operatively collaborated with my stakeholders from the beginning of the project and have ensured a shared meaning exists regarding the research project.
  
- b) By virtue of my role within the organisation, I have been fully authorized to take up the multiple roles of researcher, facilitator and coach. Following

caution from Dr. Pauline Armsby, I have been careful not to brand my research in order to drive a particular outcome that would suit my personal agenda. I have also paid attention to my own mental and emotional state during this process as it called for resilience and self discipline to overcome the challenges that emerged, many of which are over and above my core role.

- c) Most importantly, I am actively influenced by my own perspectives requiring me to be reflective and acknowledge my involvement in the research process. I am fundamentally a part of the System and will both influence and be influenced by the group. By following a case study approach and making use of grounded theory as a style of data analysis, my role of insider-worker researcher is complex, if not impossible. I have been part of the organisation for 6 years and my own preconceptions and bias are heavily influenced by the culture within which my research takes place, and therefore it isn't possible for me to start with no theoretical position. This also makes it difficult to sufficiently remove myself from the issues to gain a fresh perspective. As a result, this study makes use of two researchers and we have monitored one another's approach closely.
  
- d) A key advantage is the understanding of the broader context within which the research takes place. An external research consultant often does not have the time or the opportunity to gain these insights. I believe one of the main reasons for the success of this project is that key stakeholders are able to connect the research with the strategic deliverables of the business.

### **3.5 Ethical considerations**

In line with Sapsford and Evans (1984) every effort has been made to consider the ethical considerations and possible side effects of this project. The approach that I took was informed by the ethical guidelines from the various professional bodies such as the Health Professions Council of South Africa, Coaching and Mentoring South Africa and the International Coaching Federation.

Lorenza and I facilitated a briefing session with all participants to discuss our intentions to use the coaching conversations and reflections for research purposes. We explained the process, highlighted issues of confidentiality and anonymity and answered all questions.

Research ethics guide the nature of the agreement made with research participants (Bell, 1999). The participants simply needed to participate in the ALD process as normal and the researchers extracted what was needed. No additional effort was required and therefore no specific contracts or agreements were developed. If participants felt uncomfortable their data would be excluded, however none did. A copy of the report will be made available on completion. I feel satisfied that our request for participation in this research was reasonable.

*Word count = 2508*

## **CHAPTER FOUR: PROJECT ACTIVITY**

This chapter describes and analyses the project activity. I have captured the essence of the processes of conducting the research, as well as the content, in eight main activities.

### **4.1 Stakeholder Management and Alignment**

I ensured my role as researcher was clearly defined and clarified throughout the process. I co-operationally collaborated with my stakeholders from the beginning and have ensured that we had shared understanding and intended outcomes. This focus on maintaining stakeholder relationships was a continuous stream throughout the project. For e.g. I ensured that all the documentation used in this project was co-created with my key stakeholders. This resulted in ongoing support for the project and significant contribution from all stakeholders.

### **4.2 Finalizing the Sample**

Initially it was important to me that I had 30 participants for ALD and that this group could be validly regarded as a representative sub-system of the organisation. (The program is diverse in terms of race, gender, age and areas of expertise across the business). When reflecting upon my response to losing one of the participants, I recalled that this research study is not seeking representative findings and does not seek to make generalisations from the findings, therefore the issue of sample size and profile became less important. Thereafter I had a more realistic approach and expected natural attrition of the sample over time.

### **4.3 Conduct Literature Review**

Once I received feedback on my proposal to make use of grounded theory, I started to explore the principles of this approach. I realised I was approaching the literature review in a traditional, linear fashion which was inappropriate for grounded theory. From this point onwards I adopted the cyclical process of data analysis prompting

new data collection. This shift in my approach triggered a surprising yet profound learning for me, namely how difficult it is to come to any research without preconceived ideas and the strength and subsequent impact of these ideas on how I think and behave as researcher. This learning came through the realization that I was using the same theory that underpins my personal coaching framework to make sense of the data. I felt more humbled and cautious to claim to be a grounded theory researcher that approaches the data without preconceived ideas. This learning increased my awareness of how I was bracketing my own responses and influenced the feedback I requested from, and gave to, my co-researcher.

#### **4.4 Preparing for Data Collection**

I was guided by Bell (1999) and Gray (2004) in the design of research questionnaires, and the recommended piloting and administration process. I involved a group of key stakeholders in the preparation for each data collection method which had numerous benefits. Firstly I enhanced the face validity of the questionnaires. Secondly, I was able to test my ideas and my approach with colleagues that understood the research. This enhanced my awareness of my own bias and preconceived ideas towards the research. Thirdly, I was assisted with some of the planning and preparation.

#### **4.5 Data collection**

##### **a) Recorded observations of workshops**

This was the “first field visit” to collect data and I realized that this data did not directly relate to the primary research questions and that it would serve to create the context for the coaching conversations more than it would provide insight into the research topic. I also realized that I was not previously aware of the level of analysis I was busy with. This project calls for the level of analysis to be at group level as I am working with themes and patterns. The effect this had on me was to start questioning whether I really understood the purpose of my research. I also asked myself “what shall I do with the information I get from each data collection method?” This enhanced my understanding of my research methodology and led to alignment

conversations with Lorenza to ensure we had the same principles in mind. Based on her response, it became evident to me that Lorenza is a skilled, experienced researcher. However we did agree that it is not easy to facilitate and observe the group at the same time and were therefore appreciative to have one another to cross-check our observations. ([Learning Log A](#)).

**b) Conduct coaching sessions between workshops with participants**

○ **Participants record their reflections**

At the time of the research proposal, the intention was for all participants to document their reflections at the end of each coaching session. However I soon realised that it is not possible for the participants to separate their learning from the workshops and the coaching sessions as they are deeply integrated in terms of both process and content. Furthermore the participants pushed back and indicated that they need more time to reflect on the sessions before sharing their reflections. This had been learning for me early on in my coaching career and I realized that I had ignored it in order to “get research data that would fit my research design”. By doing so, I would have negatively impacted on the research findings and shown disrespect to the participants’ personal preferences. This was a profound learning for me as researcher.

Therefore the process changed to all participants documenting their reflections after the first workshop and coaching conversation, and then again after the second workshop and coaching conversation. I received all reflections according to a defined structure via email.

One of my data collection objectives was to get all the data components from all 30 participants. However ALD is based on the philosophy and principles of adult learning so the reality is some learners take up the opportunities that are presented to them, and others don’t. Taking into account one withdrawal from the program before it commenced, the following table indicates the participation. The numbers do suggest that there was a good response to the coaching overall and a high

percentage (68%) of reflections were completed, even though the participation did reduce over time.

Total participants on ALD program	Participants attended 1 coaching session	Participants completed first reflection	Participants attended 2 coaching sessions	Participants completed second reflection
29	22	15	18	15

*Figure 1 – Participation in coaching*

As a result of this participation, I considered only using the data from those participants that attended both the workshops and coaching sessions and completed both reflections. However, given the nature of this study, it made sense to keep all the data and focus on the group trends and patterns that emerged. One of my learnings is that the expectations of the researcher are seldom realistic and as the work-based research project unfolds, the researcher has to be agile and flexible enough to work within this constantly changing context. It also highlights the importance of selecting a research methodology that can accommodate changes in the sample over time without jeopardising the sustainability of the project.

- **Coaches record their reflections**

Both coaches' completed a structured questionnaire to capture their reflections after each coaching session. These reflections were kept in a confidential file throughout the process. The coaches' reflections were completed for every participant who took up the opportunity to be coached, irrespective of whether the participant had one or two sessions. Again given the nature of the study, I decided to keep all data generated in this sample.

**c) Participants complete reflective questionnaires**

All participants were required to complete a reflective questionnaire at the end of the data collection process. I provided context, read through both questionnaires

(one for participants who had coaching, the other for participants who didn't). I answered all questions and requested participants to return completed questionnaires the following day. A box was provided for participants to return their questionnaires anonymously. Only three participants on the program did not return a questionnaire.

#### **4.6 Data Analysis**

The iterative process of data collection and data analysis was new to me, and although it wasn't easy to construe initially, it enabled and supported me to make sense of the data as I progressed. When reflecting upon this process, it is astonishing to be able to track the development of the theory and model throughout the research period. In terms of my learning as a researcher, I value this process more than the outcome of the research.

As I collected the data I captured it into a spreadsheet and immediately started the open coding of the data. This would inform my thinking each time I moved back into data collection. However I soon found myself faced with a vast amount of data and all I had started was the open coding. Grounded theory encourages the repeated use of the questions "What is this about? What is being referenced here?" This assisted me to move into a phase where I inserted a memo with coding notes into the spreadsheet to identify the initial categories and to formulate hypotheses to make sense of the data. I also inserted coding notes to indicate how something in the data or categories related to literature.

A second enabling procedure encouraged by grounded theory at this stage of analysis is the constant comparison of categories. This felt natural and it was almost a spontaneous process as I worked through the data. However I was concerned that I may be "jumping to conclusions" because some categories already appeared to stand out more than others. I had to consciously bracket my own responses to this and remind myself that I needed to allow the theory to emerge without applying any preconceived ideas. This proved to be difficult and challenged my ethics as an insider-worker researcher as the data was suggesting that the work I was doing in my

full time role as coach was beneficial and there is a demand for it going forward. This was the first time I really understood the potential risks associated with the dual role.

As indicated in chapter three, my preferred approach when looking to uncover causal relationships between categories is to use causal loops and therefore I did not make use of the prescribed categories in axial coding illustrated by Strauss and Corbin (1998, cited in Gray, 2002). By working with the data, I began to ascertain patterns that could lead to general concepts about it. One area of constant frustration was as a result of the research design. By making use of written reflections and reflective questionnaires, I had limited opportunity to probe deeper into issues that became evident in the data. I was tempted to conduct a focus group to further explore some of the issues however I realized I didn't have the luxury of time. On reflection, I had sufficient insight from the data to complete the study, and a work based researcher would seldom get the opportunity to endlessly explore issues that emerge from the data. However in future I would change this design and start off the data collection with a focus group or in-depth interviews to inform a reflective questionnaire, if necessary. ([Learning Log B](#)).

At this stage I was faced with various sets of data that I needed to triangulate and make sense of in terms of the research question. Grounded theory assisted me here with the final step in the process, namely choosing the core category and relating all other categories to that category, called selective coding (Kinach, 2001). The essential idea is to develop a single storyline around which everything else is draped (Heusser, 1999). As I built causal loops, I involved a colleague (and Systems Thinking Specialist) to work through the concepts with me. We realized we first needed to identify variables to assist us in understanding *how coaching influences leadership behaviour* before we would be able to determine the benefits. We put together a causal loop which I shared with some of the stakeholders. Once we had a shared understanding of the causal loop, we were able to start formulating some of the potential benefits of coaching leaders on the ALD program.

Around this time I was fortunate to attend a workshop with Johan Strumpher, an international business improvement consultant. We had an in-depth sense making

conversation about the benefits of coaching leaders on a development program. From this conversation I gained tremendous insight into the many systemic factors at play and realised that it isn't constructive to try to measure the benefits of coaching in isolation of the system. I felt humbled as a coach and realised that coaching is ineffective if the client isn't committed to personal development and transformation. ([Learning Log D](#)).

As a result, I revisited the causal loop and continued collaborating with Lorenza. This resulted in us finding new insights and deepening our learning relating to the benefits of coaching which I have incorporated into chapter five.

*Word count = 2008*

## CHAPTER FIVE: PROJECT FINDINGS

This chapter focuses on the analysis and interpretation of the findings.

**5.1 The main aim of this research** is to deepen our understanding of the benefits of coaching participants on the ALD program. I have clustered the themes under the appropriate research questions:

**A. To what extent do the coaching sessions facilitate a deeper learning experience for participants on the program?**

i. The characteristics of an adult learner

Most of the participants have understood the principles of being responsible for their learning within a context created for them. *“This is a facilitated process and the attitude I have towards it will determine my own learning”*. The coaching conversations helped participants realize leadership is personal development and this journey requires them to internalize their learning. The participants report they have developed an appreciation of the critical role dialogue and reflection plays in enhancing their levels of self awareness and thus deepening their learning. The majority of the participants have also demonstrated how their reflection skills have improved during their coaching sessions.

ii. Appreciation of multiple perspectives as leader

Many of the participants have been humbled by this process and the coaching has helped to entrench the existence of multiple perspectives. *“Now I have a deeper awareness of the limitations of my own worldview”*. *“There are multiple perspectives and multiple realities at the same time and we need to appreciate this in others”*. Coaching has allowed the participants to think and behave differently both as leaders and people. The participants are therefore able to see a bigger more diverse context and therefore act more appropriately within context. *“We cannot profess to know everything – rather it is a process of awareness, awakening and self discovery”*.

iii. Participants' level of engagement and openness to coaching

Coaching appears to have facilitated a significant learning experience for those participants who engaged the process with both their hearts and minds. This appears to be due to their ability to dialogue and reflect which has heightened their levels of self awareness. Some of the more spiritual participants are deeply reflective, two of which meditate regularly to *"deepen my levels of self awareness and the understanding of the self"*. These participants were able to integrate the work well and internalize their learnings which resulted in changed behavior. Some participants are also starting to demonstrate *"the courage to be authentic and be true to (himself) in the role of leader even when under heavy pressure"*.

The participants who engage mainly with their head – i.e. intellect, but are starting to engage with the heart do not have the ability to reflect on their own; they need a coach or facilitator to assist them. *"As coach I have to facilitate this process by providing hypotheses before he could integrate the work and start to internalise it"*. These participants typically demonstrated *"an attitude and willingness to deepen (their) levels of self awareness through this program"*. The findings suggest more participants were engaging the process with their hearts and minds after the second coaching session.

Only a small number of participants were engaging the process with their heads and were resisting the process. These participants tend to have low levels of self awareness and undeveloped reflection skills. They tend to debate issues rather than dialogue. These participants also tend to rely on their intellectual ability to integrate the work but have limited internalization and integration at an emotional level. When challenged at an emotional level, these participants tend to become defensive and *"have difficulty working with feedback"*. The coaching sessions were not as effective in deepening these participants' learning and I believe these participants are not ready for deeper self awareness and therefore coaching has limited value for them.

iv. Coaching as skills practice

The coaching provided an additional opportunity to continue the learning conversations after the workshops and deepen their reflections. The participants who struggled with reflection indicated that the coaching helped them to reflect more easily and therefore increase their levels of self awareness, thus deepening their learning experience. Those participants who engaged mainly with their minds but were starting to engage with their hearts benefited from their coach facilitating their reflection and integration. This in turn deepened their learning experience. These participants learned the skill and the process during these coaching sessions and therefore started to engage the process fully with both minds and hearts. This is evident in the quality of the dialogue that took place.

v. Participant sets the pace

Participants set their own pace for learning. As they increase their own ability to reflect in action and on action, they benefit more from the program as a whole. This means they are also able to offer more to their peers learning opportunities. What participants put into the program and to the coaching sessions is a good indication of what participants will get out. *“I am like a butterfly that has come out of the cocoon – I have grown so much and I am so much better for it”*

vi. Opportunity to give participant feedback on behavior in group

Our observations of the group during the workshop gave us insight into the levels of resistance and some of the group dynamics (such as leadership challenges and competition) that were blocking the learning. This helped us understand the levels of awareness of the intent and effect of individual on group. This was helpful as it gave us behavioural examples that we could refer to in the coaching sessions if and when appropriate, thus supporting internalization.

## **B. How do the participants experience the coaching?**

### **i. Trusting coaching relationship**

Despite feeling vulnerable initially, the coaching relationship was described as trusting and non-threatening. I was surprised by the extent to which the participants connected to both coaches during and after the workshops. When commencing the coaching relationship, there was already a fair amount of trust which allowed us to move quicker and go deeper than I am used to doing with new coaching clients. *“It helped because of coming to know the coach during the workshops which provides the basis of building trust and confidence”.*

### **ii. Dual role a non-issue**

This was deemed to be a non issue for most participants and they indicated no role confusion. Participants who did not take up the opportunity to be coached indicated that this had no influence on their decision. However one of the participants stated that the dual role *“is workable, but I feel strongly that you choose a coach because of what you see in them and the value they can add to you, and not because they are the facilitators”.*

In the mind of the participants, there is a clear distinction between the two roles, namely that of coach and facilitator. *“The Coach is more personal and more time is spent on me, the Facilitator is more of a process role”.* The reality is that some participants will grow closer to one facilitator or coach than the other over time, and this is a natural reflection of relationship development. ([Learning Log F](#)).

However this data does highlight the impact that two key principles have on coaching and its outcomes, namely the right to choose to be coached and the right to choose your coach. In this program we have not honoured these principles enough.

iii. Empowering coaching process

Participants generally experienced the coaching process as *“a deep process with lots of introspection”* and *“a deeply reflective and empowering growth experience”*. *“It is a safe place to share and reflect”*.

**C. What are the perceived benefits (specifically in terms of their own effectiveness as change leaders)?**

- i. Enhanced personal development and growth through increased self awareness and reflection

Most of the participants were open to coaching, they were ready for it and they benefited from both the sessions and the relationship with their coach in a number of different ways. The most common benefit was enhanced personal development and personal growth through increased levels of self awareness and reflection. *“Reflection plays a critical role in allowing me to continuously challenge my own beliefs and ways of doing things in the face of a constantly changing world”*. This gives us insight into what the participants’ value and what they took from the experience and should inform the purpose of the coaching going forward. *“The program brings up a lot of stuff that requires reflection, and coaching is critical for us to really internalise the learning and grow as individuals”*. *“Now I have a deeper perspective of who I really am”*.

- ii. Shared understanding of purpose and expectations

A detailed briefing session was held for all participants to ensure a shared understanding of the purpose of the coaching component. All the participants that had coaching had an expectation that it would be of benefit to them in some way. Most of the participants reported that the coaching had met their expectations in terms of the benefits that were discussed in the briefing session.

In some cases, the participants have assessed the benefits against no specific expectations. Some participants weren't sure what exactly to expect from the coaching and entered the coaching with an open mind as it was a part of the program. Others wanted feedback on their progress in order to either feed their underlying performance anxiety or their "need to compete and win". As can be expected, these participants were unsure of the benefits. ([Learning Log G](#)).

Some participants chose not to have coaching due to time and work pressures, but clearly indicate the desire to have coaching in future to deepen their learning.

### iii. Feedback from others

Although each individual is on their own unique learning journey, most of the participants have received feedback that they are more present when they are with others and that they are experienced as more emotionally sensitive and mature towards others. *"You are more proactive at asking for feedback and better able to work with the feedback you get"*. The feedback also suggests that the participants are engaging in more dialogue with others rather than just conversation and debate. *"Everyone has noticed a change. I am more open and seem more human and more happy"*.

### iv. The way participants engage with others

Most participants found that coaching had influenced the way they take up their role as change leaders. Due to the various triggers on the program and the coaching, the participants engage more effectively with their changing world. Because they have been exposed to new and different things, they are able to act more appropriately in a diverse context. *"I have a broader understanding of the world we live in and therefore understand the context of change better now"*. One of the participants is *"changing the way he is dealing with his role in the community and as a father and a husband"*. These participants are voicing profound changes in how they see themselves and the way they engage with others.

v. Leadership development is personal development

Through the workshops and coaching conversations, participants have understood and appreciated that leadership development IS personal development and that their role as a change leader starts with themselves. *“I understand what it means to be a leader. A leader comes from the inside. Coaching deals with the inside”. “We need to know ourselves better to be able to know how to lead others better”. “As leader, I am my own change agent and it is up to me to make a difference in the lives of the people around me”.*

As I started the data collection process, I realized that participants were willing to share both their perceived benefits as well as their dislikes of the coaching component. Although this falls outside of the scope of this research study, I have appended some of the data regarding their dislikes as it has influenced the way in which I evaluate the coaching. (*Appendix K*). Knowledge of this data has also influenced my recommendations.

**D. Would these participants benefit from coaching in future?**

**a) From the participants’ perspective:**

i. Demand for coaching

The response from participants is an overwhelming yes to coaching in future. This demand could present a problem because of both the logistical issues involved and the coaching sustainability of some participants. An unintended consequence is the expectation we have created that coaching will be made available, so we need to manage these expectations going forward.

ii. Coaching as and when the participants want it

The overall feedback suggests *“rather than having scheduled sessions, people should have the opportunity to take it up when needed”.* *“It must be more needs*

*driven from my side – I should have the freedom to use it when I need to*". This feedback suggests we should be careful not to force the coaching component and rather ensure that it is available to them when they believe they need it. In this way we will keep it congruent with the philosophy of the program and the principles of adult learning. Logistic could be a challenge with this approach and therefore difficult to implement. Coaching on an "as and when" basis in isolation of clear outcomes tends to morph into counselling which is not the purpose of the process.

iii. Preference for face-to-face coaching

The participants located outside of Johannesburg received telephonic coaching, and some of them feel that *"telephonic coaching sessions are more impersonal"* and would prefer to find a way to have face to face coaching sessions.

**b) Coaches' perspective**

i. Attitude

The coaches indicated that the majority of the participants would benefit from coaching in future. Although the reasons were varied, the most common reason was the participants' attitude. *"He is experiencing this whole journey as profound and is experiencing tremendous growth"* and *"She always engages the session fully and gets excited with her learnings' and insights"*.

While this is true, it is also important to respect that some participants' ability and openness to self insight develops at different rates. This means that each person's journey is a reflection of their self and this has a direct impact on the speed at which they benefit from coaching. This presents a clear challenge to organisations that have an expectation that their leaders will all develop towards a similar outcome on a similar time frame.

ii. Coaching as skills practice

Coaching is particularly appropriate for some of the participants learning preferences and learning style. Other participants *“rely on the coaching for the necessary integration and to learn the skills and the process of reflection”*.

iii. Ability to coach self and others

An important consideration is the transfer of coaching skills to coach self and others in future. Some of the participants are already able to *“reflect on (his) own and I believe (he) could self coach and coach others with a little support / guidance”*.

**c) Why some participants would not benefit:**

An evaluation of whether participants would benefit from coaching in future would be incomplete without considering factors that may hamper the benefits.

i. Excessive time and work pressure

Sometimes the reality of heavy work demands and the pressure to deliver task outputs to externally imposed time lines are too consuming for people. Any deviation away from delivering the task tends to be perceived as wasteful interruption.

ii. Not open to coaching

Sometimes people connect with their world through their mind or intellect and this makes it very difficult and in many cases frightening to be open to coaching, often as it represents a state of vulnerability that can not be contained through facts and the mind.

iii. Participants in therapy

Some participants on the program are currently in therapy and they are too emotionally unstable to risk further disintegration within the workplace. ([Learning Log C](#)).

iv. Feeling of obligation

Some participants are only doing the coaching because they feel it is expected of them, *“it is the right thing to do”* and not because they understand the purpose or benefit for them. This attitude may have blocked their learning and the coaching may be less effective.

v. Performance anxiety

Some of the participants were experiencing performance anxiety on the program. This is not surprising as participants selected for ALD have been identified as having potential for senior leadership positions within the organisation. The workshop and the coaching did not appear to reduce this anxiety over time, indicating the strength of this anxiety. *“He suffers from performance anxiety which prevents him from being vulnerable in an emotional space. The attitude that it presents as is one of arrogance”*.

vi. Need to win

The majority of the participants who are starting to engage the process with their heart appear to be being held back by their need to win and achieve. *“His need for short-term achievement means he battles to go slow to go fast”*

It is not about the learning that we as coaches want for the participants. We need to trust in the wisdom of the individual - they will learn what they need to when they are ready, and certainly not on our terms! The reality is that not everyone is able or even willing to benefit from coaching.

## **E. Why some participants didn't take up the opportunity for coaching**

- i. Time and work pressure

Participants indicate that increased time and pressure in the work environment made it difficult to take up the opportunity. Work and time pressure is a reality especially when considering the context of a global organisation going through an acquisition.

We cannot force the coaching - if the individual does not want it, he will not create time and space for it to happen. However it is a valuable learning opportunity for the participants to reflect on this behavior and how it impacts on them as a leader.

### **5.2 Conceptual Model**

By exploring and reflecting upon the benefits of coaching leaders on a leadership development program, I have gained a deeper insight into how coaching influences leadership behaviour. This learning has been a humbling experience as I have become more aware that coaching is just one intervention and the power to transform lies within the individual.

The findings point heavily towards the interior of the individual. The benefit of coaching leaders is determined to a large extent by their attitude towards their own learning, their openness to coaching and their desire to transform themselves. Factors external to the individual do appear to have an influence on the benefits of the coaching, for example, the culture of the organisation and the time and work pressure on leaders to deliver outputs. The findings do identify certain factors that the coach can influence, for example, establishing a clear purpose and managing the expectations of the client, building a trusting client-coach relationship, equipping the participants to work with multiple perspectives and facilitating the coaching process to enable clients to coach themselves and others. However, if the participant is not fully committed to personal transformation, no sustainable change will take place within the individual despite any intervention from the coach or organisation.



B3 – The logic here is based on teaching how to fish. The coaching conversations result in deeper learning (Kolb, 1993) and internalisation that in turn results in deconstructing and reconstructing principles (triple loop learning) which in turn results in the ability to work with multiple perspectives. This finally results in appropriate leadership intentions to drive appropriate leadership behaviour. Coaching is therefore an important leverage point in this System to shift leadership behaviour.

In both the Balancing Loops (B2 & B3), the intervention ceases as soon as the results resemble the intention – which explains why coaching is most effective within the organisational context when it has a specific purpose, a defined outcome and timeline.

If we work within the boundaries of this conceptual model, the *potential benefits* of coaching participants on a Leadership Development Program are as follows:

- a) Coaching lays the foundation for learning conversations to build the skills of reflection, dialogue skills and deconstruction.
- b) By applying theoretical learning models such as Kolb (1993), coaching deepens the participants learning and internalisation of the work.
- c) The coaching process facilitates the deconstruction and reconstruction of principles (or the participants' personal worldview – triple loop learning). The interior of the “intervener” or coach and the client-coach relationship is a critical success factor in this part of the journey.
- d) Coaching enables participants to work with and appreciate multiple perspectives which in turn results in appropriate leadership intentions, and therefore appropriate leadership behaviour within context.

I used the wording “potential benefits” to illustrate the point that if the participant is not open to coaching and is not ready and committed to embarking on this journey of personal transformation, then none of these benefits will truly be realised.

*Word count = 3328*

## CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 6.1 Conclusions

Coaching on the ALD program is a new initiative within the organisation and therefore needs to be evaluated to determine both its efficacy and the return on development investment. This study identified some of the potential benefits of coaching leaders on the ALD program and has suggested how coaching conversations may deepen learning and increase self awareness. My assumption prior to the study was that *“coaching will provide participants with a deeper level of self awareness which in turn will lead to improved leadership capability”*. I maintain this assumption for those participants who are open to coaching and have engaged the process fully. These participants have demonstrated a return on investment for the business that is line with its strategic objectives. Furthermore, these participants perceived the coaching to be highly beneficial and have requested coaching in future.

In addition to my learning around the objectives of this study, the experience has significantly deepened my learning as Researcher and Coach.

- a) Coaching is a learning intervention for adult learners who have the desire to transform themselves in a particular area of their lives. By setting out to explore the benefits of coaching participants on a Leadership Development program, I underestimated the complexity of the adult learner.
- b) In Chapter One, I described how formal coaching was included in the ALD program *“to further accelerate the participants’ growth and learning...”*. The findings clearly suggest that the coaching cannot *accelerate* this process as the adult learners are in charge of the pace of their learning. However the ALD participants are between 36 and 50 years of age, and are at a life stage where they have rich life experiences to draw from and the associated emotional maturity. Therefore it is my hypothesis that they are able to consolidate their learning at a quicker rate making the ALD program an *accelerated* version of

the ADI (younger program). This hypothesis needs testing and presupposes a future research study.

- c) This study set out to measure the benefit of two coaching sessions over a three month period within the context of a two year ALD program. It therefore only measures the uptake and initial experience of the coaching and not the long-term benefits. Given the assumption that coaching will continue beyond the research, I believe the benefits will multiply and become more evident over time.
- d) It is difficult to identify the benefits of coaching in isolation from the systemic factors that are at play. As demonstrated in the Balancing loops, the intervention ceases as soon as the results resemble the intention, which explains why coaching is most effective within the organisational context when it has a specific purpose, a defined outcome and timeline. Fellow researchers are cautioned against generalising these findings and are encouraged to rather relate their decision-making to that described in this case study.

### **6.1.1 Reflections on the research approach**

I feel enriched by the experience of applying the Kolb Learning Cycle throughout this research project. This has given me the gift of thinking about research in a fundamentally different way. For the first time I am able to make explicit the successive refinement of my project as I progressed through it, and how the theory developed through my own personal learning journey.

The case study approach was appropriate within the context of this study, and in combination with the specific steps and guidelines from grounded theory analysis I was able to achieve the research objectives. The data collection methods were appropriate however I believe in-depth interviews would have rendered richer data. Nevertheless I collected too much data to be able to process and make sense of in one study. Perhaps this is an introduction to my doctoral studies, or perhaps input for a couple of articles to enhance the body of knowledge within the field of coaching.

When reflecting on my research journey overall, I feel privileged to have had learning conversations with so many people who authentically engaged with me and contributed to the findings of this study. They often challenged my thinking and made me aware of my own mental filters and assumptions, which deepened my learning as researcher and coach. Most of the recommendations that I put forward were supported and adopted, and this success I want to attribute largely to the co-operational and collaborative process I adopted through the study.

[\(Refer to Learning Log E\)](#)

## **6.2 Recommendations**

### **6.2.1 To the organisation:**

- a) Design the leadership development journey as a process with multiple interventions. Each individual leader will learn what they need to learn, when they are ready to learn;
- b) In order to be globally competitive in the New Economy, the organisation needs to ensure that triple loop learning is a standard part of its leadership practice. However leaders must be given the option to participate on this journey;
- c) Consider the systemic factors that contribute to creating the context within which their leaders would want to embark on this journey, e.g. the culture and values, the climate (specifically levels of trust) and appropriate company policies and practices (such as those focusing on Reward);
- d) Focus on developing the enabling skills of adult learning (such as reflection and dialogue skills) in order to lay a solid foundation for this type of transformational work at leadership level.

### **6.2.2 To the facilitators of the ALD program: [\(Learning Log H\)](#)**

- a) Pay attention to the selection process and the profile of individual that we select onto the ALD program to enhance our likelihood of success. ALD requires participants to learn at an accelerated rate, so participants need to be

ready to engage this personal transformation AND have the ability to reflect and learn in the moment in different situations and from different people.

- b) The philosophy behind the coaching offering going forward needs to be more congruent with the principles of Adult Learning. The facilitators should trust in the wisdom of the individuals to know when they are ready for coaching, and make provision for a pool of coaches to give individuals more choice when selecting a coach.
- c) The coach should be called a "Learning coach" and should focus on "facilitating learning conversations to increase levels of awareness and deepen the learning within the context of the program". Coaching is largely influenced by the level of transformation the individual requires. Where individuals are looking for a deep transformation of the self, I recommend that these participants contract with a personal Life Coach outside of the program for this purpose.
- d) Participants should be encouraged to journal regularly and to continuously reflect on their reflections as part of their learning conversations. The process could include reflective essays and development plans to entrench this behaviour.
- e) The coaching sessions should be highly focused and driven by the participants needs. In addition to the two facilitators', I suggest that selected ADI Alumni take up the learning coach role, giving the participants the opportunity to have more than one "learning coach" over the period of the program. Learning Coaches from the ADI Alumni pool should constantly be reminded of the ethical contract entered into between the client and the coach albeit a more informal coaching relationship.
- f) Utilising internal resources results in significant cost savings as compared with external coaches. Furthermore, internal coaches can apply their existing insights about the culture and are more likely to observe and hear how those

being coached are doing and to fold these observations back into the coaching.

- g) All learning coaches' should attend regular supervision sessions. This is important for two reasons, namely from an ethical perspective, as well as an opportunity to identify patterns and trends in this sub-system to feedback into the leadership development programs and into the organisation.

This approach suggests a more informal approach to coaching, where the boundaries of coaching lies within the structure of the ALD program. The facilitators accept this informal approach to coaching is more difficult to implement and measure, however coaching is viewed as one of the offerings of the ALD program which can only truly be measured through visible appropriate leadership behaviour within context.

This report has endeavoured to capture the current insight and level of thinking relating to the research topic. As our insight into coaching evolves through experience and our learning is deepened over time, we will continue to enhance both the coaching offering and the ALD program.

*Word count = 1301*

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**TOTAL WORD COUNT = 12 043**

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank and acknowledge these colleagues and acquaintances who walked the path with me and significantly contributed to my learning through this journey:

- o Francois Steyn (Research Project Sponsor)
- o Lorenza van Schalkwyk (Project Owner)
- o Caroline Horner (i-Coach community)
- o Johan Strumpher (Business Improvement Consultant)
- o Johan Herholdt (Colleague in Leadership Development)
- o Lida Groenewald (Research Consultant)

A special thank you to my sister Barbara Oliver-Craven for her support.

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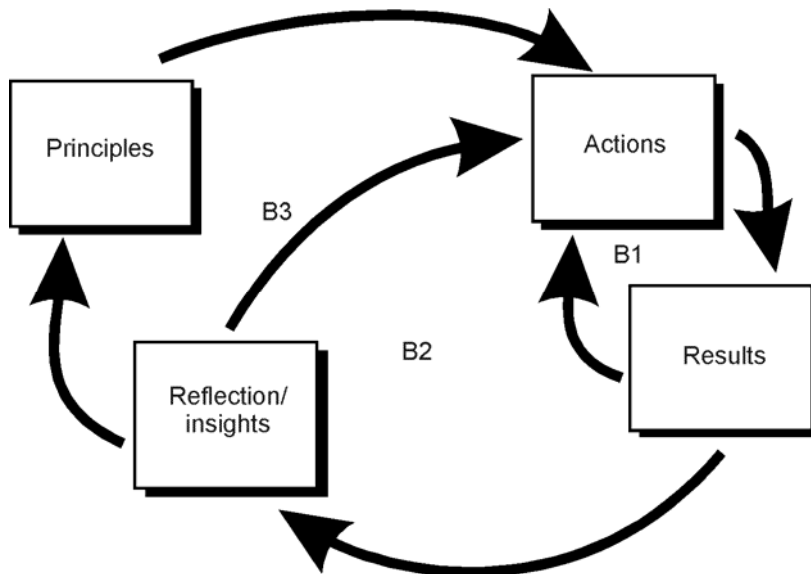
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## APPENDIX A: LEARNING LOOPS

The concept of different learning cycles as described by Argyris (1977) is relevant here.

Very simplistically, we take action to achieve results. The results may or may not lead to new actions. This is the most basic form of learning (or not learning) from feedback — where results are used as the basis for the next action (see Figure 1 below).



*Figure 1: Learning Loops*

Learning starts with single-loop learning (B1) when our desired results reinforce our behaviour. We act with intentions and measure the results achieved. When the results fall short of our intention, we change our behaviour (in a more or less trial-and-error way) in an effort to modify the outcomes.

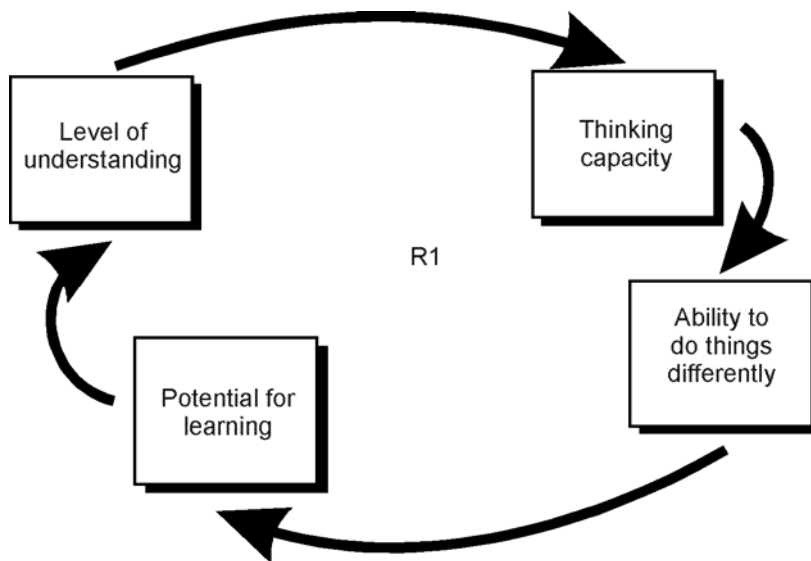
If results are used as an opportunity to reflect and to develop insights and/or to think through beliefs and assumptions, then a double-loop learning (B2) cycle has started. This starts the process of asking the most basic systemic question of “why” to uncover what is known and understood. Here I also adjust my actions based on reflection and insights.

Triple-loop learning (B3) starts when these insights are further developed to identify the relevant principles related to the subject matter. This identifies the underlying structure

supporting what we are or wish to be. Here I adjust my actions based on the principles that were identified.

Double and triple-loop learning is all about increasing the potential for improved results based on our insights and the principles we discover. Reflecting on results and the identification of related principles should become a standard and integral part of excellent strategic practice.

Learning through feedback-loops (see Figure 2) creates the virtuous cycle where greater levels of understanding and insights will lead to deeper and more enriched thinking capacity. The greater the level of thinking capacity, the greater the increase in the ability to take different actions to achieve different and (often) extraordinary results.



*Figure 2: Virtuous learning loop*

To search and to seek to understand before deciding and acting is part of the process of increasing the quality of decision making.

Herholdt (2006, pp. 2-7, based upon Argyris, 1977)

## APPENDIX B: DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ADULT AND NON-ADULT LEARNING

There are many different approaches and theories of adult learning (such as behaviourist, cognitive, humanist and social constructivist). I choose to apply the principles summarised by i-Coach (2005). The key differences between adult learning and non-adult learning are:

Adult Learning	Non-Adult Learning
❖ Individuals evaluate their situations and performance to determine what material needs to be learned	❖ Individuals are told what training they need to take
❖ Individuals determine what style of learning would suit their personal style best based on their self knowledge	❖ Individuals accept what ever training is offered and attempt to adjust their personal style to what ever is offered
❖ Individuals set goals and measurements to evaluate the effectiveness of their learning. Empowerment exists and brings benefits	❖ Measurements are set by those in power and evaluation is done by others
❖ They take responsibility for their own learning. They understand that they are responsible for finding the resources that they need to achieve their learning goals	❖ Empowerment is limited
❖ Individuals apply their learning in improved performance or changed attitudes or behaviours in a broad range of situations. Creativity is enhanced	❖ Responsibility is left with the supervisor for training and its effectiveness
❖ At the more self-directed and self-organised end of the continuum, adults are able to view their activities in terms of the underlying assumptions and take steps to change those which need to be altered in order to make permanent progress i.e. double loop learning	❖ Little individual effort is put into looking for other sources of learning
❖ Learning to learn is a valued, long term activity	❖ Little learning is retained and applied on the job. If it is, there is limited application to a broader range of situations. Creativity is limited
	❖ Learning is specifically problem-solving as opposed to creating new ways of doing things. Underlying assumptions are accepted rather than questioned, i.e. single loop learning.
	❖ There is little progress towards learning to learn

*Table 1: i-Coach Learning Module (2005)*

## APPENDIX C: KOLB'S LEARNING CYCLE

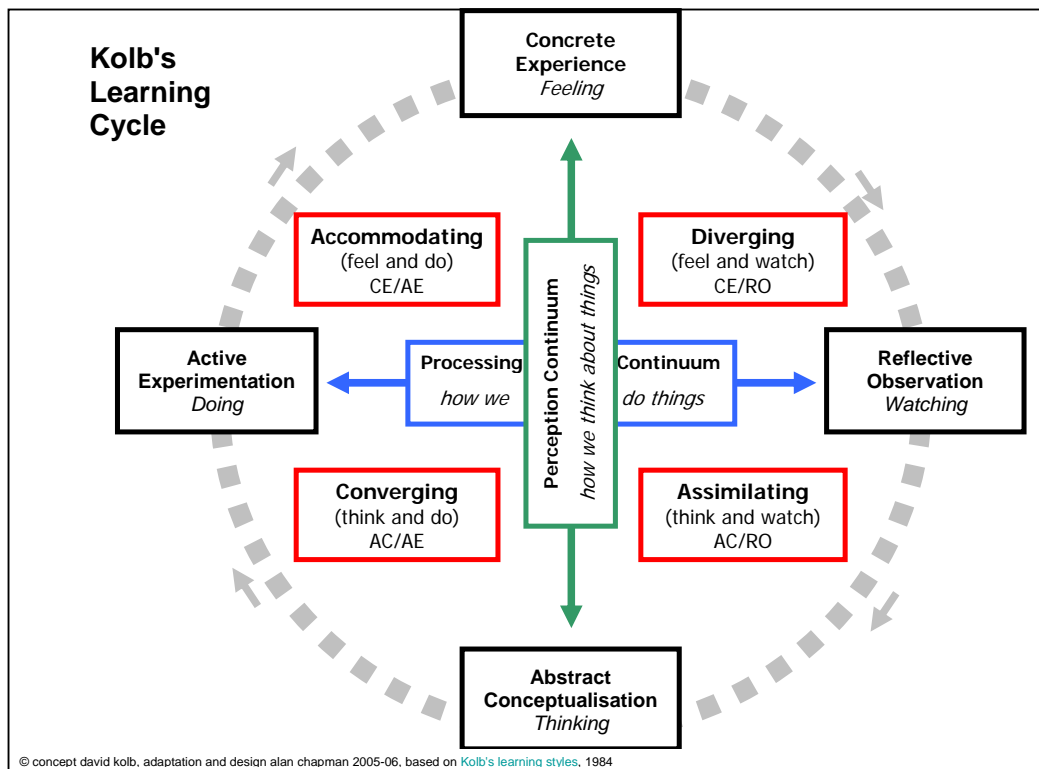


Figure 1: Kolb's Learning Cycle

Kolb (1993) defines learning as the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of the experience". He argues that effective learning requires contrasting abilities, which he describes as polar opposites on two dimensions of learning. Abstract conceptualization and concrete experience are contrasting ways of "grasping experience". Reflective observation and active experimentation are contrasting ways of "transforming experience" that you have grasped. For learning to occur, experience must be grasped and then transformed.

## APPENDIX D: CONSCIOUS COMPETENCE LEARNING MODEL

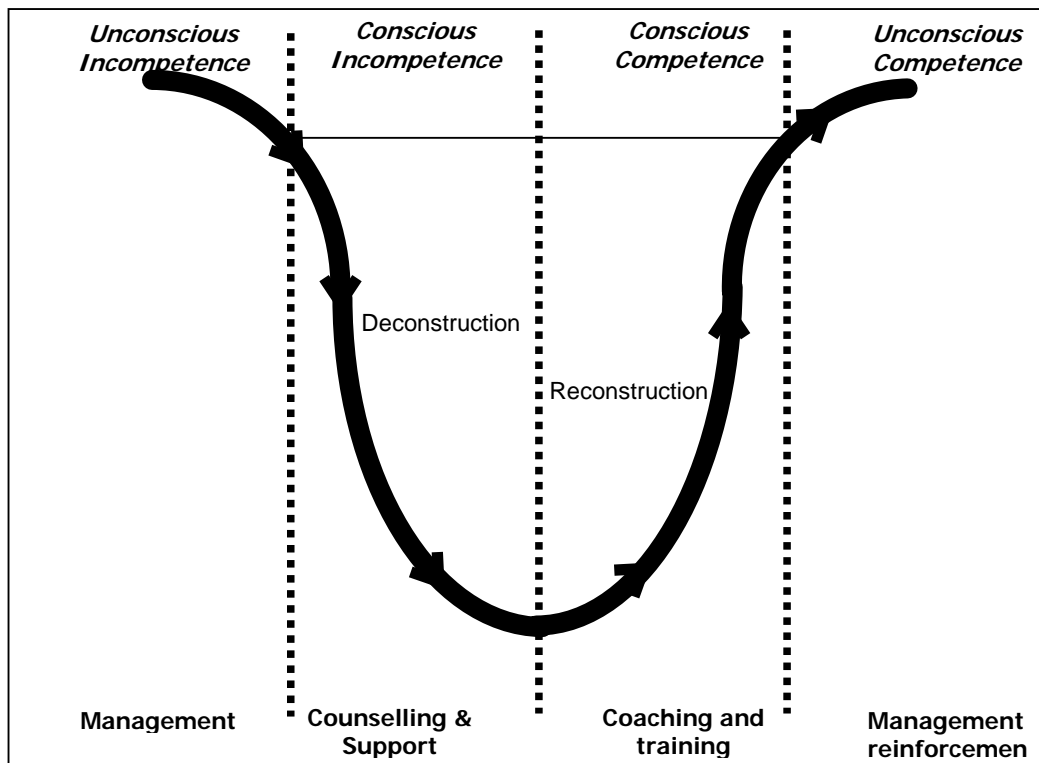


Figure 1: 'Conscious Competence' Learning Model (cited in *i-Coach learning module, 2005*)

The earliest origins of this model are not clear, although according to Businessballs.com, the US Gordon Training International organisation has certainly played a major role in defining it and promoting its use. According to Dr Thomas Gordon, (founder of the California-based Gordon Training organisation) this model (originally called 'The Four Stages for Learning Any New Skill') was developed by former GTI employee, Noel Burch over 30 years ago.

The Conscious Competence Model explains the process of learning a new skill (or behaviour, ability, technique, etc.) The model describes four broad steps that individuals move through in this process of learning a new skill, namely Unconscious Incompetence, Conscious Incompetence, Conscious Competence, and Unconscious Competence.

**Connectivity**, an accredited people development training provider, designed the following graphic which captures the integration of the Kolb cycle and the conscious competence

learning model. As described in the project report, as coach I work with both cycles simultaneously to achieve the desired outcome.

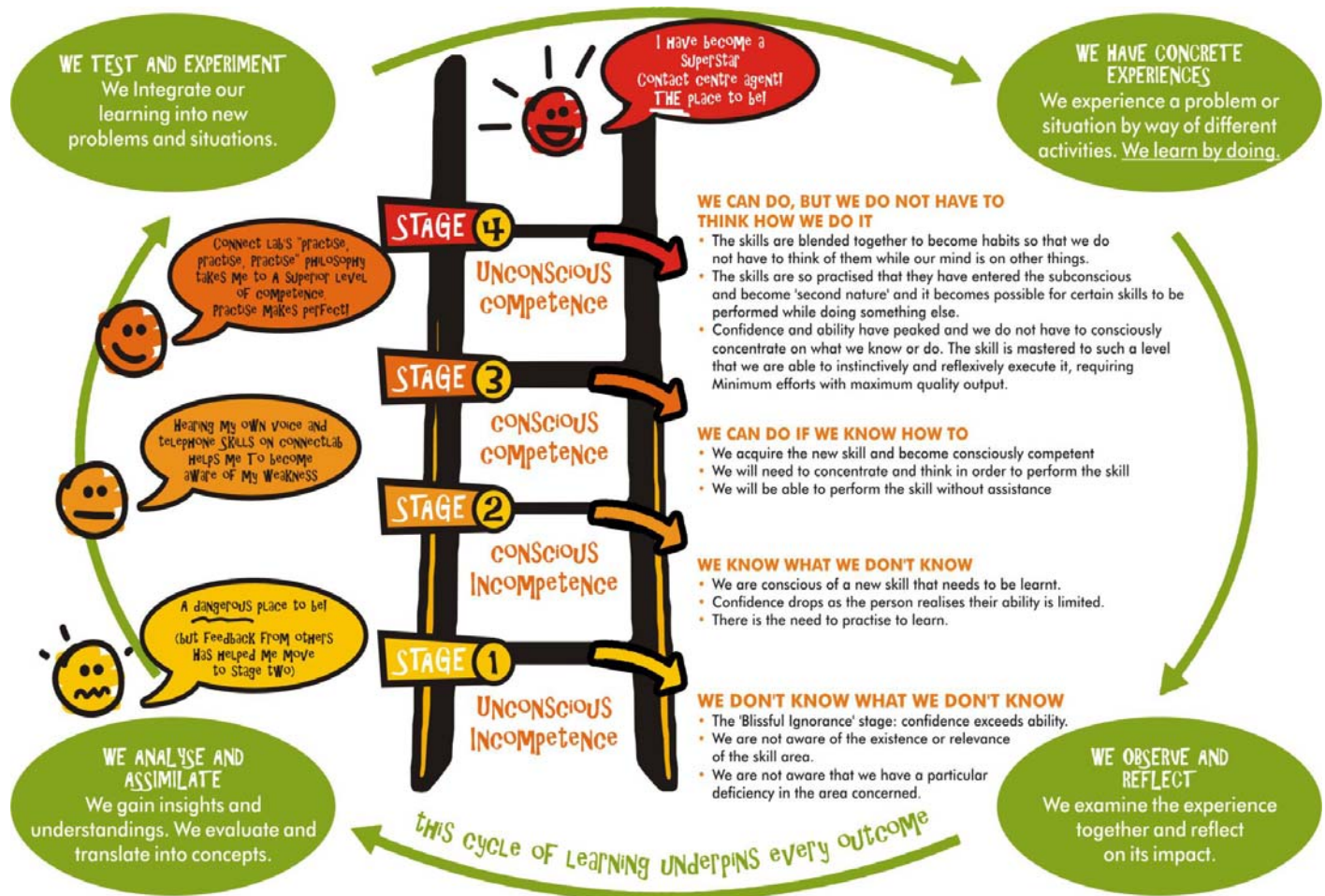


Figure 2: Learning cycles (Connectivity, 2007)

Connectivity (2007). Power Hour Manual.

## **APPENDIX E: QUESTIONS FOR PROBING GROUP OBSERVATIONS**

The coaches / facilitators observed the group at both workshops. Their observations were recorded according to the structured questionnaire below.

### **FACILITATOR OBSERVATIONS OF GROUP AT WORKSHOPS:**

1. To what extent are the delegates engaging the overall process?
  - with the mind
  - with the heart
  - with the heart and mind
  
2. What are the levels of comfort in the group with the exercises?
  
3. To what extent are the individuals making themselves vulnerable and sharing their emotions with the group?
  
4. What is the groups overall ability to learn in the “here and now” and to reflect in action and on action (past)?
  
5. What are the group dynamics specifically with reference to awareness of intent and effect on individual and group?
  
6. What are some of the themes/patters that could facilitate deeper learning in the coaching conversations?

## **APPENDIX F: QUESTIONS FOR PROBING PARTICIPANT REFLECTIONS**

Participants reflected upon the following questions after the first workshop and coaching session and then again after the second workshop and coaching session.

### **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:**

1. How did you experience the process?
2. What effect did the process have on you?
3. How did you experience the content you were exposed to?
4. What are your key learning's and insights from participating in this workshop?
5. Are there any other comments you would like to share with us?

**APPENDIX G: REFLECTIVE QUESTIONNAIRE (RECEIVED COACHING)**



**APPENDIX H: REFLECTIVE QUESTIONNAIRE (NOT RECEIVED COACHING)**

## APPENDIX I: QUESTIONS FOR PROBING COACHES' REFLECTIONS

### THE BENEFITS OF COACHING INDIVIDUALS ON THE ALD PROGRAM

**Question: To what extent do the coaching sessions facilitate a deeper learning experience for the individuals?**

**COACHING SESSION:** \_\_\_\_\_

**NAME OF DELEGATE:** \_\_\_\_\_

**DATE:** \_\_\_\_\_

1. To what extent is this individual:
  - a. Engaged with the mind? \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Engaged with the heart? \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. Engaged with the heart and mind? \_\_\_\_\_

Please explain and comment on the individual's level of self awareness:

\_\_\_\_\_

2. To what extent is this individual integrating the work from the module(s) and recognising the patterns? Please explain:

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Can you identify what (if anything) is holding this individual back on this journey of personal growth and development? Please explain:

\_\_\_\_\_

4. Do you have any additional comments or insights that you would like to share?

\_\_\_\_\_

*AFTER SESSION 2 ONLY!*

5. Do you believe that additional coaching would facilitate a deeper learning experience for this individual? Please explain:

\_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX J - ISSUES AROUND BEING AN INSIDER-WORKER RESEARCHER**

### **Influences on the worker researcher**

The insight that I have gained through doing this exercise is the realization that a worker researcher has a significant advantage in terms of understanding the broader context within which the research takes place. As described in the DLRP (2003, p.23) the advantage is insider knowledge on the research question, the sources of information, the organisation and the key stakeholders. On reflection, I believe the success I have had to date in my research process is due to the way in which I have integrated it with my business as usual role and hooked it appropriately to the strategic deliverables of Absa and the objectives set out for our department. In my experience, contracted researchers often have difficulty when conducting research in an organisation when the key people fail to see the connection between the research and the day to day running of the business.

I will consider each of the aspects covered in the DLRP (2003, p.23) of the worker researcher below:

#### **a) Formal Sector**

Throughout my career I have worked in the financial services sector. One of the advantages as a worker researcher is my understanding of how the financial policy of the country, determined by the minister of finance and the government of the reserve bank, impacts upon the private sector (and in this particular instance, Banking). The economy determines the financial policy and we need to consider the fact that our economy in South Africa has grown by 5-6% (as per department of statistics) for the past couple of years and is running out of foreign exchange. This means that the strategy of the organisation needs to anticipate a rise in interest rates and the implications of this in terms of our own capacity in areas such as credit control. This will also have a direct impact on the strategy to penetrate the Black Mass Market in order to realize our organisation purpose which is to be the pre-eminent bank in sub-Saharan Africa.

This bigger context has an impact on the way in which we develop our senior leaders. The ALD program focuses on developing the ability to deal with both intellectual and emotional complexity at the same time and to thereby act appropriately in context. As worker researcher I am exposed to this broader context and am able to make sense of it in relation

to the research process and data. For example, given the highly regulated banking industry with the focus on compliance, the worker researcher needs to expect that the participants in this project are likely to be self disciplined and structured within their approach to work.

### **b) Workplace Policies**

A further contextual influence on the research project that needs to be considered is workplace policies. As worker researcher, it is important to understand the context in terms of national policy, for example the Financial Services Charter and Employment Equity Act. This has a direct impact on the ALD program and therefore participants that will be participating in the research. We have had to ensure that more than half the participants are people of color. Over the past few years, the pattern that has emerged is the loss of black talent as they are highly mobile and don't stay with an organisation for long. Fortunately my research project only takes place over a 5 month period and therefore I shouldn't lose too many participants! This loss of black talent raises the issue of how we remunerate and seek to retain this grouping given the bigger context within our country. These patterns are likely to play out in the coaching conversations and the disadvantage of being the worker researcher in this instance is my thinking is contaminated due to my experience in dealing with these types of issues in Human Resources

Another national policy that I need to seriously consider is the BEE (Black Economic Empowerment) Bill. As a worker researcher exploring the benefits of coaching, I have been asked to give a view on an organisation wide coaching framework. Should we decide to use external leadership coaches, we need to work within the group sourcing and procurement policy and make use of vendors that are registered BEE partners. This has a direct impact on the budget as the fees charged tend to be higher for BEE partners.

The Skills Development Act has a significant impact on training and development within the organisation. This Act makes provision for organizations to be awarded grants based on the amount of training and types of training that organizations invest in their staff. Again this links to the profile of delegate on the program namely their race, gender and age. The issues of development of black talent within the organisation and the preference that the organisation gives to people of color when making senior appointments, is likely to emerge in the coaching sessions. It is critical for worker researchers to be culturally sensitive, both in terms of the country but also in terms of the organisation-specific culture (which is further explored below).

The disadvantage as a worker researcher is that it becomes more complex in that I need to consider all these external forces in relation to the research. The research project is not just a clear cut clinical exploration of a particular variable. I have mentioned just a few of the policies to illustrate the point; however a discussion around workplace policy in this particular exercise would be an essay on its own.

### **c) Workplace**

Having worked in Absa with leaders for over 6 years now, I have insight into the context and the culture of the organisation and have worked closely along side Lorenza for most of that time. I view this as both positive and negative from a research perspective because it is unlikely that I will develop an inappropriate research project, however I have to be aware of my own preconceptions and bias which is heavily influenced by the culture within which my research takes place. (DLRP, 2003, p.22)

Over the past 6 years I have been actively involved with the organisation-wide climate and culture research surveys and therefore have a good knowledge of where the organisation is at. I was involved from the beginning in discussions with the Barclays Group around the acquisition of Absa, specifically regarding the challenges we face given the two diverse cultures that need to be brought together. The benefit of this deep knowledge of the context is that I am aware of the subtle power struggles within and between areas, across levels and across race and gender. The acquisition dynamics will play out in the research as the sample is a sub-system within the bigger organizational system, and it is important to recognize it for what it is and be aware of the impact this has on the research project. This is especially important when considering the recommendations or types of interventions the researcher will propose to the organisation as it is important to check the appropriateness in terms of fit with the culture of the organisation.

Seale (2000, cited in DLRP, 2003, p21) states that the worker researcher is implicated in producing particular accounts of the community of practice she works in, accounts that will necessarily be influenced by both her own and her professional beliefs, those of the people she is interacting with and those informing the workplace culture. I need to be reflexive and acknowledge my involvement in the research process, especially as a result of my dual role as employee and researcher. This brings to life some of the disadvantages for worker

researchers. In addition, worker researchers tend to be too close to the problem and are unable to remove themselves from the situation and to get a fresh perspective.

#### **d) The Politics of Management and Administration**

In my mind this refers to how leaders interact with the organisation system (culture, processes, policies, etc) to maximize the benefits (profits) for the organisation through leveraging the human capital resource (talent). In terms of the worker researcher, it is important to have an awareness of how the political interactions play out and affect the research data and findings, especially when considering what recommendations to propose to the organisation. In my experience, this behavior is most often unconscious and goes by unnoticed, but it has a significant influence on the culture (the way things are done around here). A researcher that is external to the organisation would need to collaborate very closely with key internal people to understand this factor.

#### **e) Stake holding, Citizenship and Self**

The nature of the dual role that I have on this research project enables me to take up my personal authority and manage the process. I have the necessary autonomy to make decisions where required, and will continuously consult with my co-facilitator and project owner, Lorenza, throughout the process.

It is important that my role as researcher is clearly defined and clarified throughout the research process to be better prepared for the potentially conflicting roles and manage the duality of this position (DLRP, 2003, p22). In an attempt to manage the potential conflict that can arise as a result of this dual role, I have engaged my stakeholders from the beginning of the project and have ensured a shared meaning around the research proposal. The project sponsor and owner have provided me with a letter that fully authorizes the research and assures me of their full support throughout the process. The form of co-operational collaboration will go a long way in supporting me through this research project.

One of the conversations that I had with the project owner is appropriate to mention here. We discussed the possibility that the research findings may suggest changes or enhancements to the program. Lorenza and I have agreed that these enhancements need to be carefully considered together as co-facilitators on this program. This again sensitizes me to the question around who will allow my research and who may block my research as it evolves

and at this stage I am cautiously comfortable that no-one will block my research within the Absa system.

As described in the research proposal, the internal qualities of the worker researcher are important to consider. The researcher needs to be resilient and able to overcome hurdles and challenges that emerge throughout the process. The worker researcher is typically doing this research over and above her core job and it takes self discipline and focus to ensure that the project doesn't fall behind when work is particularly challenging. For me, attitude and self discipline is the differentiator that will ensure this research project is completed within expectations.

Dr. Pauline Armsby spoke about the worker researchers "Brand" and how when researchers are driving an outcome, people will see them as a person with authority to do so. It is critical that worker researchers don't abuse this and should be cautioned against using the research project to drive one's own agenda. Yet again, it is important to be reflexive because if you don't realise that something impacts upon you, it still influences you!

## APPENDIX K – DATA REGARDING THEIR DISLIKES OF COACHING

When I became aware that the participants were sharing their dislikes of the coaching in addition to their perceived benefits, I added an appropriate question into the reflective questionnaire. **“What do you dislike about the coaching component?”** The data assisted me to better evaluate the coaching, which influenced my approach in making recommendations to the organisation.

Below is an extract from the data table for this question:

### Question 8: What do you dislike about the coaching?

I feel like the session is rushed  
The sessions are too short  
Coaching is yet another thing I need to make time for  
I need to have more frequent sessions at the start of the programme  
The sessions exposes one more which is uncomfortable, but it does deepen the learning  
The frequency of the sessions is too high  
I feel obliged to attend even though I don't have time  
Rather than having scheduled sessions, I would prefer to be given the opportunity to take it up when I need to.  
The lack of clarity of purpose  
I get emotional when I confront personal issues  
Forces us to confront our issues when we are not ready  
Telephonic coaching is too impersonal  
I don't think the telephonic sessions are as effective as face to face sessions  
Fitted in between appointments - mindset not right  
It must be more needs driven from my side  
I should have the freedom to use it when I need it  
I don't like doing something when I don't know how it can assist me in future  
I don't have time to attend workshops and coaching every month, I have to deliver my work too  
Heavy work demands that causes time pressure and makes it difficult to make time for coaching

The over riding theme that emerges at first glance of the data is the participants need to have coaching on their terms – “as and when they want it”.

**APPENDIX L - ETHICS RELEASE FORM**



## **APPENDIX M: SUMMARY OF THE PROJECT PROPOSAL**

Leadership has been a strategic imperative in this organisation since the early 1990's and was identified as the critical success factor for the integration of the four local banks into one brand in 2000. Following the acquisition of this organisation in July 2005 by an international player, the focus on leadership has elevated even further with a specific emphasis on change leadership (given the large scale change that is required to realize the synergies of the acquisition). Therefore the Executives of the organisation requested that an Accelerated Leadership Development Program (ALD) be launched in January 2007, the theme of which should be "leading large scale change". They want the program to develop a leader's ability to manage both emotional and intellectual complexity at the same time and to thereby act appropriately in context. Participants selected for this program are from South Africa and specific areas in Africa such as Zimbabwe, Kenya, Mauritius and Mozambique.

One of the components in the ALD program is coaching, the purpose of which is to accelerate the participants' personal growth and learning throughout the program. The main aim of this research project is to deepen our understanding of the benefits of coaching individuals on the leadership development (ALD) program. Aligned with this aim are two research questions, namely:

- A. To what extent do the coaching sessions facilitate a deeper learning experience for the individuals on the program?
- B. How do the participants experience the coaching and what are the perceived benefits (specifically in terms of their own effectiveness as change leaders)?

This report suggests a Case Study approach will be adopted as it allows for flexibility in terms of a variety of research techniques and the triangulation of various data sources. The research will be qualitative and consist of both deskwork and fieldwork. The data that will be collected include recorded observations of the ALD group at their first two workshops, participants' reflections, participants' reflective questionnaires and coaches' reflections.

This project proposal indicates which other approaches I considered and why I do not suggest them for the proposed study. The project feasibility was evaluated by making use of a project plan against the back drop of the various stakeholders required to support the project within the specified timeline. Various issues relating to the role of insider-worker researcher are explored.

The ethical considerations in this research project have been considered throughout the research process including the social and economic principles and the sustainability of the research. Consideration has also been given to the intention of the research; it's fitness for purpose in terms of the culture, the approach that has been selected, the data selection techniques and the feedback of results.

The biggest strength of this research project is the sustainability of the momentum created by the research and the adoption of the learning. The research is only focused on the first three months of a three year program and the work will continue once the project is completed as an enhanced program. On the other hand, the biggest weakness is the data collection and classification process may differ between two researchers. This weakness has been largely mitigated by the structured approach used for data collection and analysis.

This research project ends off with a glossary of terms that has been built up over the duration of my research project thus far.

**APPENDIX N: COPY OF APPROVAL LETTER**

## APPENDIX O – LEARNING LOG EXTRACTS

I have appended selected entries from my learning log here in order to provide evidence of my reflective thinking during the course of the module and the successive refinement of the focus of the project as I progressed through it. I have also made reference to these extracts in the project report.

**LEARNING LOG A:      Reflection on research design (Group Observations)**  
*Early February 2007*

I have just worked through the first set of data that I collected (the group observations) and I feel disappointed. When I reflect on the how I went about collecting this data, it was harder than I thought to do the observations whilst facilitating the process. In hindsight it may have been better to recruit two observers to capture the data for us – however that would have had an impact on the process and the dynamics in the group (and I doubt whether Lorenza would have supported that for good reason!). So I have to live with *our* group observations and remind myself that this data is not even directly related to the research questions, but rather it creates context for the coaching to take place. I also need to remind myself that if I was busy with my doctorate using in-depth inquiry into each of the individuals, then the whole design would have been different any way! So this reflection is a valuable learning for me when doing research in future – ensure the data collected will answer the research question(s) and be sure that I have understood the level of analysis (is it individual or group). Also don't try to fit the data "that is possible to collect" to a research question – start with the research question and select the data that is appropriate for the study!

<b>LEARNING LOG B:</b> <b>Reflection on overall design of study</b> <i>Early March 2007</i>
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As I work with the data – both the new data and the old data – I can sense that I am feeling a bit frustrated, as if the design of this study is too limiting. This is a bit weird because I am a structured person by nature and as a researcher, I believe it is important to be clear on the scope and boundaries of the project - I believe I have done this well to date. However the shadow side of this is the lost opportunity to perhaps enter a further round of data collection and analysis through in-depth interviews or a focus group with a small group of the participants. I cannot do this due to the time pressure and the need to come up with recommendations for the coaching component of ALD. In future, I think my approach would be different. If I were to do it over I would first do the interviews or focus groups and then get written reflections and feedback from the participants if need be. This would allow me to probe a little deeper into the mental models, beliefs and assumptions underpinning the participants' opinions and behavior.

<b>LEARNING LOG C:      Reflections on coaching clients who are in therapy</b> <b><i>March, 2007</i></b>
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I know that sometimes I will come across participants that are in therapy to work through unresolved issues. However some of these issues hinder the coaching process and will therefore hinder their overall development process. On ALD we have a number of individuals in therapy for depression as a result of a past life trauma. The question is to what extent did the selection process successfully explore the individuals' wellbeing prior to offering them a place on the program? Furthermore, should these individuals be on the program? Is it in their best interests and in the best interests of the organisation? (However I constantly remind myself to be sure not to discriminate). In a nutshell, this program will build good reflection skills and therefore increase their levels of self awareness - which should not cause any damage, especially when Lorenza and I know they are in therapy and can monitor them carefully. Irrespective, this is an ethical issue that we need to carefully consider. We should not coach individuals who are in therapy as we need to respect the boundaries and appreciate that this individual is already on a personal journey and interference could be detrimental for the individual as they move through a period of deconstruction. However knowing which participants are in therapy is helpful for us to monitor them and provide the necessary support when appropriate. These insights need to be built into the recommendations going forward – specifically the issue of selection of participants.

**LEARNING LOG D: Reflections from conversation with Johan Strumpher &  
Lorenza van Schalkwyk  
End March 2007**

The ALD program requires participants to try things and do things they have never done before – participants deconstruct and reconstruct their constructs / mental models and through this process, practice and apply their learning and do things differently and thereby integrate the learning. Coaching supports this process. (Remember this is how the Kolb cycle (1993) and my approach to coaching is integrated) Through coaching, participants are encouraged to also practice and reflect – which focuses on the horizontal component of the model. In this way participants are able to integrate the learning and do things differently than before (for e.g. we discussed change leaders that show innovation and the willingness to take risks to get a different result). ***Without coaching, the practice / testing part of the adult learning cycle will lose focus and is therefore likely to decrease and therefore the growth may slow down*** (Because the organisation demands the thought / concept to be implemented at speed – which focuses on the vertical component of Kolb's model).

Participants are expressing tremendous time pressure to deliver work outputs. However coaching creates the time and space for reflection and learning conversations (i.e. the Kolb cycle) which enhances learning and performance. Without the coaching, I wonder whether they would still create the time and space for reflection and learning conversations.

But the question for me is how long can we realistically continue at this intensity? This involves frequent workshops, coaching sessions and reflective writing in between sessions for a period of three years. This journey involves continuous testing, practicing and trying out new things (therefore deconstructing and reconstructing mental models continuously). At what point does the individual need a period of consolidation? Does the learning cycle require a pause?

Johan's belief is that the Kolb cycle doesn't take into account the emotional and psychological transition that happens in parallel to this learning process. The brain knows when to "switch off" to allow for consolidation (an inner wisdom that knows when the body is saturated and cannot take in any more). ***The coaching plays a critical role in supporting the emotional and psychological transition as well.***

The level of transformation through this process is the development of a new person (it is more than the development of particular skills or competences or simply learning something new). This process starts with beliefs, paradigms and mental models (double loop learning model) – by changing these, the person experiences their reality differently, they become a new person as they replace their old paradigms and mental models. But yet again this double loop learning does not take into account the psychological and emotional transition that is happening in parallel. (If I link this to Theory U – Senge and Scharmer's work - it is important to understand the depth of transition that the human being is expected to undergo first – then and only then can a coach understand what interventions are required to feed the development / transition of the person). It is therefore crucial that ***the coach is able to apply a model that is appropriate for where the client is at***. The question coaches need to ask is "how deep is the required change and therefore how deep does the learning and personal transformation need to be?" ***It must be appropriate for the required change / agreed learning outcomes of the participant AND THE ORGANISATION.***

Therefore we can facilitate a number of different interventions (including coaching) as part of a journey, but irrespective of what you feed the individual – it is about the consolidation, integration and sense-making that happens within the individual that makes the transformation happen. ***This level of transformation / people development cannot be controlled, it happens as and when the individual is ready and willing.*** This means that ***as a facilitator and a coach, we need to be humbled by the fact that we cannot make adults learn – all we can do is create a context for the learning to happen when the individual is ready.***

We are in the business of people development: all the interventions are part of the journey. **Coaching is only an intervention, a part of the holistic journey.** It can deepen the learning but becoming a new person is far more than that! (This really helps me to understand the principle that **coaching must be voluntary and individuals should never be “expected” to have coaching as this will set both coach and client up for failure**). Coaching in this instance is most valuable as part of an overall program with multiple triggers for learning (interventions to facilitate the learning journey). The purpose of coaching may stay constant over time (for e.g. to deepen the learning within a program) or it will change over the short term (depending upon what happens in the participants life and the changes they are striving to make). This is why a contract with specific agreed activities is important for a coach when offering coaching within an organization.

Some people experience deep learning relatively quickly and require a long consolidation period, whilst others have many shallow learning's and require short periods for consolidation. What is important is that **the number of interventions does not equal the learning that takes place.** So the question for me therefore becomes “what do participants take from ALD and the coaching component?”

The learning for me is that some participants have really engaged the learning and are growing at such a pace that I am wondering about the need for them to slow down and consolidate their learning's for a while. Other participants have not engaged the coaching and are also on a fast growth path. **The coaching component does not “accelerate” the learning and therefore the program. It merely facilitates a process whereby participants that are ready and have an appropriate attitude towards their own development, the program and therefore coaching, are able to raise their levels of self awareness and deepen their learning. It is up to the individuals, not what interventions the program offers that will determine the rate of learning.**

***Early April 2007***

It really would have been preferable to conduct in-depth interviews in order to allow for further probing around the benefits of coaching. This is important learning at multiple levels, firstly the importance of selecting the most appropriate methodology at the time of the research proposal and the need to have a full understanding of the implications of the approach selected. (I guess this can only come through experience!) Secondly, the implications of changing an approach in the midst of a study have consequences, both good and bad. (As researcher you need to live with both!) Thirdly, the use of in-depth interviews in a qualitative research design far outweighs the use of a structured questionnaire, and requires a far smaller sample size. This challenged and changed my belief that questionnaires are more time effective than interviews, and highlighted how my research approach was influenced by the time pressure I was experiencing as researcher (something that will always be a reality and that I will need to manage appropriately in future research projects).

I am still experiencing a feeling of frustration as I work through the reflective questionnaires. So often I wish that I could probe deeper, asking why? And How? The frustration is the realisation as I work through the data is that I may still have to have a focus group of sorts to probe deeper – and this will be a next step that falls outside of the scope of my research. (What about the checking of the findings with the participants? Isn't there room for a quick focus group? Maybe some telephonic interviews? The realisation of the benefits of being an insider researcher is that I could perhaps pull this off. As an external researcher on contract to deliver this research project, I would have less opportunity to change the scope and would definitely not be paid for my extra time!

<b>LEARNING LOG F:</b> <b>Reflections on my dual role</b> <i>Early April, 2007</i>
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The dual role isn't as easy as I expected it to be. I am consciously aware of the boundaries and I make every effort to act appropriately within each role, however I do have to stop and think "now which role am I in... coach? Facilitator? Researcher?" I have been pondering on what is the effect of a third of the group being coached by Lorenza, the other third by me, and the last third not having any coaching at all? What dynamics are at play here? So far the research findings suggest the dual role is a "non issue" and that we manage the boundaries very clearly. But I sense something else - some people have connected closer to me and others closer to Lorenza – which is the natural human process of forming relationships and this is ok! But I can't help but wonder what about the other third that are not being coached? Who are they connecting to? Have they noticed this and how does it make them feel? Although the data indicates that this doesn't appear to influence this study, it would be an intriguing exploration of group dynamics. And for me, well I keep trying to manage the boundaries equally and fairly for all participants, but it is hard because once the client-coach relationship has formed, and it cannot be denied!

<b>LEARNING LOG G:</b> <b>Reflection on coaching towards a specified purpose</b> <i>Mid-April, 2007</i>
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I have just made sense of the data around the perceived benefits – they are directly related to client expectations (both the coachee and the organisation are clients). Shared understanding around the purpose of the coaching is so important, just as important as the purpose of a particular strategy or project. The purpose defines the boundaries within which the coach and client operate. It facilitates the development in line with specific objectives / outcomes (which makes the evaluation of the coaching intervention easier). Furthermore, it makes better business sense from a business perspective and makes it easier for sponsors to invest in this type of leadership development intervention. When building the business case, it gives a more structured approach to defining the return on investment – which is never an easy task when dealing with interventions aimed at human transformation. Therefore I need to make explicit the purpose of the coaching for ALD delegates as well – and in so doing try to manage the expectations of the various stakeholders.

So profound is this learning from the research for me as Coaching and Mentoring Custodian for the organisation, all coaching within the group will be conducted within the scope of the leadership framework, which allows us to guide and leverage the coaching conversations towards the shift in leadership behaviour and therefore culture transformation within the group.

However I expect there may be some resistance from the leader’s perspective. If their “leadership coaching” in the past has not been about leadership behaviour but rather about life coaching or something else, then they may feel that their coaching relationship is being threatened.

**LEARNING LOG H: Reflections on the findings and trying to formulate recommendations**

***End April, 2007***

Having worked through the data, I am trying to think about recommendations that would naturally flow from the findings but would also be appropriate to the organisation (and its culture).

It is clear to me that individuals should have the option to choose a coach from a wider pool than just Lorenza & I. We did not honour this principle and the findings highlight this clearly.

The program is designed in such a way that participants are continuously in a reflective space. Given my experience on i-Coach, an additional component that would develop the participant's ability to reflect on action is to do reflective essays at specific times along the program. Specific questions could be posed to the participants to reflect upon. This process would involve triple loop learning and therefore deepen the learning process and enhance the sustainability of the behaviour change. I also believe the participants would benefit through drawing up their own development plans and continuously revisiting & reflecting upon their development to heighten the levels of self awareness & deepen the learning (not to mention developing the skill of reflective writing). However one of the principles of the ALD program is there is no form of assessment or judgement in the program, therefore we do not give "homework or preparation"; neither do we "mark work".

The recommendation to incorporate reflective essays and development plans could only work if I suggest that this is done informally between client and coach and not a formal part of the program. However I do wonder about the percentage of participants (adult learners) that would do it!

## APPENDIX P: MODULE FEEDBACK QUESTIONNAIRE AND RECEIPT

