Project Title:

Executive coaches' experience of developing their clients' self-coaching capacity

An abridged version of the project
submitted to Middlesex University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Masters in Work Based Learning Studies (Professional Coaching)

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CONTENTS

Summary

This research project explored seven executive coaches' experience of developing their clients' self-coaching capacity i.e. how they think about it and approach it in their coaching process.

The overall aim of this research was to explore and make sense of what self-coaching capacity means to these executive coaches, how they develop it in their clients during the coaching process and what informs their approach.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) informed the data collection and analysis. A semi-structured interview was used to gain rich data from the coaches.

Key findings were:

- The coaches view reflection as a main element of self-coaching. Therefore, developing reflective capability is essential to developing self-coaching capacity.

- Different coaches have a different overall approach to the development of self-coaching capacity i.e. there are those who develop it more explicitly as an additional outcome of the coaching process *versus* those who view it as being developed more implicitly through the coaching process.

- Even though many coaches found it difficult to explain how they actually develop self-coaching capacity during their coaching process, this study sheds light on how it is developed and how this might be done more effectively.

- The coaches' personal beliefs and their coach training background inform their approach to developing self-coaching capacity.

Recommendations were made for the different stakeholder groups associated with the executive coaching profession.

Chapter 1: Introduction, Objectives and Literature Review

Introduction

Sustainable change – a key challenge for coaches

Executive coaching is a rapidly growing inter-disciplinary profession which is defined differently by different practitioners based on their education, theoretical underpinnings, experience and personal beliefs. In general coaching is perceived as being about learning and human growth, resulting in *sustainable* behavioural change and enhanced personal effectiveness.

Yet, because we live in a constantly changing environment, a key challenge is posed for coaching practitioners; this being, *how do we help people to sustain their changes and to adapt in times of increasing uncertainty and ambiguity?* According to Peterson (2006, p.52), "Coaches must help the people they coach become effective learners, capable of translating their lessons into new settings, even after the coaching has ended."

Personal context of this study

As a leadership coach, a strong ethic of mine is to foster independence and sustainability of my clients' outcomes in their organisational context. I have therefore grappled, and continue to do so, with how to assist leaders to sustain their changes, after the coaching has ended, in a business environment marked by constant change and uncertainty.

As part of my professional development, I chose to focus on developing self-coaching capacity of my clients in a more meaningful way; my challenge was *how*. As a result of this I have made some changes to my coaching approach and want to develop this further. However, there is not much in the literature to guide one in this respect. I am therefore curious and interested as to how other executive coaches approach the development of self-coaching capacity in their clients. What is their experience? What are their views? How do they approach this?

The intent of my research project

Being a leadership coach in the corporate sector, my project is situated in the context of executive coaches working in this sector. Executive coaching assignments are generally restricted to a time frame, with an expectation by organisations that the coach fosters a level of independence in the client to sustain the changes made after the coaching ends. Based on this, I am assuming that experienced executive coaches have a view and approach as to how they develop self-coaching capacity in their clients.

My intention is to gain more insight to the phenomenon of developing self-coaching capacity by exploring and learning from other executive coaches' experience. I want to understand how they view and approach the development of self-coaching capacity within their coaching process.

The importance of my research project

There is a gap in coaching-related research and literature on the phenomenon of self-coaching capacity and how executive coaches think about it and develop it in their clients. So the importance of this project for me is that, in addition to assisting me to further develop my own coaching practice, it will extend the body of knowledge on self-coaching capacity in the rapidly growing profession of executive coaching.

It specifically has significance to these different stakeholders:

- Executive coaches
- Coach training and education providers
- Professional coaching bodies
- Purchasers of executive coaching

Project Objectives

My project aim

The aim of my research project is to explore and make sense of executive coaches' experience of developing their clients' self-coaching capacity i.e. what self-coaching capacity means to them and how they think about and approach the development of this capacity in their clients.

My research questions

To achieve the aim of my research project, I need to answer these questions:

- What is the meaning of self-coaching capacity?
- How is self-coaching capacity of clients developed by executive coaches during the coaching process?
- What informs the coach's approach to developing self-coaching capacity?

Literature Review

The definition and purpose of executive coaching

According to Bluckert (2009, p.1) "definitions of executive coaching tend to group around learning and development linked to performance improvement, or coaching to facilitate personal growth and change." The particular emphasis often reflects the professional background of the coach/author.

In addition to these type of coaching outcomes, there are definitions which also place emphasis on the coaching process needing to foster the on-going self-directed learning of the coachee in order to facilitate sustainable change – as follows:

- Grant (2001, p.8) defines coaching in the workplace, whether for executives or non-executives, as "a solution-focused, result-orientated systematic process in which the coach facilitates the enhancement of work performance and the self-directed learning and personal growth of the coachee".

- Peterson (2006, p.52) states "In addition to changing behaviour, a second purpose of coaching is to enable people to be better learners – by enhancing their self-guided learning."

- According to Flaherty (2006, p.5), "Coaches have to address both a short- and a long-term view. Short-term in the sense that they must support their clients in reaching their goals, but long-term in the sense that the client will always have more challenges later and must be left competent to deal with these situations as they arise…" Flaherty therefore views self-generation and self-correction as products of coaching which the coach must drive for.

What emerges from the above, is that there are two purposes of executive coaching:
- firstly, the attainment of the client's goals or outcomes
- secondly, some form of learning *(or self-coaching)* capacity for sustainability.

The Executive Coaching Forum's handbook (2008) emphasises "learning how to learn" for the client during coaching i.e. developing skills and habits of self-reflection that ensure that learning will continue after coaching ends. They note this is *"an important and sometimes overlooked goal of coaching";* the aim of which is to eliminate executives' long-term dependency on their coach and to teach habits of learning and self-reflection."   (www.executivecoachingforum.com, p. 20-21)

The implication is that the second purpose of executive coaching may be overlooked, or not explicitly focused on, by executive coaches.

The meaning of self-coaching capacity

Self-coaching implies the ability to coach oneself, independently of a "facilitative partner" such as a coach. What capacity or skills does one need to be able to self-coach?

What is implied from the above definitions and purposes of coaching, is that self-coaching capacity is related to the development of some kind of learning capacity in one's clients i.e. self-directed learning, self-guided learning or learning how to learn based on developing habits and skills of self-reflection.

Skiffington and Zeus (2003) suggested that "learning is at the heart of coaching" and it seems to be implicitly understood that in order to achieve coaching outcomes, learning must occur. Cox (2006) makes explicit some of the links between coaching and adult learning. She also notes that Kolb's experiential learning cycle (1984) can often be seen guiding the coaching process in different models. The Kolb cycle is based on how people learn from experience, through a process of reflection, to generate understanding and action.

Turning to psychology, Ylvisaker (2006) explains that self-coaching is based on self-regulation, primarily of one's self-talk. As a psychological therapy, he states (2006, p.248) that "self-coaching most closely resembles cognitive behaviour therapy." Grant (2001, p.23), who outlines a theoretical framework for a psychology of coaching, suggests that the coach's role is to facilitate the coachee's movement through a goal-directed self-regulatory cycle. Grant (2003, p. 255) identifies self-reflection and insight as stages within this cycle. This appears to align with aspects of Kolb's experiential learning cycle, e.g. both emphasise a process of reflection.

In this study I want to explore and understand how executive coaches define self-coaching capacity. More specifically, what kind of learning capacity and skills does it involve?

How to develop self-coaching capacity

More recently, Griffiths study (2009) of coaches' and clients' experience of the process of learning across a range of coaching models sheds some light on the learning process in coaching. The findings demonstrate how learning in coaching emerged i.e. "coaches fostered an accepting, honest, trusting, equal and purposeful relationship with clients, questioned and listened to them and held them accountable to learning, while clients reflected, took action, took responsibility and progressed to self-coaching, gradually taking over the processes that were initially facilitated by coaches".

From this, self-coaching capacity appears to be about the clients gradually taking over the processes that were initially facilitated by coaches. Although these findings give some insight to the phenomenon of developing self-coaching

capacity, it is not clear as to how this was specifically approached by the coaches. Is the "taking over of the processes" an explicit process, or does it happen more implicitly as part of the coaching process? I want to explore and understand more specifically how this actually happens by making sense of executive coaches' experiences.

A recent work-based study by Ellison (2009), which explored self-coaching from her individual clients' perspective, highlighted some interesting aspects about the development of self-coaching capacity e.g. what the coach did to enable self-coaching, and what she did which hindered self-coaching. I intend making links between my findings and Ellison's findings (2009) where relevant, to aid greater understanding of the phenomenon of developing self-coaching capacity.

Chapter 2: Methodology

My research approach

My project was an exploratory, qualitative and inductive study based on a phenomenological approach, because the intent was to describe and make sense of the lived experience of a phenomenon. I selected Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis IPA because it had a good fit with my research aim and questions, and aligned well with my role and stance as a practitioner researcher.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

IPA is particularly suitable for research focused on how individuals experience a specific phenomenon, and how they make sense of it (Hindmarch 2008).

IPA has an idiographic focus i.e. it aims to offer insights into how a given person, in a given context, makes sense of a given phenomenon by focusing on the particular, rather than the universal. This aligned with my project as I wanted to explore individuals' experiences and perspectives to identify commonalities, while retaining individual differences or variation.

IPA is underpinned by a double hermeneutic enquiry (or two-stage interpretation process) i.e. the researcher attempts to make sense of the participant's attempts to make sense of their own experiences (Smith, 2008). IPA views research as a dynamic process, with the researcher having an active interpretative role.

My data collection techniques

As a research approach, IPA provides guidelines for data collection and analysis, but is not prescriptive (Smith 2008). IPA allows for and encourages the researcher to select and adapt the methods to best suit the purpose and context of the project, while retaining congruence with its theoretical underpinnings. My data collection techniques were aligned with and informed by the IPA approach. These are outlined below.

Sampling

A small sample of 5 - 6 is strongly recommended for IPA projects (Smith 2008), with an upper limit of 10, which is suited to the in-depth, idiographic mode of inquiry of IPA. IPA focuses on small, reasonably homogeneous samples to offer a meaningful perspective, in a given context, on a given phenomenon. I would like to

reiterate that the aim of my research was to explore the coaches' perspective, not the clients'.

I therefore used purposive sampling through my professional networks, to find 6 executive coaches to participate voluntarily. The participants needed to meet these criteria:
- Be an executive coach in the corporate sector, with at least 3 years of executive coaching experience. I assumed that by having a certain number of years of experience, the executive coaches, as outlined in my introduction, would have experience, views and approaches to fostering self-coaching capacity as a means to fostering independence.
- Be trained and accredited as a professional coach
- Be a member of a recognised professional coaching association.

In addition to the above, I wanted my sample to be made up of coaches with different academic/coach training, so I could engage with different perspectives to generate richer data. However, my intention was strictly not to compare or evaluate the different coach training institutions or the participants' credentials in my final report, which would have required a different research design.

The participants I selected were either executive coaches I knew personally, or were referred to me through my professional network. This helped to finalise my sample relatively quickly. I selected six people who met my criteria outlined above, while ensuring that the sample would provide different perspectives by having some diversity relating to individuals' coach training.

Fortunately all the coaches I approached were willing to participate - and the coach, I piloted my interview on, agreed to be included - bringing my sample to a total of seven.

Interviews

The favoured data collection method for IPA is semi-structured interviewing (Smith 2008). I designed my interview guide around eliciting information to answer my three research questions, using a funnelling technique explained by Smith (2008, p.62). That is, I started with a very general question to enable the participant to talk about the phenomenon as they have experienced it and to think about it. I then moved onto the other more specific questions. By asking questions in this sequence, I allowed the participants to give their own views before funnelling them into the more specific questions.

In terms of ethical considerations, I needed to be absolutely transparent about the purpose and process of my study and to ensure confidentiality and anonymity for the research participants. I therefore outlined these details on an informed consent form which all participants signed once they agreed to be involved.

Each interview was allocated 1½ hours. I recorded each interview, using a digital recorder, to allow me to focus fully on facilitating an effective interview process. The interviews were then transcribed verbatim as recommended by Smith (2008), which places emphasis on transcription at the semantic level (i.e. see all the words spoken, including false starts, significant pauses and laughs). The transcribed interviews were sent to each respondent for verification of the contents and for any additional reflections since the interview.

Analysis

According to Smith (2008), in using IPA the analyst is interested in learning something about the respondent's beliefs and constructs that are suggested by the respondent's talk. Either way, meaning is central and the aim is to try to understand the content and complexity of those meanings, rather than measure their frequency.

The analysis was conducted case by case following the guidelines provided by Smith (2008), to identify and cluster the themes. I used a peer researcher to analyse the transcripts independently as a form of investigator triangulation (Denzin, 1978).

The final stage of the analysis involved the construction of a table of superordinate themes for the group of participants. I then translated these themes into a narrative account to answer my research questions, using verbatim extracts from the transcripts to support my interpretation and making links with the extant literature.

Credibility, transparency and triangulation

A number of guidelines to enhance the quality of qualitative research have been published (Seale and Silverman 1997; Fade 2003). I used a combination of these, and IPA guidelines, to decide on these steps to establish credibility and transparency:

- I piloted my semi-structured interview

- I used a peer researcher for triangulating my analysis of the interview transcripts

- I gained participant verification of their interview transcripts, and encouraged them to add any additional input or reflections since the interview for completeness.

- I practised reflexivity by keeping a research journal to note my views, thoughts, concerns and decisions in my interpretative processes

- I established an "audit trail" to provide evidence which links all the analytical stages from the raw data to the final report. This will enable another researcher to conduct the same study using a different sample.

- I grounded my narrative in examples that reflect the participants' voices (Elliott et al 1999)

- In my analysis of the data, I searched for and reported disconfirming data that did not fit with the themes that I identified (Creswell 1998)

Limitations of my project

My research design and time constraints, resulted in these limitations:

- In line with the purpose of this study, it only focuses on the coach's perspective of developing self-coaching capacity, and did not consider the client's.

- The data collection relies on interviews only, which is a self-report method and therefore inherently subjective. It also relies on participants' ability to recall what they do, so the data may not be a complete picture.

- The interpretative role and subjectivity of the researcher in the analysis and findings, even though this active role of the researcher is valued in IPA.

- Because of the qualitative nature of the study and the small sample, it is not possible to generalise from the findings. Although this project is based on a small sample, it goes into depth and will therefore extend a body of knowledge in the growing profession of executive coaching.

Chapter 5: Project Findings

This chapter presents a narrative account of my findings and interpretation, with links made to relevant literature.

For this report, I have selected the key themes *(Table 1.)* from my analysis to answer my research questions. Verbatim quotes are used to illustrate the findings. The seven participants have been randomly designated as Coach A to Coach G.

In line with IPA (Smith, 2008), these findings do not report data in terms of frequency of response for each theme. They focus on what is mostly common for each theme, while capturing variation or differences.

Table 1. Themes per Research Question

Research question	Key themes	Sub-themes
Question 1: What is the meaning of self-coaching capacity (SCC)?	How coaches define SCC	• Common elements in how coaches define SCC
Question 2: How is SCC of clients developed by executive coaches during the coaching process?	The coach's overall approach to developing SCC How coaches develop SCC during the coaching process	• More explicit vs. explicit approach • Implicit development of SCC • Why develop SCC more explicitly? • Shifting awareness, through reflective capability • Linking reflection with an experiential learning process • Transferring techniques / tools
Question 3: What informs the coach's approach to developing SCC?	Personal beliefs Coach training	• Enablers & barriers to developing effective SCC • Reflective practice of coach • Adult learning principles
Reflective question at end of interview	Value of interview for coaches	• Made sense of one's views and approach to developing SCC • Identified improvement areas for developing SCC

Setting the scene for the findings

As explained earlier, I selected my sample based on the assumption that experienced executive coaches, by virtue of their experience, would have relevant experience, views and an approach to developing self-coaching capacity (SCC). What emerged for me was that many of the participants were actually making sense of the phenomenon of developing SCC during the interview.

I reiterate a key limitation of this research being its reliance on participants' self-report and their recall of what and how they approach developing SCC. As a coach, I also acknowledge that a bias of mine is that I personally believe in the importance and value of developing SCC in one's clients, and that this may have influenced my interpretation of the findings

Question 1: What is the meaning of self-coaching capacity (SCC)?

How coaches define SCC

In order to develop SCC effectively, I believe we need to understand what SCC actually is i.e. what kind of learning capacity or skills are involved. I wanted to understand this based on the coaches' definitions shared with me.

Some of these definitions are noted:

- *E: ".... it's the ability, firstly, to take stock and reflect and then, secondly, to be able to consciously use techniques that have worked for you…."*

- *B: "Self-coaching allows us to frame what has happened, and how we are going to respond to what has happened. So things still happen to us in life, but … we respond better"*

- *F: "Self-generation is being my own observer – being able to see what I am doing; and being able to change what I'm doing "*

- *G: "It would be the ability to look at yourself… observe yourself, reflect on yourself and make the changes that are necessary"*

- *A: "stepping back in their mind…viewing it from a dissociated place, so they would have the ability to respond in an appropriate way"*

From these responses and other descriptions shared during the interviews, common elements are identified as core to the meaning of SCC. These are: reflection, awareness and choice of response to situations or ongoing life challenges.

Reflection therefore appears to be the key learning capacity at the heart of SCC, which implies that developing reflective capability is essential for developing SCC. Jackson (2004) describes reflection as the action of looking again at one's thoughts, feelings and behaviours.

Two other definitions add to our understanding of what SCC is, as follows:

• Coach C defined it from the perspective of being her own coach: *"…having a conversation with myself and being able to take myself through that process (i.e. the stages of the coaching process)…. to go through a process of reflection, and use the skills that I have developed as a coach and apply that to myself as if I were my own client."*

• The second part of Coach E's definition above: *"secondly, to be able to consciously use techniques that have worked for you..."*

These build on the reflection component, and emphasise applying other aspects learned during the coaching - as part of what SCC is i.e. applying the coaching process conversationally to oneself, including using certain coaching skills and techniques.
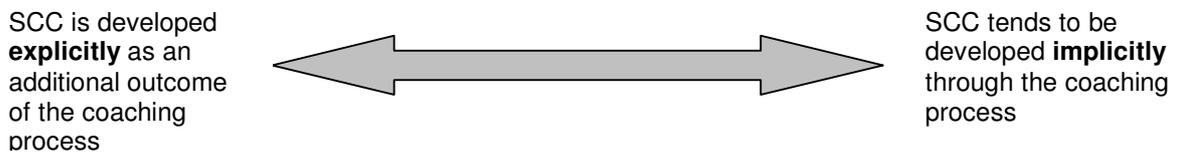
The meaning of self-coaching capacity, therefore, appears to be the ability to have a coaching conversation with oneself which includes the application of coaching skills and techniques learned during the coaching process, so leading to reflection, awareness and choice of response to a situation.

2.1. The coach's overall approach to developing SCC

A more explicit vs. a more implicit approach

It became evident during the interviews that different coaches had different approaches to the development of SCC as part of their coaching process. Essentially these can be represented on a continuum as follows:

SCC is developed **explicitly** as an additional outcome of the coaching process ⟵⟶ SCC tends to be developed **implicitly** through the coaching process

These comments highlight the different perspectives of the coaches:

A more explicit approach	A more implicit approach
A: *"What I do … about the second or third session, we start talking about self-coaching and … the role of self-coaching in the process, so that they are aware of it throughout the process*"	G: *"Part of their outcomes is to change themselves and their behaviours. That's implicit in the self-coaching, but it's not about me telling them"* *"..in my last session… I ask them questions ... "How are you going to sustain this? What do you need in order to continue this?"*
B: *"I tell them that right up front…. And then I share my outcome as a coach - and my outcome is to… transfer self-coaching tools to them all the time, so I make it extremely explicit to them…"* *" I check all along (for SCC)"*	E: *"to be honest I haven't made it a major focus of the work that I have done";* *"… there's a risk of relying too much on what has been achieved during the coaching … hoping that the patterns and the techniques are going to continue."*
F: *"And so ...right from the word "go" is teaching our clients to be their own observers"*	C: *"I think it is more organic – it comes through the coaching process … but I hope it gets instilled in them through the coaching anyway."* *"So… that for me is always part of the ending process – how they will support themselves and use the skills they have learned going forward."*

These suggest that when the coach develops SCC more explicitly, the coach tends to view it as a second purpose of their coaching – in line with Peterson (2006) and Flaherty (2006), both of whom place emphasis on coaches needing to equip their clients with learning capacity for longer-term sustainability. These coaches

therefore make the development of SCC explicit to their clients at the start of their coaching and focus on SCC throughout their coaching process, with the intention of fostering independence.

The coaches with a more implicit approach, on the other hand, view the development of SCC as being instilled through the coaching process, while focusing on how their clients will support themselves going forward, at the end of the coaching process. What came through was an element of "hoping" that SCC is being instilled and the changes will be sustainable.

Implicit development of SCC in clients

A few interesting findings emerged about the implicit development of SCC. Starting with Coach D, who was difficult to place on the above continuum, as his view was:

- *"If they [his clients] leave me and there's a whole list of coaching skills they don't know, that doesn't concern me as much as …"; "..it's not something I pay a lot of attention to and I don't really see myself as a person teaching those things."*

However, during the interview Coach D realised that his clients do assimilate certain skills and tools from his coaching process (e.g. goal-setting and making choices based on their feelings*)* and that he did make aspects of his coaching process explicit to them, albeit using an intuitive, unstructured approach which is client-led, as follows:

- *"I'm not saying to them "this is what you're learning" - I'm doing it with them, so they are experiencing that thing. I do describe afterwards what we've done"* and in some instances *"this is what we're doing and this is how it relates to .... - but then it's client-led."*

So even if a coach is not focusing on developing SCC as part of their coaching, the implication is that some implicit development may occur through assimilation by the client, and possibly because the coach is explaining aspects of the process and techniques used during the coaching. This is supported by Ellison's study (2009) of three clients' developing self-coaching by receiving coaching from her - even though it appears that she had not focused on it explicitly. My concern is – what is the quality of the SCC when assimilated like this? Ellison (2009) also identified a negative impact of the self-coaching transferred to one client i.e. being overly self-critical, which I will discuss later.

Further support of implicit development of SCC is linked to Coach B, who has a strongly explicit approach. She observed "unintended transfer of certain tools" to some clients:

- *"I never thought of them [certain tools] as self coaching and discovered that they are…".*

Here she was referring to the coaching outcomes certain clients had set for themselves, with behavioural indicators to measure themselves against. She noticed that some of them had starting "*using those to coach themselves*". What struck me was how Coach B explained this phenomenon, based on feedback from some of her clients:

- *"They had these [outcomes] in their awareness and how they are going to measure themselves - was a way for them to almost start taking responsibility and accountability for themselves".*

This observation leads me to suggest that implicit development of SCC may also be related to characteristics of different clients (e.g. learning style and locus of control), and possibly how they resonate with certain tools or approaches in the coaching process (e.g. clear goals and measurements in this case[1]).

Why develop SCC more explicitly?

So if a certain amount of SCC may develop implicitly through the coaching process, why focus on developing it more explicitly? Two of the coaches shared how they have, over the years, shifted their approach from being more implicit to more explicit. This aligned with a shift in *the purpose of their coaching*, relating to empowering their clients as a basis for longer-term sustainability. They have seen qualitative benefits in making this shift in their clients, for example:

- *B: "the feedback I have had [from clients] is that it has yielded incredible results for them in terms of coaching themselves …""*

- *A: "…increasing competence [in SCC], as we go through the process … and using the tools themselves as they go through the coaching process"*

Based on my own experience of becoming a more "reflective practitioner" (Schon, 1987), I have realised that the ability to self-coach is a complex and challenging process. Besides requiring self-discipline, impartiality and self-honesty, it requires the skill to take oneself through a reflective, coaching conversation. As Brockbank and McGill (2006, p.55) explain "personal reflection demands detachment on the part of self, to look at another part of self, and in this there is a danger of self-deception. "

Even though some SCC transfers implicitly through the coaching process, what is the quality of this capacity? I believe that making it a more explicit focus and process within the coaching will promote the development of a more effective, robust and resourceful quality of SCC in one's clients - enabling them to be more adaptive in a constantly changing environment.

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[1] According to Locke (1996), for individuals, who are committed and have the necessary ability and knowledge, goals that are specifically and explicitly defined allow performance to be precisely regulated and lead to high performance.

2.2. How coaches develop SCC during the coaching process

Many of the coaches, and particularly those coaches who viewed SCC as developing implicitly through the coaching process, found it difficult to explain how they specifically develop SCC within their coaching. They were really making sense of their process during the interview.

None-the-less, three themes emerged as to what and how SCC is developed during the coaching process, with some coaches approaching this more explicitly than others, which will be highlighted.

Shifting awareness, through reflective capability

All coaches emphasised shifting awareness as being significant in the process of learning. For example:

- *C: "it's awareness… because once we know we do something, then we recognise we have a choice, but for so many of us it's automatic – to go back into the same unconscious pattern...""*

Awareness is therefore implied as being critical to the process because it assists one to make different choices and to act differently, instead of repeating one's unconscious automatic responses. In fact, a significant mind shift may lead to an implicit type of SCC, because the client is then operating at a different level[2], as Coach E explains:

- *"…the major breakthrough that he [his client] made was a shift in his mindset … it was greater self-awareness… being more conscious that he had other choices …. it was so significant that he was able to… could carry this over to other interactions.."*

All coaches appear to focus on reflection as a key means for shifting one's awareness and developing new insights.

- *A: "… self-coaching is very much about self-reflection … getting my clients to think about what's happening, and what are the consequences …and so what do they need to do differently."*

- *B: "if we can reflectively observe what I did do, what I did not do, what went well, not well and why – it allows us to have new insights"*

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[2] This type of significant shift in awareness is associated with the concept of transformational learning (Mezirow, 2000) – which refers to a reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective – possibly leading to implicit SCC based on this new perspective.

Jackson supports this (2004, p.57) by describing "reflection" or "reflective practice" as "any approach that generates individual self-awareness." Although the coaches use many tools and often link reflection to these, journaling was identified as the most common tool used by these coaches for developing their clients' reflective practice. Even though the coaches recognise the need to be flexible in how they get their individual clients to journal (because they respond differently), some coaches prefer a more unstructured approach, while others are more structured, as follows:

- C: "In terms of journaling, it can be anything – a stream of consciousness, or what I recognise the problem is or something…"

- F: "…I would introduce journaling for some people (as) - just reflect at the end of the day, make a few notes, about what you've seen yourself do…what have you discovered?"

- B: "…reflective journaling which can be divided into the "what? so what? and now what?".

The implication is that a more structured approach (e.g. using set questions as prompts) appears to be preferred by the coaches who are more explicit in developing SCC, as a means of getting their clients to practise the process of reflection in a structured way to develop their reflective capability - which is key to SCC. This is supported by Jackson (2004, p.63), who recommends that "structured reflection, through the effect of rehearsal, creates a more accessible habit or capability of reflection."

One coach, who is also a psychologist, pointed out an area of caution relating to reflection:

- "So it's [reflection] about taking yourself out of yourself… which is an interesting concept because in psychology you can only do that when a person has strong ego resources… because otherwise what can happen is you can get all sorts of other difficulties…"

This struck a chord with me relating to an early experience of a client's response to journaling[3]. Turning to the literature, Grant (2003) notes the potentially counter-productive tendency of self-reflexivity when it is not linked to gaining insight and goal achievement. Ellison (2009) mentions how one of her clients expressed a negative impact of self-coaching as hypercritical self-analysis.

So when developing reflective capability as part of SCC in one's clients, this suggests a need for a more structured approach in using journaling as a tool for reflection (and any other tools or processes used for reflection), to specifically *link the reflection with action*.

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[3] In my early years as a coach, I suggested that a client journal on her emotional states – in an unstructured way. This seemed to take my client deeper into a negative, ruminating emotional state. After this incident I became weary of getting certain clients to journal.

Linking reflection with an experiential learning process

Several coaches mentioned the importance of linking reflection with action or experimentation, and some made reference to applying Kolb's experiential learning cycle as follows:

- *F: "I position it as a key part of adult learning – action and reflection – that's how adults learn."*

- *A: " (after reflecting)….in terms of the "now what", it is also about taking the action – the action step and putting that into practice, rather than remaining in one's head – it's about putting that Kolb learning cycle into practice - and then reflecting on it afterwards …, it's about learning from the action so that they start to experiment and change things…"*

Cox (2006) notes that Kolb's experiential learning cycle (1984) can often be seen guiding the coaching process in different models. It is interesting how Stober (2006) refers to a cycle of change underpinning a humanistic coaching approach - described as Awareness-Choice-Execution (ACE) – and recommends this as a tool for the coach to teach clients how to learn to move through the process themselves. It appears to me that Stober is advocating that coaches make explicit the experiential learning cycle (underpinning one's coaching process), as a means of developing SCC.

In this study, even though many of the coaches referred to some form of experiential learning in their coaching process, the coaches appear not to be making this connection with SCC explicit to their clients so they learn to move though the process themselves. A few coaches, by providing a structured journaling and reflection process, linked with experimentation or action, appear to be more explicit about this – and so might be transferring this experiential learning process more actively to their clients.

Griffiths (2009) refers to the role of the coach in holding their clients accountable to learning and getting them to apply their learning through action - and implies that this assists the client to integrate their learning, to take responsibility and start self-coaching. In this study, only a few coaches[4] emphasised the importance of holding their clients accountable to their agreed actions between coaching sessions, and following up on these in the next session. Again this appeared to be the coaches who are more explicit about developing SCC. Note some of the coaches' comments:

- *F: "...it comes into the next coaching session, 'what have you discovered?' and "so my clients know they are here to learn.."*

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[4] I never asked a question about how the coaches hold their clients accountable – as this would have been leading. I acknowledge that some coaches might have neglected to mention this more specifically.

- *B: "… it's about agreeing on the tasks that will be useful … and the coachee very much taking ownership …. So whenever I start a coaching session, I will ask them about the tasks they had agreed upon … And I will ask about reflective journaling"*

- *G: "… I might ask, you know, how did their tasks go. But if they say … "well, fine" but they don't want to talk much more about it. Then I leave it"*

Ellison (2009. p. 27) mentioned a client raising the point that "a colluding coach – a coach who is not sufficiently challenging" may hinder the development of self-coaching. Perhaps this point links with the need for the coach to hold one's client accountable for their learning.

Transferring techniques / tools

The coaches discussed different techniques they used in their coaching. Again it was not always clear how some of these were used specifically to develop SCC. Besides the use of journaling by most coaches as a tool for reflection (discussed earlier), coaches tend to use a range of techniques. Some of the themes relating to techniques are listed below with supporting quotes:

Type of technique	Relevant quote/s
Techniques which resonate with the coach	*D: "… there's something about the metaphor that then connects you to your self … more than trying to learn a way of doing things. So the metaphor is hopefully richer and more inspiring."* B: "The Power Zone … it's a very profound coaching tool"
Practical techniques which are easy to remember when facing situations	E: "Then it's looking at some practical techniques which will help to support that, to help reinforce that" e.g. what I say is "moving to the left" - moving more towards … trying to understand the situation before responding
Asking powerful questions to get clients to gain a different perspective	E: "Where those questions resonate with them, you would hope those questions will have legs. They won't forget those because they've made an impression"
Visioning / goal-setting to engender and sustain client's motivation	D: …"have a sense of that process by which you connect to what you want …- you set a goal which connects you to… what you really want" A: "I use visualisation… of where you want to be …then if an obstacle comes in their way, they would go back to that visualisation …. it would give them the impetus to continue…."

A common theme that emerged was that the coaches use some techniques that resonate with them and it came across in the way they spoke about using these, or the importance of these. This is something we need to consider as coaches, because Ellison (2009) observes that when certain tools *don't resonate with the client*, this may in fact hinder the development of SCC (e.g. one of her clients did not enjoy visualisation).

Relating more specifically to the development of SCC, some coaches emphasised using practical techniques in challenging situations as a means to remember "an approach", something "catchy" to try out, or visualisation of one's goal.

Effective goal-setting was mentioned by several coaches and Grant (2001, p.30) explains that "goal-setting is the foundation of successful self-regulation". Coach B raised the importance of getting one's clients to be receptive to feedback and learning to seek it, which would link to the concept of self-regulation.

Getting clients to ask questions of themselves is also mentioned as key to shifting one's awareness or perspective. Ellison (2009) identified that her clients regarded certain of the coach's questions, the style of questioning and repetition of the language used in doing this - as enabling the development of SCC. This indicates the significance of the questions that coaches ask, and perhaps the need to make explicit one's rationale for asking certain questions at times so as to encourage one's clients to learn to ask these questions of themselves.

Other techniques mentioned by the coaches were: mental rehearsal, re-framing one's thoughts or beliefs and the use of stress management techniques. Although the coaches did not explicitly say so, it appears to me that some of these are related to cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). Grant states that CBT psychologists have developed an extensive repertoire of techniques designed to enhance self-regulation (2001).

Question 3: What informs the coach's approach to developing SCC?

Most of the coaches appeared to not have a clear sense of what specifically informs their approach to developing SCC, and some even said so. However, two key themes were identified from their interviews, which shed some light on what influences them to adopt a more explicit or more implicit approach to developing SCC.

Personal beliefs

The type of beliefs and how these might inform a coach's approach to developing SCC are highlighted:

Type of Belief	Quotes
The coaches who adopt a more explicit approach believe that SCC fosters independence and empowerment of their clients.	A: *"..a belief of mine is that in order to feel empowered we need to be able to make changes for ourselves. … I believe that is an important part of coaching - is that we empower people to do things for themselves.."* B: *"my outcome is to become redundant to my client in the most empowering way… So transferring self-coaching is extremely important to me. "*

Type of Belief	Quotes
Two coaches did not believe in making SCC an explicit outcome of their coaching – as it should be about the client's agenda (i.e. client-centred)	G: *"I'm not explicit about what I want them to do …I don't have an agenda around what I think they should or shouldn't be doing"* D: *"And there's a thing in the back of my head about not being too prescriptive…it's client-led".*

In addition, Coach C emphasised her belief that developing SCC will depend on the person being coached, as follows:

- *"I don't necessarily think that everyone will be completely self-coaching capable. It would depend on the person – whether one focuses more on fostering independence or encouraging others to work with somebody else when stuck."*

Coach C also acknowledges her bias or preference for talking to someone, based on an underlying belief :

- *"… it's always useful to talk to somebody else, not necessarily me. But if you get stuck, you might need some other kind of coach … whatever it is to have a different perspective on the issue. For me that is self-coaching capacity – to recognise the need."*

Coach E believes that developing SCC is important for sustainability of the client's outcomes. He tempers this with the following view:

- *"what's also clear is that "people are people"… we don't just sustain things forever. We inevitably go through times of change. So it may well be… ambitious to expect that you can have an episode of coaching – and then have no further coaching…or further kind of intervention…"*

From the perspectives of Coach C and Coach E, the implications for coaches are:

- To adjust one's approach to developing SCC (or one's expectation of the type of SCC required as an outcome) based on the client's characteristics or needs[5].

- To be aware of one's personal biases and the impact of these on one's approach to developing SCC

- To be realistic about what SCC can achieve over the long term, especially in times of significant change.

Essentially, it is important for coaches be aware of their beliefs, and how these might be enablers or barriers to effectively developing SCC in their clients.

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[5] During the interviews, most coaches identified client characteristics as being an enabler or barrier to developing SCC i.e. personal style (e.g. being optimistic vs. pessimistic) or learning style (e.g. very reflective, but not inclined to experimenting / taking action)

Coach training

It was not the intention of this study to compare the different types of coach training. It was important to have different perspectives about developing SCC in the sample. It is, however, interesting to note that coaches' different approaches to developing SCC appear to have been influenced by their coach training.

The coaches who develop SCC more explicitly, clearly identified that their training influenced them, particularly in relation to being required to develop reflective practice or SCC themselves as part of their training:

- *F: "… I have to be involved in being my own observer, and my self-generation as a coach and as a human being – constantly. There's no holiday from this "*

- *B: "So that form of reflective journaling …I use it …so for me it becomes a practitioner's tool to improve my own coaching …. it is an interesting self-coaching tool because it helps me to improve"*

This implies that the coaches who practise self-coaching on a regular basis have experience and belief in SCC as a resource, and therefore approach it's development more explicitly with their clients. These coaches also referred to adult learning or experiential learning as informing their approach to developing SCC.

Reflective question at end of interview

Most of the coaches valued the interview as it afforded them the opportunity to:

1. Make sense of their own views and approach to developing SCC as follows:

   - Reinforced the importance of developing SCC
   - Helped to articulate their beliefs, views and biases
   - Assisted them to articulate what and how they do things in their coaching
   - Appreciate the potential ripple effect of clients with SCC spreading that to others e.g. leaders

2. Identify improvement areas for developing SCC in their coaching processes as follows:

   - To be more explicit about SCC and the importance of it
   - To be more explicit about their process and tools
   - To be more explicit about the whole coaching process, rather than just aspects of it.
   - To include SCC on the client feedback form used
   - To assess SCC informally with the client during the process and at the end e.g. on a scale of 1-10
   - Weave more of it in throughout the process
   - Be more formal in helping clients to prepare for post-coaching

Chapter 6:   Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

The key conclusions drawn from the findings for each research question are noted.

Question 1: What is the meaning of self-coaching capacity (SCC)?

- It is suggested that self-coaching capacity is the ability to have a coaching conversation with oneself, which includes the application of coaching skills and techniques learned during the coaching process, so leading to reflection, awareness and choice of response to situations or ongoing life challenges.

- Reflection therefore appears to be a key learning capacity at the heart of SCC, which implies that developing reflective capability is essential for developing SCC.

Question 2:   How is self-coaching capacity (SCC) of clients developed by executive coaches during the coaching process?

2.1. The coach's overall approach to developing SCC

- Different coaches have different approaches to the development of SCC as part of their coaching process i.e. those who develop it more explicitly as an additional outcome of the coaching process *versus* those who view it as being developed more implicitly through the coaching process

- Some implicit development of SCC may occur during coaching, even when the coach is not focusing specifically on developing it.

- Even though some implicit development of SCC may occur, a case was made for developing it more explicitly to ensure that a more resourceful quality of SCC is developed in one's clients - with benefits for them.

2.2. How coaches develop SCC during the coaching process

- Many of the coaches, particularly those who view SCC as being developed more implicitly through the coaching process, found it difficult to explain how they specifically develop SCC. They were making sense of their process during the interview.

- All coaches emphasised the ability to shift one's awareness as being significant for SCC because it assists one to make different choices and to act differently. They therefore focus on developing reflective capability as the basis for increasing one's awareness.

- Journaling was the most common tool used by these coaches for developing reflective practice in their clients. A more structured approach to journaling appears to be preferred by the coaches who are more explicit in developing SCC, which is essential for linking the reflection with action and so avoid having clients develop counter-productive self-reflexivity.

- Even though many of the coaches referred to experiential learning in their coaching process, they do not appear to make it explicit as a means of developing SCC - so that their clients learn how to move through the experiential learning process or cycle themselves.

- The coaches, who adopt a more explicit approach to developing SCC, place importance on holding their clients accountable to learning in terms of their agreed actions and following up on these.

- Although coaches mentioned a variety of techniques, it was not always clear how these were used specifically to develop SCC. Some techniques were explained for developing SCC e.g. practical techniques which are easy for the client to remember, and asking powerful questions which clients could use themselves.

- Most coaches identified improvement areas to develop SCC more effectively in their coaching processes.

Question 3: What informs the coach's approach to developing self-coaching capacity (SCC)?

- Coaches' personal beliefs and biases about SCC inform their approach to developing SCC in their clients. These may be enablers or barriers to doing this effectively.

- The coaches, who develop SCC more explicitly, clearly identified that their coach training influenced them, particularly in relation to being required to develop reflective practice or SCC themselves as part of their training.

- These coaches who practise self-coaching on a regular basis have experience and belief in SCC as a resource, and therefore approach it's development more explicitly with their clients.

Recommendations

Recommendations to the different stakeholders associated with the executive coaching profession are outlined.

Executive coaches

- To articulate their stance and approach to developing their clients' SCC, given the degree of change and uncertainty being experienced in all facets of life.

- To improve their approach to developing their clients SCC as part of their coaching process, possibly by making it an explicit outcome of their coaching and focusing on it more explicitly during the coaching process.

- To consider these project findings and the suggestions for improvement made by the executive coaches interviewed (pg. 33 of this report)

- To better articulate how their coaching processes foster sustainable change and add value in the organisational context. This is important as the corporate sector is becoming more stringent in their selection of executive coaches. (I know of one organisation which includes a criterion relating to the coach's ability to develop their client's self-coaching capacity.)

- To focus on developing SCC of leaders so they become more adaptive to the business environment and able to coach others.

Coach training and education providers

- To focus on the development of substantial reflective practice and SCC in the coaching students themselves

- To focus more comprehensively, in their curriculae, on why coaches need to develop SCC and how to do this.

Professional coaching bodies

- To include the development of SCC in their coaching competency frameworks or give more depth to current competencies aligned with SCC.

Purchasers of executive coaching i.e. organizations

- To learn more about SCC and how it may add value to their leaders' adaptive capacity.

- To consider expecting SCC as an additional outcome of executive coaching assignments so as to foster independence and sustainability.

- To consider including "the effective development of SCC" as a criterion for selecting executive coaches.

Recommendations for future research:

- To conduct a longitudinal study on clients who have been coached by executive coaches who develop SCC explicitly in their coaching process – to investigate the medium to longer term effects on the clients' sustainability and adaptability

- To conduct a similar study to this one with a range of clients who have been coached by different executive coaches (with different coach training qualifications)

- To investigate client characteristics which are enablers or barriers to developing SCC

- To compare the range and quality of SCC outcomes of clients, who have been coached by executive coaches using a more implicit approach to developing SCC, with clients coached by executive coaches using a more explicit approach

- To investigate the impact of executive coaches explicitly developing leaders' SCC while being coached e.g. impact on the leaders' adaptive capacity, resilience, the extent to which they coach others (such as their own teams) and the effects on their personal lives

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