

**Work based research project – April 2009 – Rachel Ellison submission**

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**Title:**

**‘Seeking to explore and understand self coaching and its potential impact from an individual client perspective.’**

**Abstract:**

This study seeks to explore what self coaching is, and to understand its potential impact. The research is a practical, work based project. The study seeks to start to define self coaching. It seeks to start to identify what coaches do that brings about self coaching during or after a coaching programme. It also seeks to identify what coaches do that could hinder the ability of a client to develop their capacity to self coach. The study finds there are positive outcomes for individuals, teams and organisations as a result of leaders self coaching. These include: being a more confident, insightful and challenging leader, increased multiple perspectives thinking, generating more ideas and solutions; also, more empowered teams which work with more purpose and passion. Increased individual contribution across organisational functions; ‘raising the bar’ for the whole organisation.

This study also finds positive self coaching outcomes transfer to other environments e.g. home. This includes increased harmony at home e.g. better listening and presence with partner and children.

According to the participants in this study, some powerful coaching questions which promote self coaching in clients include:

- ***'That's a great question...why don't you have a go at answering that yourself?'***
- ***'If I weren't here, what question would you ask yourself?'***
- ***'What question are you hoping I won't ask you?'***

In addition, specific coach behaviours were identified as helping or hindering self coaching.

The research also identifies some *negative* aspects of self coaching. These include becoming over analytical and stressed. The study also considers the uncertain economic environment at the time the research was conducted [January – February 2009]. It found self coaching is considered even more essential in global crisis because *new thinking* is required, as old or current ways of doing things in business are failing.

The study considers its limitations in terms of sample size and resources. It suggests improvements for the methodology and questions that future research might address. These include when does self coaching begin? How sustained is self coaching after the coaching programme has ended? Does self coaching vary across culture or according to gender?

It is hoped these research findings may contribute to academic research on self coaching, the training, mentoring and supervision and assessment by organisations of professional executive coaches, also, questions coaches ask their clients, the field of leadership and organisational development and to the design and standard criteria of corporate coaching programmes.

## **Introduction:**

In this study I wanted to explore and start to understand more about self coaching I was curious to find out what coaches do or don't do, in relation to developing the capacity of others to self coach. And what the impact of self coaching could be for individual leaders, their teams, their organisations and their home lives.

Originally, I had intended to explore the *conditions* which lead to self coaching. As this study discovered a broader picture of self coaching and its potential impact and implications for the coaching industry and even for society, I adjusted the research question to include an understanding of self coaching and its possible impacts.

The **inspiration** for this research came as a response to a client in the banking sector, who was evaluating the outcomes of an eight month coaching programme with me. He said:

**'Coaching is *my* tool...it's more useful to me than any previous training, even my MBA!'**

I remained curious about how coaching had become this *client's tool*. As if I had given him something he could now help himself with, in my absence. My interest in self coaching as an attractive return on investment for companies and individuals paying (both in time and in monetary terms) for coaching programmes was stimulated.

I also wanted to understand what coaches can do or ask to promote or hinder self coaching. And what implications this may have for the coach, coach training, mentoring and supervision of coaches? The impact of this work based research deepens my understanding and endeavour as a coach, as a worker researcher and as a student wishing to contribute to the academic, coaching and business fields.

Self coaching is **congruent** with my professional background and learning journey which is informed and enthused by existentialism, self empowerment theory, self mastery, self directed learning, reflective practise, conscious mindfulness and parallel process.

My **literature search** into self coaching found little on self coaching when related to business. However there are studies on 'mindfulness training' (Spence et al. 2008) and self instruction, in the field of health, social activism (Barker et al. 2008) and education (especially teacher training). With health professionals, Spence et al. find that 'goal attainment was significantly greater in the facilitative/coaching format than the educative/directive format' and that 'coaching could be enhanced through the inclusion of Mindfulness Training'. Building on this, whilst conducting my research, Collard and McMahon (2009) published an article on 'mindfulness based cognitive coaching (MBCC)' which draws on cognitive behavioural techniques applied outside a medical or therapeutic setting. Researchers found the practise of MBCC helped clients connect with the 'here and now, stimulating a completely different psychological response' i.e. creating new meaning, instead of triggering their previous self defeating, stress responses.

In digging deep, through interviews with former clients, I set out to learn, review, adapt, absorb and reflect upon my findings. I seek to add meaning to these findings on multiple levels. I intend to do this through self reflection and peer-group CPD learning before and whilst conducting my research; in addition reflection and **triple loop thinking** during the analysis stage and through developing my consciousness as a worker researcher. This includes acknowledging the potential existence and impact of any personal bias, inexperience, areas of resistance or other limitations which could enhance or damage the quality of this research. After reading Silverman (2007, p.38), my methodology includes acknowledging my contribution as a **worker researcher**. Rather than trying to screen this out (thinking I was being impartial), Silverman suggests valuing oneself as a contributing participant in one's own research.

My **methodology** is explained more fully below. In summary, it is a qualitative deep interview over the phone, with three former clients in three different jobs in two industry sectors. My preference for qualitative conversations is congruent with my personal passion for and recognised ability to deeply connect with many types of people, in order to produce more profound outcomes and learning (for others and for myself). It is also congruent with my belief system around the power of the conversation (which is fundamental to my coaching model and philosophy). In addition, my professional experiences confirm my belief that informal processes (e.g. working outside of the rules and officialdom) can produce better results. So my structured interview encourages participants to go 'off-piste' and say more, say the unsaid and say the unsayable about themselves, and their systems. In two cases the client altered the methodology – improving my questionnaire and ideas for future research. My qualitative methodology preference reflects my disconnect with gathering and making sense of quantitative data.

My research project seeks to identify its strengths and its weaknesses or **limitations**. These suggest how future research could improve and expand on this study. In addition, my findings and analyses provoke some interesting challenges and questions for **future research** projects. These include: using the improved questionnaire to sample a larger population; looking at cross cultural, ethnic, sex, gender and

age variation in relation to self coaching; finding out when self coaching begins and how long it is sustained after a coaching programme ends; in addition, learning what helps sustain self coaching once it has been established. Other factors include learning more about how the coach-client relationship / rapport influences client's capability and desire to self coach.

Unexpectedly, this project has helped me learn and develop as a worker researcher. I reflect later in this document on the implications of this for me as a person, as a coach, as a worker researcher and as a business woman hiring associate coaches. I have also reflected on what issues I self coach on and on what my current, evolving **definition** of self coaching.

I offer this here, ahead of finding out what my clients thought:

*'Self coaching is a coaching conversation with oneself to produce a thinking or behavioural outcome that has the potential to benefit the individual, their team or peers at work, their organisation or even their family life outside work. Self coaching is a conversation that occurs consciously or is deliberately evoked, in the face of a challenge or desired vision. It can happen inside a coaching session with the coach present but silent. Or outside of a coaching session or some time after a coaching programme has ended. Self coaching can occur in different environments e.g. the office, the car, on the tube, on holiday or at home.'*

### **Literature search and justifications for this research:**

Anecdotal responses to my initial soundings from my peers and professional colleagues about whether my research project idea was a good one, suggested that there is a paucity of research on self coaching in a business context. My literature search found plenty of books on self help and life coaching. But searches under 'self coaching' and 'self coaching business' invariably showed 'no references'. (I acknowledge my potential worker researcher bias here to confirm a lack of literature. Together with my inexperience conducting literature searches).

There are books about how to be successful in business. But reading a couple of examples found these books conveyed a sense of 'I'll tell you what you need to do' approach, for example, Stanier 2004 and Forester 2002. My preferred method of coaching is based on asking rather than telling, in the belief that this develops self solving skills and independence from the coach more effectively and sustainably.

Barker, Martin & Zournazi (2008) write about 'reflective practise and mindfulness' being important tools for 'emotional self management' as valuable tools for political activists to shift from negative to positive emotions of 'joyful hope' to stick with and further their cause. Bandura (1994) says people who are develop 'self directed mastery', view challenge as something to master, rather than a threat to be avoided. He says they have higher resistance, recover from failure quicker and perceive less stress. This would appear to be particularly pertinent in the current economic crisis where some leaders are working under significant stress if not exceptional pressure.

So from an academic perspective, research on self coaching in a business context could make a valid and valuable contribution to the current available resource of knowledge, insight, ideas, questions and future research needs.

In the business world, self coaching could represent useful data about the return on investment from coaching, outcomes businesses want or do not want from coaching as a leadership intervention. Organisations could benefit from knowing how self coaching occurs, when deciding how to spend their budgets. Or when deciding on coach selection.

In the coaching world, anecdotal interest and enthusiasm for my research topic, indicated that it would be a useful contribution to the coaching industry to know more about self coaching as a return on investment or outcome of coaching. Coaches could learn how what questions to ask and how to develop self coaching capability in themselves and others. They could reflect on how to improve themselves as coaches addressing this criteria more successfully or start to address this criteria in their professional practise. Coach trainers, mentors and supervisors may want to reflect on how they are teaching and assessing coaches' ability to develop self coaching in others.

There are unknown (at least to me) impacts of self coaching on multiple levels e.g. for individuals, their teams, departments, organisations, sector, home lives, community and society. Research could therefore be justified both in a specific context – business – and in a wider context, such as the benefit to society of individuals practising self coaching. This could be where the coaching industry makes a positive contribution to society, as well as endeavouring to help executive leaders perform better in business.

This broader reach and contribution appeals to my personal values and philosophy as a coach. These include helping others, encouraging more ethics orientated behaviour in society and valuing relationships and home life as part of personal or professional success.

### **Theoretical underpinnings for this research:**

Throughout the preparative thinking and the actual undertaking of this research project, I have reflected on my areas of motivation, insight, resistance and learning. I noticed parallel processes where as I learn to coach better, my clients learn to self coach better. Where self coaching helps clients with their business and home lives, my practise and training as a coach helps me with both my business and my home life. So as I notice an holistic possibility in my work and home life, so too are my clients reporting becoming more 'whole' as leaders. This parallel process chimes with the notion of congruence, which can form part of a psychoanalytic approach to coaching (Kets de Vries 2006). Psychoanalytically informed coaching is congruent with my coaching model and practise. That means diving deep, being creative about possibility, being humble and open to our internal drivers or our external behaviours. Some of my course tutors and supervisors speak about the connection between the coach's congruence and the client's ability to trust the coach. They say this trust determines the quality of work – i.e. the risks the client is willing to take in their learning journey. So the more congruence, the more trust, the greater the potential coaching outcomes for the client. This cycle of learning echoes Kolb. Respecting the client's meaning making chimes with the Person Centred and Existential theory.

So the theoretical underpinnings of this research include:

- Parallel process
- Psychoanalytic coaching
- Existentialism
- Personal congruence
- Person centred approach
- Empowerment theory
- Self organised adult learning theory
- Kolb's learning cycle
- Research methodology theory
- The concept of the Worker Researcher

### **Methodology:**

I devised a one hour telephone interview questionnaire of about 10 questions. These evolved and were tweaked. All versions are included in Appendix 2. I chose three (originally four but one dropped out because of a family health issue) recent former clients of mixed age, gender, nationality and ethnic background. All have different jobs in two sectors – retail and banking. I treated each participant in the same way, contracting for confidentiality and anonymity. In some cases it was appropriate to seek permission of their organisation, which I did.

All clients were telephoned, none seen face to face for the research. All were asked if they were speaking in a quiet place where they wouldn't be overheard by colleagues. All said yes. None of the clients were given the questionnaire in advance. All clients were told the title of the research project. All clients had been chosen by me after I had noticed them spontaneously self coaching during after several sessions of coaching with me. I defined this to myself as hearing them speak about what I would ask them / they would ask themselves...on the tube, in the car, when reflecting on their own.

The questionnaire aimed to capture the meaning of self coaching for participants, the impact of self coaching on them, their organisations and their families. And then to capture what coaches and coach trainers can do to promote the capacity in others to self coach. The questionnaire was qualitative and left room for clients to add data and improve the questionnaire, if they thought I had left something important out. One question was more quantitative, asking participants to prioritise the most powerful questions which for them, promote self-coaching. I attempted to include a control question.

### **Ethical considerations:**

Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity in terms of personal names, and names of organisations. I offered to share my research findings with them a to inform them if the project was published. In the case of one person whose mother was taken ill, I did not push for her participation even though it was offered (albeit delayed); this was in response to feedback in my Professional Review of the need to recognise my potential *power* as a coach, to influence my clients to say 'yes' when they wish they hadn't. This seems particularly important when there is increased vulnerability because of a distressing home or work event.

### **As worker researcher:**

Officially, I am not an *inside worker researcher*, as I am not employed permanently by my participant's companies. However, I am keen to do repeat business with these companies, I have worked inside them – so have an inside track or may hold insider-type assumptions and prejudices about my client's organisations.

I may hold deeper insights or ideas because I can cross reference knowledge gained in one firm, with insights learned in another. This means my research potentially benefits from informed, insider-type knowledge, without any pressure 'big up' or 'hush up' any of my findings (as might be the case for an insider worker researcher).

So for the purposes of this research, I offer my personal definition of **worker researcher**:

*'I am not an employee, however I have worked within and outside of my participant's organisations for a year, ending in 2007 and 2008. I have a warm, trusting professional relationship with my participants, whom I have selected from the retail and banking sectors. I am not paid by any company to conduct my research. I am not beholden to any organisation to share my research, nor have its findings approved or vetted. Because participants and their organisations remain anonymous, my career and promotion prospects are not influenced by the outcomes of this research. My motivations are to find out more about self coaching, to achieve my Masters degree, to inform my coaching practise and model and to add to the fields of academia, coaching and business.'*

Being human, it may never be completely possible to avoid. According to my participants, as an external researcher I am trusted more and consequently, they spoke more frankly. This may enrich my findings and their potential contribution to various fields.

However, as I am emotionally invested in this research, as part of gaining an MA, I acknowledge the risk of failed validity through bias in data collection or selection of participants and organisations. This includes avoiding approaching certain potential participants. [I hope this is not the case, but I am offering self awareness around the potential deeper drivers of my behaviour and the need for honest self disclosure, in holding a healthy worker-researcher position].

In analysing my data, I looked for repeated themes and patterns. I also looked for individuality – things that nobody else said. As a result of reading Silverman (2007 p.14) I decided to value and include (rather than attempt to screen out) my personal reflections and reactions during data gathering and analysis.

The following changes were made to methodology before and after the data gathering phase:

- Participant said 'you've asked me about the impact at work but not at home', so a home impact / family question was added to Question 3
- Questions 7 & 8 were merged as they repeat and also, I admitted to participants that this question could assume that they self coach because of me, not other factors
- Question 9: I could have asked respondents to come up with what I say...some did so
- Added Question 12: Making this research have more context: What is the effect of the economic crisis on self coaching (or do you forget to do it under pressure)?

### What this methodology omits:

This methodology focuses solely on the coach worker researcher asking former clients about self coaching. It omits to ask the client's colleagues, peers, managers, partners and children about differences they observe in the individual's behaviour and approach to situations. It does not ignore organisational or domestic impact but it fails to seek independent verification of claimed changes or outcomes.

The reasons for the simplicity of scale and limited lenses include financial and people resources, limited time to conduct the research and analyse the findings. As worker researcher I wanted to balance my work based research project, with the competing need to serve my current clients and run my business.

This research did not ask participants at what point in their coaching programme they started self coaching. It also assumed self coaching was caused by experiencing one to one coaching. This methodology did not consider that self coaching may be a coincidence, could occur through different interventions e.g. reading a book on leadership, or was happening before and therefore irrespective of received coaching.

### Other risks associated with this methodology:

Other risks associated with this methodology have caused me to consider the following during my research: how to ensure participant confidentiality, offering participants the chance to withdraw from the research before or afterwards – including my potential 'power' as a worker researcher to try to persuade, for my own needs rather than respecting the client's needs. Notes taken during interviews will be stored in a safe place as with other confidential client notes; I usually shred them after a period of 6 – 12 months. The outcome of the research, since it is anonymous and non attributable will not affect participants jobs or reputation. Should this research be published I intend to consult participants and ensure confidentiality was maintained.

In addition, I now realise that as a worker researcher my methodology focussed on an assumption of positive impact around self coaching. During the research I adjusted this to include – albeit in a limited way – some of the potential negatives. This highlights a general risk of the natural preference to select

or ignore aspects of data collection and research design, by worker researchers. Although this may apply to quantitative research, I suggest that it is even more important to consider in qualitative research.

## Findings:

- My personal overall sense of and context for the research project
- Client's definitions of self coaching
- Question by question participant responses with key point summaries
- Integrated comments and reflections as a worker researcher
- Additional ideas from clients...
- Summary of findings

### Overall sense and context of the research project:

Conducting this research was more enjoyable than I had anticipated. Even though one of the four participants had to pull out due to family illness, the three former clients with whom I conducted interviews gave so much richness in their data, I decided not to pursue more participants. I believe this research may stimulate increased awareness of and debate around self coaching and the impact of professional executive coaching on multiple levels e.g. home as well as work. This also links in with work on empowerment. As worker researcher I noticed just how empowered participants sounded when they spoke. This was a contrast with their behaviour when I first met them to start coaching.

The enthusiasm of participants and my own worker researcher reflections generated more data than I had anticipated. This includes questions for the coaching industry to ask itself. And questions for academic researchers to ask in future research projects. This study provides a diversity of ages, jobs, industry sectors, ethnic backgrounds and family circumstances. Apart from myself, it lacks female participants, as had been planned. A future study might be advised to be larger in scale and seek either, to remain as diverse as possible, or to compare two groups e.g. men and women, white and Asian, black and Asian, professionals who have partners and children and those who have children but have split up from their partner.

This study chose to focus on the biased assumption that self coaching would be a *positive* thing. It would have liked to explore more fully, the negative impacts of self coaching on a professional's performance at work. Another study might build a picture for individuals, coaches and sponsor organisations of the potential benefits and disadvantages of self coaching on the workplace and/or home life.

Another factor was the timing of this research. It was conducted in the UK in January 2009 during the 'credit crunch'. The economic context had seen oil prices drop from their record high a few months earlier, the lowest interest rates on record, constant media reference to 'recession' and the Depression of the 1930s. There were daily announcements of redundancies and liquidation of British firms. The almost daily collapse of individual banks had steadied by this point, compared to Autumn 2008. Corporate budgets were suddenly cut e.g. all business travel suspended, coaching programmes halted. Companies were acknowledging a situation of 'known unknowns and unknown unknowns' – people fear losing their jobs and not being able to find new ones.

My participants came from the banking and retail sector. The economic context may have altered the responses of some participants especially one who is in the banking sector. I believe the economic context may make this research more useful than had it been carried out in boom time, when self coaching may be easier, or may be perceived as more effective than when under significant professional, personal, financial and market pressures. It may also offer companies keen to maximise their ROI (return on investment), an insight into when and where in the business to invest in coaching.

### INTERVIEW QUESTION 1: Client's definitions of self coaching?

As a worker researcher, it was remarkable to notice how confidently and easily participants were able to define self coaching even though all of them said they hadn't heard the term before. The 'what else' question in the methodology worked well to expand participants' definitions. It should be noted, that participants are using their self coaching skills to think through and act on *new* problems not just things they already know about. This exemplifies the learning of a *process of thinking* not just re-employing answers from previous thinking.

Here is a selection of what participants said:

*'Self coaching is the ability of someone to be able to provide guidance for themselves to deal with a situation in their personal life or at work...Self coaching is the ability to articulate the challenges and have appropriate strategies to address those problems. It's a tool kit. You're doing what a coach would do but to yourself. You are talking to your ego'*

*'Self coaching is time away from yourself at work...it's a presence of mind that makes me stop and think before a meeting or teleconference...it's a little you on the shoulder...what question would Rachel ask me...I thought great leadership was innate...now I have the confidence to experiment...I know self coaching is something I didn't do before...it's continuing the coaching work you did with me further.'*

*'It's the difference between chance and active behaviour.'*

*'Self coaching is applying what happened in a coaching session but without the coach being there. It's probing questions, asking why, how, doing things differently or looking at something from different angles. Self coaching is taking it outside the coaching session and asking myself the same questions in the car...what are my or others reflections, thinking, feeling, motivations...with difficult challenges. I wouldn't call it self coaching. I would say 'application'. It's the self application of what worked for me in coaching, but I'm using it on myself.'*

The following notions confirm or compliment my original hypothesis and definition of self coaching:

- 'the ability to articulate and provide guidance for themselves'
- 'it's doing coaching but without you there'
- 'it's a little 'you' on my shoulder'
- 'what would Rachel ask me?'
- 'it happens outside a coaching session'
- 'I'm talking to myself about the work challenge in the car....'

(My definition is included in Appendix 1)

Noteably, none of the participants used the word self-solve or self coaching towards solutions. I think this is implied. But I might add it to my future definition of self coaching. Its application could help remove academic or educational coaching jargon and make the concept and learning of self coaching easier for clients to understand.

The following comments are new and interesting additions to the original definition and hypothesis:

- 'self application'
- 'self guidance'
- 'talking to your ego'
- 'it's a tool kit' [for when your coach is not there]

INTERVIEW QUESTION 2: What issues participants self coach on:

Responses included self coaching on both work and home issues and the competition and conflict within the workplace and the tension of balancing professional and family life. Themes included:

- Prioritising
- Better communication with my team
- Difficult people at work
- Thinking about the different mindsets and motivations of others
- Assumption
- How to differentiate oneself in the workplace and be recognised
- How to show my value to the organisation
- Competitive colleagues
- Survival in the credit crunch – not being fired
- Pay

INTERVIEW QUESTION 3: The impact of self coaching on you / your team / organisation / home life:

*'That's a very good question'* (RM, interview participant)

*'You asked me about the impact at work, but you didn't ask me about the impact of self coaching at home....'* (CM, interview participant)

These responses confirmed and enhanced the design of my methodology. I responded to the participant's in-the-moment reaction to the questionnaire. The interplay of the impact at work, at home and at work as a result of the impact of self coaching at home, was not something I had previously thought about. In addition, there is scope here for future research to reflect on the societal impact of the impact of self coaching at work, at home and in future employees brought up by parents who self coach. The analogy could be taken further still, to consider the impact of today's parents self coaching, on the next generation of workers and parents.

Another point to consider, is the negative impact of self coaching. This research proposal had previously assumed impacts would be positive. So whilst considered only briefly here, there is rich material for immediate reflection which could be built upon in future research.

- Self coaching impact on the individual:

The following impacts were listed by participants:

More inner confidence, more confidence with tough issues, thinking through more angles rather than coming up with just one solution and then stopping – multiple perspective taking; more confident decision making, making decisions with deeper insight; more confident managing new team; have the answers when challenged, because have done the thinking. Feel more trusted and respected.

Self coaching can be negative too – destructive rather than constructive as clients become hyper self critical. The **implication for coaches** is to determine how to help clients develop a high quality of self coaching. Or indeed help clients spot when they are not self coaching, but in fact remaining stuck in analysis without action.

As worker researcher, listening to participants' responses, I was told: 'You can't afford not to self coach' – i.e. this is now a critical skill in order for leaders to maximise their potential. Although one participant countered:

*'Too much self coaching could lead to executives reaching hypercritical overanalysis. That becomes destructive instead of constructive. This depends on the quality of self coaching – mine is variable and inconsistent; it depends on the quality of your coach, what mood I'm in and whether I feel I can trust my self coaching.'*

A summary of themes around impact for the individual:

- Greater personal confidence
- Energy and excitement
- Multiple perspective taking
- Feel more trusted and respected

- Generate more ideas for solutions
  - Can't afford not to self coach
  - Self coaching can lead people to become over self critical
  - Self coaching is not always a positive thing
  - Worker-research input: self coaching generates more passion, more confident showing emotions
- 
- Self coaching impact on the **team**:

Better results with the team, enhanced team purpose, team members feel more aligned – they belong more; enhanced motivation to deliver with passion. Team feels more empowered, more trusted, more appreciated and focuses on most productive priority tasks.

- Self coaching impact on the **organisation**:

*'Without that "self process" and increased self confidence, I would have ducked below the bar'*

*'The team is in great shape – and it's self perpetuating...self coaching is really working for me as a leader, so my team get a more confident leader who can try things, adjust and bounce back if they don't always work.'*

Self coaching is positive for organisations. It results in better personal relationships, cross functional influence e.g. finance connecting with sales better – so increased efficiency; sharing feelings if the company is wasting time on the wrong priorities – so more challenging leaders, more insightful leaders who are now contributing across the business because their standard of thinking has been raised. Higher standard of thinking is role modelled to others in the company – so 'raising the bar for others'.

Self coaching promotes self challenging, self responsible leaders who are constantly reviewing the performance of themselves and the organisation.

Summary of themes around benefits to organisations of self coaching leaders:

- More thinking leaders
- More challenging leaders
- More connectedness and contribution from individual leaders across the business
- Raising the bar for more junior colleagues through role modelling better thinking
- More flexible leaders, less ego – less afraid of making mistakes
- Organisations whose people constantly question performance

- Impact of self coaching at home:

*'Before self coaching, I was grumpy and I switched off when I got home from work'*

*'There's less dancing on eggshells in our marriage...it's more honest, there's more communication, it's more mature...'*

*'I consciously praise and reward the children more...I'm a more authentic father; I give them real eye contact now, I make time to really listen to what they're saying – I make more time for them.'*

*'The most powerful part of self coaching has been to think how what I do lands for the various people in my family.'* [worker researcher: this is conscious multiple perspectives taking]

More honest communication with wife and children; more aware of managing relationships at home – more conscious, more honest, articulating more, communicating more, set expectations within the marriage better.

Themes around the impact of self coaching at home:

- More aware of own deficiencies

- More honest in relationship with partner
- More active listening and engagement with partner and children
- More frequent communication and relationship building
- Fewer arguments, partners less frustrated, more harmony
- Enriched family life
- Potential to achieve more as a family
- Multiple perspective taking
- More authentic as a father

As a worker researcher I feel I'm picking up that there is much more communication between husbands and wives as a result of self coaching; that family life is more rewarding because of the investment of a leader in reflection and active experimentation at work; that children may emulate their parents as they grow older, so a more enriched, harmonious family life now, could pay dividends in the future because of parents expanding their own self knowledge.

However, these are personal perceptions and lack data from families as to whether self coaching is improving family life *for them*.

#### INTERVIEW QUESTION 4: What goes on when you self coach?

This question attempts to understand the process of self coaching for individuals. Here are some participant responses:

*'I think of Rachelisms....and lapse into a mini coaching session when I'm driving the car.'*

*'It's like a discussion with the Right hand side of my brain being the coach...and the Left hand side being me....putting myself through the process of playing the two roles...asking myself the question and then answering it!'*

*'It's like mind torture...I ask myself how could I have done that differently or better?'*

*'Address, understand, solve and act'*

*'I've come out of doubt...telling myself that it's OK to learn from a mistake and move on....consistently building my confidence instructing myself to have another crack at it...'*

So the process of self coaching seems to suggest a conversation with self, a conscious tension between taking a risk and encouraging self to try again for improved performance. It suggests a battery of questions evoked by coaching sessions, that are adopted and re-used on self and for some, a 'conjuring up' of the coach to help recreate a coaching conversation internally.

#### Summary of the process according to former client participants:

- What worked well?
- What didn't work well?
- What would happen in an ideal world?

- How could I improve going forward?
- Who would that land?
- What else....?
- Visualisation of a conversation where I take two different sides
- 'Thinking when can I find another opportunity to have a go at something I previously felt a downward spiral of doubt about'

INTERVIEW QUESTION 5: What enabled self coaching – what did I do as a coach to facilitate self coaching for you?

As a worker researcher I acknowledged to participants that this may be a leading question. But it tries to define what I did as a coach in order to share with other coaches what is more effective or least effective in promoting self coaching as an outcome of coaching. This may make a faulty assumption that self coaching is brought about by received coaching. This assumption may have undermined the validity of this research. This what participants said:

- *'It's too much of a coincidence to say that self coaching started after the coaching sessions with you, to say it wasn't you...!'*
- *'Going emotionally deeper on the issue helped me find the solution there on my own'*
- *'You gave me the confidence to know what I was doing wasn't rubbish...it took away my self doubt – it's the difference between chance and active behaviour'*
- *'You enabled me to verbalise the conversation I was having in my head'*
- *'Asking me tough questions, using language that made all this accessible...and using that language again and again so I could repeat it for myself later'*
- *'Your rigour. Not letting me off the hook'*
- *'Pushing me to go deeper'*

Summary of behaviours from the coach, that clients believed contributed to their capacity to self coach:

- You listened for a long time
- Nodding
- The impartiality of the coach
- Repeated use of same language (what client said and leadership vocabulary which client learned from coach as increasing their range of self expression)
- Not just firing questions at me
- Asking questions which helped me solve for myself
- Asking deep questions
- Asking deep emotion questions
- Every question had a reason – i.e. not asked because you're curious
- Your style of asking questions, e.g. 'what does that mean for you?'
- Your tone

- Never 'telling' me, but explore, understand, act
- Very considered, analytical
- You wanted me to get to the bottom of it myself, which gave me confidence (rather than you telling me as you'd got there quicker)
- Confidence that you know where you're going gave me confidence [worker researcher: clients often assume the coach knows the answers]

One participant said there is a risk some time after coaching has ended, that self coaching diminishes in effectiveness: *'Like a tool box that becomes less sharp over time'*. Also, the coach's ability to be impartial cannot be matched by the individual with him/herself.

The coach can challenge and *'not let you run away from things'*. So this may limit the efficacy of self coaching. Or it may suggest a degree of top-up coaching after several months, to sharpen the tools and create sufficient challenge to sustain self coaching behaviour.

INTERVIEW QUESTION 6: What gets in the way of / did I do anything as a coach to hinder self coaching?

Participants spontaneously identified aspects of themselves as well as the coach:

- Ego [participant meant his own ego...but as worker researcher I suggest also the coach's ability to work without their own ego or emotional baggage (e.g. envy, competitiveness, need to prove they are expert, need to be in control etc.) getting in the way]\*\*\*
- Time lapse since coaching programme ended, lack of independent emotions
- Lack of self discipline '*like being on a diet and giving in*
- A colluding coach; a coach who is not sufficiently challenging
- Tools and techniques which don't resonate e.g. one client who didn't like visualisation. On reflection, having a go at a new tool / technique evidences the leader's willingness to experiment. One participant said doing so, even with some resistance, forged a deeper relationship with the coach. This created an 'even greater honesty in the coaching work'.

\*\*\* Worker researcher reflection: This may be a strong reason for organisations to insist coaches have undergone or are in psychotherapy, in order to be able to work without ego, or to know when their own emotional issues are intruding into a client's coaching session.

Summary of potential hindrances to building self coaching capacity:

- Client's ego
- Coach's ego
- Time since coaching programme ended
- Telephone coaching [for one individual]
- Visualisation conversations [for one individual] i.e. tools/techniques which didn't resonate with the client

Overall this question was challenging for participants. There may be more work to be done here to uncover what hinders self coaching. Any answers on this could inform future coach training and supervision of coaches whose process may create or hinder the client's capacity to self coach.

INTERVIEW QUESTION 7: Do you think if you didn't like / trust me you wouldn't be self coaching now?

This question is about the *relationship* of client and coach as an influencing factor beyond the mere process of coaching.

YES:

*'Trust is important because it reinforces self coaching better'*

*'If I didn't like the coaching I might self coach instead because it costs me nothing. Or I might not self coach if I didn't value the coaching I'd had'*

NO:

*'No. What sparked self coaching were great, fruitful sessions. It wasn't about trusting or liking you. But I did trust your questions and your process.'*

YES & NO:

*'I don't need to trust or like the coach because I respect the process and that's giving me results. But if I respect the coach I am more likely to apply it.'*

INTERVIEW QUESTION 8: Did our relationship have a positive impact?

I adjusted the methodology to acknowledge that this is a leading question. I didn't focus on it as I realised this could be a whole research area in itself, and may not be specific enough to self coaching. It felt repetitive and didn't offer participants a chance to explore the negative side of a coach-client relationship. I left this question out after the first interview. This might have been different had my

research been carried out for me by another researcher, rather than by myself – hence a note for future worker-researcher considerations.

INTERVIEW QUESTION 9: Please prioritise which questions were most powerful to you:

- If I weren't here what question would you ask yourself?
- What's your internal dialogue on this?
- What reflections have you had since our last session?
- What question might I ask you at this point?
- What question are you hoping I won't ask you?
- How do you think that would land for him/her/the other people?
- That's a great question, why don't you have a go at answering it yourself?\*

Participants responded in-the-moment and I noted, with much enthusiasm. This included the control question. From a small sample there is some anecdotal indication of questions that promote self coaching. As worker researcher I also noted the laughter at this point in the interview....e.g. *'I was always petrified by that question!'*

Because of such a small sample size, it is not possible to tabulate the best self-coaching-promoting question. But here is a snapshot of responses:

Two participants said the most powerful questions to promote self coaching were:

***Q: What question are you hoping I won't ask you?***

***Q: That's a great question...why don't you have a go at answering it yourself?*** [This was the control question]\*\*

Another participant felt these were the questions that made the biggest impact on his self coaching:

***Q: If I weren't here what question would you ask yourself?***

***Q: What question might I ask you at this point?***

He also remembered me asking him many times:

***Q: What question are you hoping I won't ask you?***

\*\*The control question:

This question was designed to offer a placebo question, to make the methodology more robust. However, it didn't work, as once I began the research, I realised that I *do* in fact, ask the control question but in a slightly different way. So the placebo was too similar to the real thing. Hence the control question was not useful. But it did reveal instant enthusiasm from participants that this would be a highly useful question for a coach to ask. So irrespective of my own worker-research disappointment that the methodology around 'the control' didn't work, I am excited to comment that coaches might make greater use of this question in the future, if they want to promote self coaching in their clients.

INTERVIEW QUESTION 10: What's the impact of self coaching on you /your team / your organisation?

This question was asked earlier in the research interview. Responses are earlier in this document.

INTERVIEW QUESTION 11: Anything else you can tell me that would help me understand your self coaching?

Not all participants had additional comments here. But one said:

*'I got so much that's positive out of coaching, it made me think you'd be mad not to take this on yourself! If coaching with you as my coach hadn't worked, I'd never do more of it on my own afterwards.'*

This suggests that the quality of the initial coaching experience, influences whether a client self coaches afterwards.

INTERVIEW QUESTION 12: Self coaching in an economic crisis.....how is it helping you or do you forget to do self coach in tough times?

This question was added in response to the external environment. I think it adds a valuable dynamic layer to this research, making it even more relevant to organisations deciding whether to cut coaching budgets or questioning the return on investment from coaching. Coachees who improved their leadership capability in the good times, may find themselves less able to cope – or to the contrary – are well equipped through their personal growth and development. Here's what some of them said:

- I'm self coaching much more in a crisis, but it's less conscious
- More consciously self coaching because my environment at work is so tense
- Self coaching helps you be innovative in a crisis
- It's about asking self and others the right questions – giving the best chance of finding the right answers
- Accepted wisdoms are being thrown out, so it's even more important to be able to organise thoughts and mental processes
- Having a coaching mentality is even more important because problems are less uniform and everything is untested
- You need an external coach even more in a crisis because you can't articulate for self when so distracted and tense

There was also the suggestion from one participant in banking, that there is a need for an external coach to support thinking during a crisis, because self coaching is harder when under extreme stress and because it is too politically dangerous to share emotions and thinking with colleagues. This may suggest that self coaching needs to be supported with face-to-face external coaching, for brief periods during exceptionally stressful times, in certain industry sectors.

### **Limitations of the methodology: what did this project not achieve that we thought it would?**

I was consciously aware and afraid that this project would be too small and too simple in design to give data that could make a genuine contribution to knowledge about coaching. However, its simple yet intense methodology produced some varied, deep and fascinating insights and ideas. I would say the control question ended up not being a true 'control' for bias or autosuggestion in the way I had anticipated.

In addition, this research methodology relied on but did not test the accuracy / external evidence of changes claimed by participants when it comes to self coaching. It did not examine how teams, organisations and families experience the claimed impact of self coaching. Nor did it examine whether the outcomes participating clients claim to have achieved through self coaching, as a resultant outcome of coaching, are true. So this would need testing from multiple stakeholder perspectives in future research.

### **Making meaning from these responses:**

Self coaching is understood in different ways by clients, so asking them for their definition of self coaching may be useful for coaches, in order to promote the skill of self coaching. However all participants viewed self coaching as a reflective process involving thinking on their own. They all connected this way of thinking with received coaching. Participants mostly regarded self coaching as positive although it can sometimes be destructive.

Participants could harness the tangible outcomes of self coaching. So self coaching can produce different thinking, decision making and behaviour for individuals, their teams, their organisation and even home life. It would be interesting to learn more about the potential interplay between self coaching in a home context and subsequent leadership capability in a work context. It would also be interesting for organisations to learn about the wide scale impact of hundreds or thousands of leaders self coaching.

If, as is indicated by these research findings, leaders who have developed the capacity to self coach are more challenging, innovating, flexible leaders raising the bar for themselves and others, it may be

important to consider what this implies for organisations? Do organisations actually want more cross function connectivity, more experimentation and leaders less afraid of making mistakes in front of their teams? Many say they want these qualities. However this may upset the current order. So making use of leaders with these new, enhanced qualities may be currently an under-tapped resource, or in contrast a threat to company culture and behaviours everyone is used to.

Another implication is if there is more internal thinking, could self coaching leaders become less collaborative? Or would they not previously have communicated on these issues openly anyway....in which case, their new confidence to experiment and think of *multiple* possible solutions not just one, may bring more, not less to the systemic collective?

For individuals who self coach, they may find they survive the current challenging economic environment better than colleagues who don't have an internal dialogue with themselves. If everyone becomes proficient at self coaching, individuals may lose this edge. However systemically, the company may become more competitive compared to rival companies. And this would mean individuals who may have lost their jobs or had budgets cut, retain the edge as a collective. Thus self coaching could be argued to be a skill that promotes and preserves commercial edge, through change and tight competition.

Self coaching's influence at home confirms my personal hypothesis that coaching at work can be far reaching beyond the work environment. It may be that some leaders fail to transfer this self knowledge and their tools and techniques to leverage it, to the home environment. External to this study, but taking inspiration from Silverman (2007) who encourages the use of unexpected extra data via self, for research, a friend and senior executive recently told me, that it had not occurred to her to transfer self knowledge learning at work, to her home relationships and behaviours. So companies and coaches may want to test for 'transfer' just as other skills in the workplace e.g. finance for budgeting, listening skills for team meetings need to be fully leveraged for maximum systemic impact. The advantage for companies is helping their leaders spot when they are fully leveraging a skill and when they have not been as creative with it as they could be. So connecting work and home behaviours may bring benefits to both environments.

Also, if executives are self coaching on home issues with the result that marriages, partnerships and relationships with children are better, this might potentially 'free them up' to perform with greater focus at and happiness at work. So a work investment (coaching paid for by sponsor organisation) can help home, with can bring benefits back at work. I realise as I write this, my worker researcher bias towards the positive.

Another consideration is the negative side of self coaching. The ability of the individual to over analyse and become too self critical to the point of 'doing battle with one's ego' (RM, Participant). This could have negative consequences for individuals' confidence and performance at work. Especially if constant thinking and self reflection forms a habit of procrastination on decision making.

The implications for coaches and trainers of coaches include: a) promote self coaching and b) help clients learn to spot when self coaching is constructive and when not *for them*, and c) to help clients devise strategies to self-manage when their reflective practise becomes destructive.

Making meaning from these findings may raise consciousness of what questions coaches ask, whether they as individuals self coach, how they check for the criteria of developing the capacity to self coach with their clients and for how coach training promotes the ability in others to promote self coaching. For organisations, self coaching may become a more prominent criteria when selecting coaches. Demonstrating the ability to promote self coaching and continuing to measure its outcomes, may be important for coaches tendering for work in organisations.

Participants clearly remembered which questions they employ when self coaching. They also had surprisingly strong opinions of which questions and behaviours were most powerful, coming from a coach, in terms of promoting self coaching. So coaches could learn from this, replicate it and seek to expand their repertoire and the industry's knowledge of self-coaching promoting questions and behaviours.

The issue here is how long self coaching continues, who self coaches and who does not, and whether self coaching occurs *because* of coaching or whether certain clients would have done this anyway without receiving coaching. It may be that self coaching continues for a life time. Or that it continues strongly at first and becomes weaker or employed less frequently over time. So at this point do organisations need to consider giving employees more coaching, top-up coaching or occasional external coaching (e.g. 4 sessions a year) to keep 'the tools in the tool box sharp' (RM, Participant)? Or do coaches need to help clients develop sustainability strategies?

It would seem that the coach-client relationship is an influencing factor on the development of the capacity to self coach. Participants said self coaching was all about the *process of coaching* yet the likelihood of self coaching depended on their respect and trust for their coach. This study is limited by its

size. It would be interesting to find out whether all clients feel this way, or whether sample groups vary according to men, women, seniority, length of coaching relationship etc.

I believe the current economic crisis gives this research unexpected and valuable texture. It has shaped its methodology and its findings. For some participants, this global situation throws up the need to be original, think for oneself and create new meaning in the workplace, because accepted wisdoms no longer apply. For others, severe stress at work hampered their ability to be self-reflective.

For coaches this may offer an opportunity to market themselves specifically to help leaders generate new thinking (through their capacity to be coached and subsequently self-coach) during a crisis. For organisations, this may be the time to bring in a temporary blast of external coaching. This may help restore or retain trust and constructive team dynamics during crisis and competition for jobs / fear of redundancy. It may reduce the distraction of internal politics and thus direct energy to the performance of the organisation (with the possibility of retaining commercial edge and thus possibly not having to make so many people redundant). This could imply that a counter-intuitive spend at a time of severe budget cuts, could create more not less profitability. Or it could imply that money from other areas of expenditure could be temporarily diverted for crisis coaching programmes.

#### Summary of meaning making:

- Self coaching depends on the quality of coaching
- Certain coaching questions promote self coaching more powerfully
- Coaches, coach training, organisations and accrediting bodies may choose to make self coaching an explicit, measured criteria in assessing coaches and self coaching outcomes
- Self coaching has the potential to add value at work and at home and back again in a loop
- Organisations with self coaching leaders may need to respond differently
- Organisations with self coaching leaders may gain competitive edge in the market place
- Self coaching in economic crisis becomes even more 'added value' as accepted wisdoms are thrown out and individuals have to think more creatively to find original solutions
- Self coaching is about the capacity to think in new ways – essential during economic crisis
- The quality of self coaching in economic crisis may be compromised by stress
- Economic crisis may be the time to bring in external coaches to temporarily support self coaching

### **A brief summary of my research findings:**

The findings are rich and varied and cover both the positive and negative aspects and insights of self coaching. They help give an understanding of what different participants see as a definition of self coaching. They give granular level information about the subject matter, process and outcomes of self coaching from multiple perspectives, e.g. individual, team, organisational and home life lenses. The data is potentially limited by having a small sample of three participants plus myself as worker researcher. But these findings suggest many avenues that future research could explore. It also throws up some questions for future research, some potential improvements to the methodology and issues for the coaching industry to consider further. Included are reflections and recommendations which occurred to me whilst conducting and analysing the research. These are explained more fully later in this document.

### **Recommendations for future research & questions to answer:**

This research has been personally and professionally enlightening, moving and clarifying. It has implications for individual coaches in their practise, the coaching industry and buyers of coaching. It may also have implications for understanding the farther reaching impacts of coaching, e.g. on home life or broader society. In analysing my data and critiquing my methodology, I wanted to ask the following questions. Future research may be able to answer them:

- Replicate this study on a larger scale e.g. 100 people
- Replicate this study in different sample groups, e.g. sector, ethnicity, gender, x-cultural
- Replicate this study to look at self coaching in relation to length of coaching assignment e.g. 4, 8, 12 sessions
- Conduct a study with people 4 months, 6 and 12 months after coaching has finished
- Is self coaching sustained?
- What sustains or hinders sustained self coaching capacity?
- For how long does self coaching last after coaching has finished or does it last forever?
- When does it start occurring...how soon...how many sessions needed to start s-c?
- Is professional stage / length of experience or seniority a significant factor in self coaching?
- How aware are coaches of their potential to promote self coaching?
- How explicit are coaches about self coaching with clients?

- Should coaches be trained differently i.e. to promote self coaching in themselves and clients?
- Should self coaching as an outcome be an explicit criteria for evaluation by organizations buying coaching?
- What are the upsides or downsides for *coaches* of building the capacity to self coach?
- What are the upsides or downsides for *organisations* of building the capacity to self coach?
- What are the upsides or downsides for *families* of building the capacity of leaders to self coach?
- More on the risks of self coaching for individuals, teams, organisations
- Interview wives, partners, children, teams to compare views of the impact of self coaching – is there congruence with what the client says and what others experience that’s changed?
- The role of fun in coaching and its influence on building the capacity and motivation to self coach

#### **Application and dissemination:**

I have been commissioned to write an article for the industry magazine ‘Coaching at Work’ [CIPD publications] about my research into self coaching. I have been approached by the Journal of International Coaching Psychology to write a paper. I am also prepared to offer a workshop discussion on my findings for industry bodies such as the Association of Coaching, APECS (the Association for Professional Executive Coaching & Supervision) and i-coach academy coaching community. I intend to feature my research findings on my website [www.rachelellison.com](http://www.rachelellison.com) and reference this in my Linked-In online professional profile, which is used by people from a wide variety of fields of work outside coaching. In addition I would like to share my research findings with i-coach academy, in particular to enhance the consciousness of their coaching community of alumni and Masters programme students of self coaching. I have already started sharing my findings with my CPD peer learning group, my course director, a course examiner and three organisations where I have a coaching connection: Diageo, Anglo American Mining and Nestle.

#### **The contribution of this project to the field of coaching:**

I believe this project can contribute to the field of coaching, coach training, organisational change and leadership development. I believe it may also stimulate further research in the fields of psychology and

business. This may in turn feed into the field of education and academia, as researchers and future students of coaching connect how leaders learn, and then how they consciously start to use this learning to teach themselves. I believe there could be wider impact if this research if organisations start to evaluate the impact for them of having more self coaching leaders. So this research could potentially help companies through the recession, leverage top talent more effectively than rival organisations, maintain share price or sales targets in challenging times and even, through greater innovation, flexibility and performance of leaders, help save jobs, thus improve the lives (and family lives) of the individuals who work for such companies.

### **Some worker researcher reflections:**

As a worker researcher, this project was a tool to learn how this project's methodology can yield richer results than expected. That the imagination and ideas of participants, together with my own reflections, have the potential to contribute widely to the field of coaching and best practise. Undertaking this research, and thinking through how to do it – including my worker researcher position – was a challenge. Having experimented, taken risks, enjoyed the participation and energy of this project's contributors, I have grown in confidence. It is now more likely that I will conduct research in the future, whether or not it is linked to an academic course. I can already see how this project is enriching conversations with buyers of coaching. This research specifically relates to promoting sustainable, independence, rather than dependent learning. So it is good for clients, good for organisations and aligned with ethical best practise.

I believe that the act of embracing the uncertainty which I felt towards this project, I have been congruent with what I ask of my coaching clients – to take risks, try new things, clamber over self limiting beliefs towards truly exciting, positive outcomes. At the time of this research, the world was in economic turmoil. So everyone – participants and worker researcher – was subject to existential angst about the unknown, be it personal, professional or general. So whilst researching self coaching, I was also having to self manage emotions appropriately, self coach around confidence and delays in starting work with some organisations. This echoes participants' concerns and challenges – so a **parallel process** of self coaching well or badly, and coping with challenge and change, may have been happening.

I also reflect on what I have set out to find, what I found, what I feel about what I found and what impact that has on me and others. I notice a bias towards the positive and omitting the negative. I have responded to this and now included this in my research, albeit to a limited extent. My reflections (please

see Appendix 5) cause me to examine whether I have created a self congratulatory bias which is unhelpful to business and the coaching community. Or whether, having spotted this risk, I have unearthed deeper findings and more potential for future research.

I have been moved by my clients willingness to help me in my research. And by the quality of their answers during the semi-structured interview process. This produced deeper findings than expected, beyond the transactional and into the transformational learning space. It also suggests that my work with them was effective, achieved self coaching to some degree and that my methodology for investigating self coaching was suitable. Although not my research question, this study serves, in my view, to support the importance of trust and rapport between client and coach, in order for significant coaching work, outcomes and learning to happen.

### **Conclusion and suggested ideas for future research:**

My research sought to explore and understand self coaching and its potential impact, from an individual client perspective. This study found a greater richness of data than originally expected. As a result, it includes reflections on the impact of self coaching on individual executive leaders, their teams and organisations, their family lives and potentially wider society and the next generation of employees and parents. In addition, there are suggestions for coaches, coach trainers and supervisors, and buyers of coaching. Specifically, this study makes a start at identifying powerful coaching questions and behaviours, which result in individuals developing their capacity to self coach.

My findings suggest some improvements to the methodology. They also suggest some areas of impact which a future piece of large scale research might explore further. My research has looked at self coaching from a client's perspective. This study did not cross reference with teams, organisations or family members to see if *claimed outcomes* from participants, are actually true from other perspectives. So this would need testing in future research.

Some varied and insightful definitions of self coaching can be added to my initial attempt to define self coaching in a business or broader context. Some of the reported impacts of self coaching on the individual, their team, organisation and home life suggest valuable insights for leaders and their companies. Especially companies wanting to devise the right kind of coaching or development interventions for their leaders. As well as clocking the return on investment for those financing such learning.

It should be noted that with a small yet diverse sample, these findings offer ideas, responses and provocation for future debate, rather than definitive conclusions. They offer viewpoints from different industry sectors, at a highly testing time for many leaders.

During the research I have attempted to reflect on what I could have done better, in terms of improving my methodology, any worker researcher bias, and my ability to better interpret the data I have gathered. This includes becoming more conscious of what I leave out, or deselect in terms of spotting useful themes emerging from my research. One example was noticing that I had avoided the negative. I have reflected on what might be behind this and its implications for the validity of my research.

I summarise some of the key outcomes leaders reported as resulting from self coaching, together with a summary of suggestions for future research projects:

**Some of the key outcomes leaders reported as resulting from self coaching:**

- 'You can't afford to *not* self coach'
- A more confident leader
- More insightful as a leader
- Better at making tough decision
- A more challenging leader
- Increased multiple perspectives thinking
- Generate more ideas and choice of solutions
- More focussed team priorities
- More empowered teams
- More productive teams
- Raises the bar for self, others in the organisation, and thus the organisation
- Self coaching in a crisis is even more essential as *new original thinking* capability is needed as current leadership or historical leadership methods fail
- Increased harmony and less frustration in home life
- Better relationships with partner and children
- More active listening and attention to presence with partner and children interactions
- More authenticity as a parent
- 'I'm a more honest person with myself'

**Negative findings** include self coaching as a destructive force, resulting in a hypercritical leader who feels stressed to the point of inaction and avoidance under internal or external environmental pressures. This may help organisations become more conscious of their 'coaching offer' to employees, by responding in different ways to different employees, or targeting coaching at the most stressful times or with the most stressed employees or parts of the business. And thus know how to use coaching budgets more effectively.

### Suggested ideas for future research:

- A larger study of self coaching using the improved interview questionnaire (Please see appendix)
- When does self coaching start to occur?
- How much coaching is needed to develop self coaching capability?
- What else can self coaching achieve?
- How else could self coaching be destructive rather than constructive?
- How sustained is self coaching?
- What helps or hinders sustained self coaching?
- What other impacts of self coaching are there in home life?
- How do home life impacts integrate and re-impact for the leader back at the office?
- How could self coaching at work impact positively or negatively in wider society/community?
- The potential impact of self coaching parents on the next generation of leaders?
- Self coaching in a cross-cultural and global context?
- A comparative study of men and women and self coaching
- Finding out more about the impact or irrelevance of the quality of the client-coach relationship?
- Finding out more about the impact of the quality of coaching, on self coaching as an outcome?  
And on the quality of that self coaching?
- How would you know if someone is self coaching?
- How would *they* know they were self coaching?

To conclude, I draw on the concept of Johari's Window: I have consciously endeavoured as a worker researcher, to explore and ask questions to unlock knowledge and learning around some of the known-knowns and known-unknowns for *me*, in relation to self coaching. I have attempted to explore and share insights about some of the known-knowns and known-unknowns for *others*, in relation to self coaching. But like all blind spots, they are blind. Therefore, it may be for outsiders to help me become informed as to what others know about self coaching that I don't know I know, or don't know I don't know. And for multiple stakeholders e.g. me, coaches, organisations, clients, academic tutors etc., to seek to uncover the unknown-unknowns in the field of self coaching as it relates to the coaching, learning and business world.

Finally, I would like to thank my research participants, peer thinkers, tutors and my clients for their contributions and help in stretching my learning. I have been moved by the responses of my sample group. I hope my attempts to disseminate my findings will contribute to the improvement and

professionalism of the coaching industry, leadership development in organisations and in the community and to my own ongoing learning, reflection and professional practise. ENDS.