

# A new model of sustainable change in executive coaching: coachees' attitudes, required resources and routinisation

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## Abstract

The existing literature lacks theoretical and empirical research when exploring the phenomenon of sustainable change as a result of executive coaching. Despite the rapid growth of executive coaching, there is a disconnection between practice and academic research in assessing sustainable change. This means that reflective practitioners face critical challenges in facilitating sustainable change in their clients, because there is no blueprint for how to implement it. To address these challenges, I present my recent postgraduate investigation undertaken at Oxford Brookes University, which introduces a three-category theoretical model that fills the gap in the current research and offers a practical implementation of sustainable change.

**Key words:** Attitudes, executive coaching, sustainable change, resources, routinisation

## Introduction

Coaching is generally recognised as an important, effective and useful intervention. Bachkirova, Cox and Clutterbuck (2010:1) propose that coaching could be seen as

*a human development process that involves structured, focused interaction and the use of appropriate strategies, tools and techniques to promote desirable and sustainable change for the benefit of the client and potentially for other stakeholders.*

Likewise, one of the unwritten goals of coaching is 'to ensure enduring learning and development for the client that can be sustained long beyond the end of the coaching intervention' (Cox, 2013: 138).

Executive coaches are used to help executives through a wide range of issues (De-Valle, 2005). Published empirical studies suggest that executive coaching contributes towards the following changes: improved goal setting and self-regard (Evers, Brouwers & Tomic, 2006); the development of behaviours which are the focus of the specific intervention (Orenstein, 2006); leader development, flexibility, reduced stress levels, increased in satisfaction (Jones & Spooner, 2006); leadership behaviours, such as charisma and inspiration (Kampa-Kokesch, 2002); learning, behaviour change and growth for the economic benefit of the organisation (Sherman & Freas, 2004); skills transfer and effective coaching behaviours (Turner, 2004); relationship, problem solving and motivation (Wang & Wentling, 2001); performance (Smither, London, Flautt, Vargas & Kucine, 2003); self-efficacy related to managerial skills (Baron & Morin, 2009) and stress reduction (Gyllensten & Palmer, 2007). All these changes have the potential to be effective in the short term, but they may be equally susceptible to lapses, and therefore would not be successful in the long term. However, evidence for the overall effectiveness of executive coaching in the workplace (MacKie, 2013) and empirical research on the

processes underlying effective coaching are surprisingly limited (Feldman & Lankau, 2005). Seven empirical studies report on the effectiveness of executive coaching impact up to 2000 (Foster & Lendl, 1996; Olivero *et al.*, 1997; Judge & Cowell, 1997; Gegner, 1997; Hall *et al.*, 1999; Laske, 1999a; Garman *et al.*, 2000). Since then a limited number of reviews of the effectiveness of executive coaching have been conducted (Wasylyshyn, 2003; De Meuse *et al.*, 2009; Grant *et al.*, 2009; MacKie, 2013; Theeboom *et al.*, 2014).

Even though these studies are focused on the effectiveness of executive coaching, there is a lack of empirical studies focusing on sustainable change. From the above, only two studies: Gegner (1997) and Wasylyshyn (2003), examine sustainable change. Gegner's Master's thesis (1997), a cross-sectional field study with 48 executives using quantitative and qualitative methods, suggested that coaching contributes to sustained behavioural change, as well as to learning and creating a positive effect on executives' personal lives, etc. To determine whether coaching contributed to sustained behavioural change Gegner (1997) combined the percentages of 'highly effective coaching' and 'somehow effective coaching' statements, which were considered as coaching outcomes. Percentages ranged from 71% to 94%, and therefore suggested that coaching contributes to sustained change behaviour. In Wasylyshyn's outcome study (2003) of measured sustainability, with results based solely on 87 executives whom she coached between 1985 and 2001, the achieved changes were specified as: personal behaviour change (56%), enhanced leader effectiveness (43%), and fostering stronger relationships (40%).

To my knowledge, only Lawler's (2011) doctoral research, a comparative case study with grounded theory approach, explores the phenomenon of sustainable change in executive coaching over time. The study's aim was to examine how change, particularly sustained behavioural change, is made and sustained for at least a six-month period after the end of the coaching engagement, and to gain better insights into the conditions, methods and processes of coaching. A model was created to address how coaches help clients make sustainable change, which included the clients' readiness to change, the external expertise of the coach, the 'sacred rapport' of the coach and the client that allows change to happen, client self-awareness, repeated practice and reinforcement to create new habits and measured progress (Lawler, 2011:4).

This overview establishes the need for a study exploring sustainable change through coaching practices. The main objectives of the study were to: a) investigate seven coachees' experiences of sustainable change (over one year after completion of executive coaching) and five coaches' experiences in facilitating those sustainable changes; b) propose the own definitions of executive coaching and sustainable change, continuing the exploration of its values; and c) construct a model of sustainable change from the empirical data, taking the whole concept of sustainable change further.

## **Literature: definitions of executive coaching and sustainable change**

### ***Executive coaching***

Disagreement over the definitions of executive coaching are common throughout the literature and vary based upon: a) perspective, intended recipients, objectives and setting (Carey *et al.*, 2011); b) existing literature reviews (Kilburg, 1996; 2000); and c) are grouped around learning and development linked to performance improvement or coaching to facilitate personal growth and change (Bluckert, 2005). Executive coaching encompasses a vast range of services and specialties: coaching for enhanced strategic planning; presentation skills; anger and stress management; executive management, team building and leadership development (Fillery-Travis & Lane, 2006). Similar themes are achieved in Greene and Grant's (2003) assertion that the coaching process should be a systematic, goal-oriented process to facilitate sustainable change. Indeed, the promise of coaching is not so much that it provides instant solutions, but rather that it promotes learning and change over time (De Haan *et al.*, 2011). A subsequent distinction in the definition of executive coaching, was made by Zeus and Skiffington (2002:35) who argued that it is '*a collaborative, individualised relationship between an executive and*

a coach, the aims of which are to bring about sustained behavioural change and to transform the quality of the executive's working and personal life'. My preference for this study was to offer my own definition of executive coaching, building upon previous authors' work and incorporating sustainable change, to continue the exploration of its value:

*Executive coaching is a confidential partnership between an executive (or a manager) and a professional coach to facilitate learning; leader and leadership development; and a sustainable desired change persistent for at least one year after completion of a formally defined coaching agreement, for the permanent benefits to both individual and organisation. In this respect sustainable change can be manifested by self-awareness, behaviour, attitude, career satisfaction, job commitment, performance and skills improvement, goal(s) completion, perspective, personal and professional satisfaction.*

### **Sustainable Change**

The concept of sustainable change is increasingly important in the development debate, because it requires thinking beyond short-term goals. Lawler (2011) defines sustainable behavioural change as follows: a) the executive displays a change in the targeted behaviour(s) for at least a six-month timeframe from the end of the engagement; b) this change is consistent even under pressure or stress; c) the new behaviour is sustained by the internalisation of deeper psychological insights about undesirable behaviour(s) and targeted coaching that converts the insights into pragmatic action steps. My working definition of sustainable change is: *sustainable change matters, maintains, consistent under pressure and in stressful situations, can have profound impact, lasts over time (minimum of one year), and retains once coaching support ceases.*

Laske (2004:43) argues that 'some changes and developments may take several months, or even years to become apparent, in part due to the fact that such changes are rarely predictable and seldom linear in nature'. It is only recently that researchers (Lawler, 2011; Koroleva, 2015) have begun to attempt to identify the kinds of mechanisms that facilitate long-term change in coaching. Of specific relevance to the study is the work of Grant (2001), who investigated the impact of different types of coaching (cognitive and behavioural) on trainee accountants' performance at a one-year follow-up. Grant's findings indicated that, in order for coaching to be effective in facilitating long-term change, the coaching must impact on the coachee's personal sense of self. I developed further the concept of sustainable change, borrowing the concept of sustainability from health promotion programmes, specifically around behavioural changes. Firstly, sustainability maintains programmes' effects over a long period (Puska *et al.*, 1996). Secondly, sustainable change will endure (Altman *et al.*, 1991), and they must survive over an extended period of time for such changes to occur (Steckler & Goodman, 1989). Thirdly, there is often a latent period of years between when programmes begin and when their effects are felt (Roussos & Fawcett, 2000). Fourthly, organisations lose what they have invested when programmes are not sustainable, and they will then resist further investment as a consequence (Shediac-Rizkallah & Bone, 1998).

Based on the identified knowledge gap in the literature review, the following research question was derived: How can executive coaching achieve sustainable change? This question pointed to the need for retrospective study to analyse sustainable changes in executive coaching over long periods of time after completion of the coaching interventions. It also called for constructing a new model of sustainable change in executive coaching.

### **Methodology**

The constructivist approach to grounded theory was used as the research approach for informing the collection and analysis of research data. The rationale for using grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014) included: it suits exploring a topic of sustainable change that has not been deeply investigated; it suits

data in a raw state; it focuses on the participant's point of view; and it constructs conceptual elements based on the empirical data.

The empirical data for this research was gathered in twelve semi-structured interviews (each between 60-90 minutes). They were conducted in English using Skype and phone calls with seven coachees (five British citizens, one American and one Tajik, living and working in the UK, US and Tajikistan), who had sustained changes from *one to five years* after the completion of executive coaching engagements, and their five experienced executive coaches (four British citizens living in the UK and working in the UK and internationally; and one American citizen, living in the US and working in the US and internationally). The twelve participants (given pseudonyms for this study) were recruited from the International Coach federation (ICF), the Association of Coaching in the UK (AC), through personal connections and recommendations. The average age for coachees was 43 years (range 40-52 years) and coaches – 52 years (range 41-61 years) with average ten years of practice in executive coaching and leadership development. In the interviews open questions were used that focused on sustainable changes, i.e. perceptions, significant factors, etc., which are similar to Lawer's (2011) questions and structured in a way to reflect aspects of the literature review.

### **Data analysis and saturation**

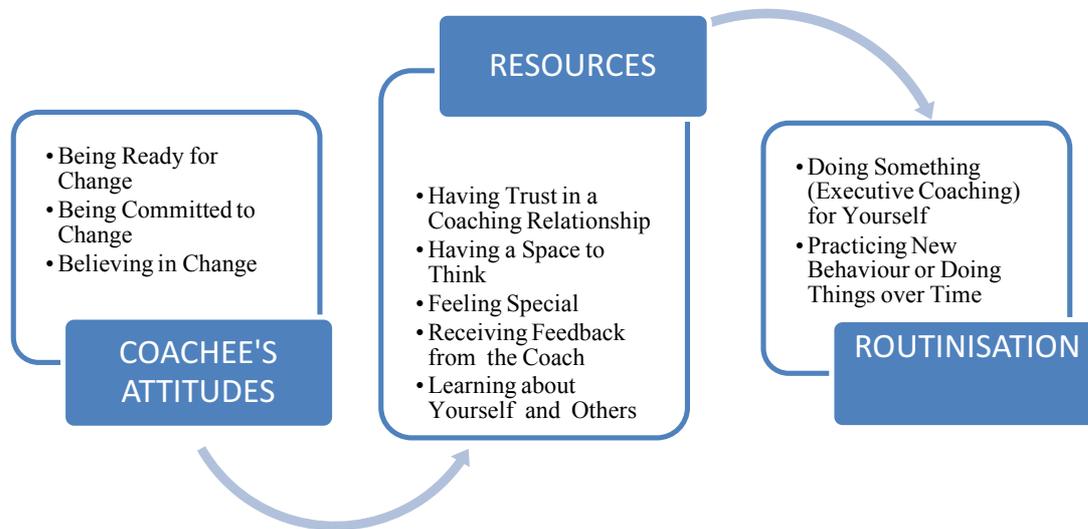
The model and categories were constructed by 'defining and conceptualising relationships between participants' experiences' (Charmaz, 2014:245). The first stage involved the collection and storage of audio data and interview transcriptions. I was surprised to learn a great deal from the first three interviews with coachees. I analysed the first three interview transcripts, then added two more, continually adding two and three transcripts until I had completed all twelve interviews. Approximately ninety five open codes were identified with the first seven transcripts. An additional ten open codes were identified in the next three transcripts. The full thematic discovery completed within the last two interviews with coachees and coaches, where I asked open questions about developed categories, such trust, relationship, space to think, etc. In addition to coding, I captured the development of categories in memos throughout the entire research process, writing about codes and their relationships with other codes.

Glaser and Strauss (1967:65) first define theoretical saturation as the point at which 'no additional data are being found whereby the (researcher) can develop properties of the category'. Charmaz (2014:345) defines theoretical saturation as the point at which 'gathering more data about a theoretical category reveals no new properties not yields any further theoretical insights about the emerging grounded theory'. Theoretical saturation occurs when all of the main variations of the phenomenon have been identified and incorporated into the merging theory (Guest *et al.*, 2006). Saturation is used as a marker for sampling adequacy (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). Saturation in the research was reached because of the similarities, which appeared within 12 interviews, which resulted in ten axial codes (Figure 1). By analysing the empirical data in the participants' recorded interviews, transcriptions and written memos, I constructed ten axial codes into three conceptual categories of attitudes, resources and routinisation, and finally developed the model of sustainable change in executive coaching.

### **Findings: Model of sustainable change in executive coaching**

The model of sustainable change in executive coaching includes three conceptual categories: the coachee's attitudes, which is the first essential component *for success of sustainable change*; resources, which are crucial for *process of sustainable change*, and routinisation, which play a key role *in embedding sustainable change*. central to the model are definitions and the analysis of three constructed categories and its key components in relation to sustainable change. All key elements of the three categories reflect the language of participants, directly linking the developed elements to their achieved, practical experience of sustainable change (coachees' perspectives) and to facilitation of

sustainable change (coaches' perspectives). By doing this I compared and challenged the findings with the existing views in the literature.



**Figure 1: A visual representation of Model of sustainable change in executive coaching**

***The coachee's attitudes that contribute to sustainable change***

From the empirical data, 'Attitudes' were defined as the way the coachee thinks and feels about change, especially if this shows in the way they behave. These are three aspects to the attitudes category: 'Being Ready for Change', 'Being Committed to Change', and 'Believing in Change'. My defined category echoes the 'client factor' factor in McKenna and Davis's research (2009). Working on the assumption that psychotherapy and executive coaching are sufficiently similar to justify generalisation from one domain to the other, they propose four primary 'active ingredients' that account for most of the variance in psychotherapy outcomes, that can be used to improve executive coaching practices, such as: Client/extra therapeutic factors (40%); The relationship or alliance (30%); Placebo or hope (15%); and Theory and technique (15%).

This category has resonance with the established literature review, specifically with coachee's characteristics that contribute to coaching success in executive coaching, such as motivation, engagement and commitment (Bozer *et al.*, 2013; Giglio *et al.*, 1998; Kappenberg, 2008; Laske, 1999; Saporito, 1996; Sherman & Freas, 2004). While Laske (1999) suggested that coachee characteristics such as personality factors and motivation be used as predictors of coaching effectiveness; Kappenberg (2008) identified the role of coachee engagement in the success of coaching. Additionally, Bozer *et al.*'s study (2013) with 68 executive coaches about important predictors of coaching effectiveness provides greater insights about the coachee characteristics, such as of learning goal orientation, pre-training motivation, feedback receptivity, and development of self-efficacy.

'Being Ready for Change' is the first of three coachee's attitudes that links to sustainable change. I define 'Being Ready for Change' as the ability to respond to change in ways that create advantage and minimise risk, being open to opportunities, being aware of need for change, being aware of issues, expectations, perceptions and being able to sustain performance. To understand coachee's attitudes is to understand the challenges executive coaches might face in facilitating sustainable change. Through their responses coachees reveal their readiness for change.' 'I knew I wanted to change. I was ready for change.' (Sophia). 'I just think that the fact that I was ready to make changes in my life. I knew something had to change' (Tanice). My findings are consistent with

Laske's (1999a) conclusion in his dissertation that executive coaching is only of value if the executive is ready for development. In the findings, two important points emerge. First, this attitude highlights those aspects of sustainable development that are particularly difficult to achieve in practice. Second, the findings are consistent with the literature, Prochaska *et al.* (1992), which emphasises the need to assess the client's readiness for change.

**'Being Committed to Change'** relates to the coachee's ability to understand the need for change; to be dedicated or loyal to coaching sessions, its tasks, to clear outcomes; and to oblige to actions. The examples provided below offer coachee statements about being committed to a task, to a decision, to an outcome; and how this plays an important role in their desire to succeed. *'You know you have a session, and you have a task, and you have to compete it, and do it. I am still; five years later I still try to devise my life this way.'* (Irina). *'I think if you want to commit to something, you need to be very clear what your outcomes are.'* (Lucy). *'I think you have to make a decision first what you actually want to achieve change, something sustainable.'* (Nora)

Nora's observation resonates with Lawler's (201:14) argument that sustainable change seems to require that the client 'recognises the deep motivators that underlie their behaviour'. Coaches demonstrated views on the 'Being Committed' attitude, such as 'the commitment from sides' (George), and 'they have to be completely committed to it, otherwise there is no point' (Hilary). The debate by numerous scholars in executive coaching (e.g., Bush, 2005; Giglio *et al.*, 1998; Saporito, 1996; Sherman & Freas, 2004) on the need for commitment to achieve success in coaching interventions, clearly reflects the findings.

**'Believing in Change'** is the second attitude, which influences, leverages and links to success in sustainable change. Unlike change denial, 'Believing in Change' is a necessary attitude of engagement in change for personal and/or professional gain and fulfilment. Some participants explained this as: *'They both (coachee and coach) have to believe that the coaching relationship will help to make a change to be sustainable.'* (Nora). *'I don't think the coachee will achieve sustainable change unless they believe and want to change.'* (Hilary). There is no research literature in the executive field about this attitude. Nevertheless, an attitude of 'Believing' correlates to the 'Placebo or hope' factor in the McKenna and Davis's research (2009). I consider that this attitude, might be a challenge in a corporate sphere, as it requires looking at the coachee differently, not just in terms of commitment and motivation, but also their belief system; in other words, an alignment of head and heart (Williams *et al.*, 2002). I argue that the key attitudes within executive coaching assignments demonstrate that 'Being Ready for Change', 'Being Committed to Change' and 'Believing in Change' are not synonymous attitudes. They cannot be easily achieved in the coaching assignment, thus there is clearly a need for a stronger assessment stage prior to commencing executive coaching.

### **Required resources to achieve sustainable change**

This section proposes the definition of a second conceptual category, Resources, and its five key components: 'Having Trust in a Coaching Relationship', 'Having a Space to Think'; 'Feeling Special', 'Receiving Feedback from the Coach', and 'Learning about Yourself and Others'. This is a rich category, understandable in terms of five descriptive categories underlying processes pertaining to the executive coaching experience. In the concept of this study, the direct and indirect effects of these resources on sustainable change suggest important coaching implications in the way executive coaches facilitate changes, and coachees' capitalise their resources, so as to achieve permanent changes. In relation to these study findings, I identify 'Learning about Yourself and Others' as resource (as a result of a coaching relationship) rather than learning as a coachee's ability to learn or Attitude.

**'Having Trust in a Coaching Relationship'** is the first characteristic in the category 'Resources'. This reflects that relationships with others are vital parts of our environment and our ability to function within them. The review of the literature suggests there has been no debate about coaching relationships in relation to long-term outcomes, such as sustainable change. The research participants

have the following to say about coaching relationships, interventions and their effect on their work and lives: *'I think having somebody listen to and play back what they were hearing, because we talk about things superficially sometimes, and don't really understand what is beneath them. He (my coach) gave me confidence.'* (Henry). *'My views of coaching for years were sceptical, about coaching and coaches. So, I wasn't keen on coaching, this is the truth... If you get a proper coach in your life, it is life changing.'* (Tanice). *'Coach X is perfect for me, his style, his manner and sort of chemistry. I think it is very important and worked very well.'* (Sophia). *'You actually got a chance to work with your coach, and do it, and reflect on what you have done, and talk about it with your coach, that is the big thing.'* (Lucy).

Henry, Tanice, Sophia and Lucy's comments align with Smither and Reilly's study (2008:8), who note the development of a productive relationship 'sets the stage for success', and Lawler's study (2011:13), which argues that 'in order for coaching to be successful, trust must be developed between the coach and the client.' A review of the literature, after these categories emerged, indicates that, indeed, executive coaching is a relationship based intervention, which focuses on the enhancement of personal performance at work and provides change in the coachee (Passmore, 2007); and that an effective coaching working relationship is central to the work within coaching (Jones & Spooner, 2006). Vaartjes (2005) stresses recognition of the coaching relationship being at the heart of the creation of outcomes in coaching. This valuable category supports the results of Luebbe's (2005) qualitative study of 13 participants regarding their experience of executive coaching, indicating that trust is the highest rated attribute, confirming that the relationship is a key component in bringing about the change. Further to this, the capacity of the coach to establish and maintain a trusting relationship with their client was identified as being of primary importance in effective executive coaching since it is through this relationship that the coach can challenge their client's comfort zones, and thereby support behavioural change, and ultimately, transformation (Paige, 2002).

Additional to the empirical literature, the coaching relationships in the study were described by the research participants as being challenging, supportive, offering practical tools, empathetic (listening and understanding) in their nature. Flaherty (1999) points out that the coaching relationship forms the background for all coaching efforts and should be principles-based: offered in a mutually satisfying environment of respect, trust and freedom of expression.

**'Having a Space to Think'** is the second characteristic in the category 'Resources'. It is defined and can be understood in the following way where: coachees have space to think, to reflect, to talk and to be challenged; be vulnerable, honest; and the outcomes of this become a process in creating sustaining changes. The following quotations are illustrative of this element: *'It puts you in front of difficult questions you need to answer.'* (Victoria). *'He (coach) is sort of own the space you are in, and he is calm and very direct.'* (Sophia). *'It pushes you to be honest at least with yourself, which is a starting point to any change.'* (Irina). *'Permission to, having a save place, and permission to be wrong... You need to think with the coach.'* (Lucy)

Having attained senior positions, 'the individuals and their organisations are vulnerable to catastrophic failure from dysfunctional behaviours, which may include inappropriate risk taking or a failure to understand and work with the more subtle human emotions of key stakeholders or partners' (Passmore & Gibbes, 2007:116). However, coaches' responses describe an alternative perspective, such as providing a safe space and having responsibility for that. The following quotations explain this: *'The client knows they have a safe space and they are ready to start and committing to the change they wants to see. They know that you have the best interest in your heart.'* (George). *'So the coach has responsibility to provide an environment in which... the challenge to enable that to happen.'* (Hilary)

**'Feeling Special'** is the fourth component of Resources that links to sustainable change. I have chosen to include it in the Resource category, rather than the category 'Attitude' for two reasons.

Firstly, it was expressed as a result of working with a coach, in a coaching assignment rather than as a feature of coachees' attitudes. Secondly, this is a component that has a strong connection to the previous component of 'Having a Space to Think', where the coachee can be vulnerable, and the coaching is seen as an opportunity they get to talk about themselves. Hall *et al.* (1999:41) state that it is easy to use the coaching session as 'a safe place to discuss issues when there are so few people one can trust at the executive level in the workplace.' It is also hard to be vulnerable and to just 'think out loud' when others are waiting for your words of wisdom they can react. Indeed, to obtain positive results, it is essential that the coach controls the emotional component (Schlegelmich & Fresco, 2005). Victoria expresses this as:

*They (both coaches) made me feel special... I had very little time with my supervisors... They (coaches) acknowledged my progress and my achievements, and they helped me to see this progress and my achievements.*

Mila offers a coach's perspective: 'It will be a successful person to allow him to be vulnerable, but understanding that he is doing it in order to be better and more successful.' Mila's statement resonates with Bluckert's (2005) claims that for clients, trust enables them to feel safe enough to say whatever they need to or to reflect on mistakes and deficiencies - to be fully honest with themselves.

**'Receiving Feedback from the Coach'** on new developments, behaviours and performance is the fourth element of Resources. This component is viewed as both a necessity and an opportunity for both leader and leadership development. Victoria made the following statement: 'People could not give feedback... Now I would like someone to tell me feedback on me, and coaches were giving feedback on me.' Feedback receptivity is a major component of career success and a central component in the coaching process (Ashford, 1986; Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). London and Smither (2002) determined an individual's overall receptivity to feedback and the extent to which the individual welcomes guidance and coaching. They suggested that individuals with a high level of learning goal orientation seek knowledge and skills, and view feedback as an opportunity for personal improvement. This resonates with (coach) Hannah's experience:

*And it's been a couple of times on some short coaching contacts I had, when people asked me feedback at the end, and the occasions I always talk about things that are great, and I would talk about some things that not so great, and all the time when I have been constructive with them, the responses always been: That is the best feedback I ever had.*

**'Learning about Yourself and Others'** is the fifth emergent theme in the analysis. The promise of coaching is not so much to provide instant solutions, but rather to promote learning and change over time (De Haan *et al.*, 2011). In reflecting on their experiences, most participants indicated they learnt about themselves and others. Victoria emphasises: 'I learnt how to apply learning in complex and challenging situations... The knowledge that I had experienced it, I have done it, and I can do it again... I know I can apply some of these learning, tools, to my next transition.' Other participants provided more explicit information about learning. 'I learnt how not to take things personally at work.' (Irina). 'I have learnt a lot about myself... the way of being. I am open now.' (Henry). 'I have a much better sense of myself... I got a good sense of my strengths and weaknesses.' (Tanice)

Caplan (2003) points out that executive coaching can bring out the best in people, and it is a highly personalised learning process that is tailored to the learner's knowledge base, learning style and pace. It raises self-awareness, uncovers blind spots and enables the executive to accomplish more than otherwise he or she would. This clearly supports the assumptions of Bright and Crockett's study (2012), which suggested that coaching, even as a one-time experience is an effective learning transfer process.

## **Routinisation to embed sustainable change**

Attitudes and Resources are significant for sustainable change, but implementing changes is what makes change sustainable. I define Routinisation as a category that forms the foundation for a longer, continuing, maintained at the same level (without problem) performance or behaviour into regular work life over a period of time. The category includes two components: 'Doing Something (Executive Coaching) for Yourself', and 'Practicing New Behaviour or Doing Things over Time'. As Victoria expresses: *'We can engineer ourselves by practicing certain behaviour.'*

**'Doing Something (Executive Coaching) for Yourself'** is the first component of Routinisation. In the study, the difference in this component lies in the funding source: for a self-funded coachee (Irina) it is a feeling of fulfilment; in the case of an organisational investment, for a coachee (Lucy) it is as feeling of endorsement. The following quotations emphasise this conceptual component: *'You realise that you are doing it for yourself. I felt so fulfilled inside of me; I felt for the first time in my life, I did something for myself.'* (Irina). *'Just even given permission to have executive coaching, which doesn't come cheap... I think does have an impact on me, and how I have been valued by my bosses, and by the organisation I work for.'* (Lucy)

**'Practicing New Behaviour or Doing Things over Time'** is the second component of Routinisation. The participants mention ideas such as an 'ongoing process', a new way of doing things, repetition and a firm foundation for the future. Practicing new behaviour or doing things over time necessarily for sustained change. This component is consistent with research by Finn (2007), who points out that coaching focuses on encouraging the coachee to experiment with new behaviour options. The following quotations express these arguments concisely: *'I believe that changing the habit means consistent practicing, and find situations consciously when you can practice. Practice in a safe environment as much as you can. Practicing and preparing for everything.'* (Nora). According to Tanice, Irina and Henry's comments below, their actions were based on particular situations and indicated repeated practice. *'To repeat what I have learnt, to embed that into my daily life... That was creating permanent change, and how I operate my life... and I know a new way of doing it.'* (Tanice). *'But the most difficult time do it for the first time, and I have done it during the coaching.'* (Irina). *'Coaching has not been for me one off; it is an ongoing process... And take real actions to deliver sustainable change.'* (Henry). It is hard to imagine coaching without change and without practicing and experimenting with the desired outcomes and results. During this process of repetition, change is incremental, and the impact of change can be profound. As Lucy observed: *'We can practice certain behaviour, start with those not in our nature, but they (coaches) help us overcome those difficult challenges. You have to practice.'*

Another focus of the concepts of practicing is from the coaches' perspectives, where the focus is on the work between sessions, on more internal work and meaning making. The following quotations highlight these expressions: *'I would expect them to follow through with agreed actions, ways of being beyond the coaching sessions. It is not what happens in the session, it's also the evidence what really happens outside coaching sessions.'* (Hannah). Or as Hilary suggested:

*What needs to happen in between sessions is the key thing. If during the session the thinking somehow landed with them and had a meaning for them that mean the coachee will then act with that belief coming from insight. So I think that if they internalise those beliefs, that has an immediate impact on how they see things and that what really should be changing is between sessions.*

## Conclusions

Linking coaching practice with theoretical work is critical given that an increasing number of organisations incorporate coaching as a major component of strategy and executive coaching (Bozer *et al.*, 2013). My retrospective study of changes, which have been sustained for one to five years after the completion of coaching assignments, has taken a step forward in answering the main research

question: How can executive coaching achieve sustainable change? The study also adds additional knowledge and so offers competitive advantage for coaches providing solutions in facilitating sustainable change. It also offers a foundation for future research.

It is my hope that the model of sustainable change in executive coaching presented in this article can be applied to promote and enhance executive coaching practices to facilitate and support sustainable change. The Model suggests that a clear articulation of the coachee's attitudes, required resources for sustainable change and routinisation must be discussed, provided and acknowledged. For example, the category of Attitudes implies the need for a stronger assessment stage prior to commencing executive coaching, and with the categories of Resources and Routinisation there is a need for a clear contract for all stakeholders involved, i.e. coachees, coaches and sponsors of coaching interventions. Executive coaching must establish a connection between coaching interventions and sustainable change. Ideally, in the absence of sustainable change, all stakeholders should re-examine their coaching agreements and practices, as George suggests:

*For me, the purpose of coaching is to bring lasting change that the client wants to see...if this is not sustainable then I would question what the change was based on and whether the coach had contracted thoroughly...To change be sustainable, people have to do things differently, and put energy, emotion and effort.'*

This article has sufficient foundation for further enquiry, for example by exploring whether the model of sustainable change in executive coaching useful for interventions and further academic research. However, this research study is limited in a number ways. Firstly, the majority of the research participants, prior to their coaching interventions attended six to twelve months of leadership development programmes, which may have influenced their motivation for change. Secondly, the qualitative approach and the subjectivity of the data mean that both coachees and coaches may introduce some degree of bias. Thirdly, the evaluation of sustainable change was based on personal coachee's self-reporting (at an individual level) and feedback from their coach. Due to time restrictions, it was a deliberate decision when undertaking this postgraduate research not to specifically take into account the coaching process, and a third party assessment of achieved sustainable change. Therefore, in order to maintain the focus of this research it was decided not to include other stakeholders, such as HR representatives.

I would like to conclude with a final thought on the issue of a lack of research on sustainable change as a result of executive coaching which requires conjecture, generalisations and speculations about its potential outcomes for executives (manages) and their organisations. This creates a further question: Whose responsibility is it to ensure that sustainable change in executive coaching is at the forefront of organisational agenda?

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