

## **Applying the Lens of Social Movements to Coaching and Mentoring**

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### **Abstract**

The rise and development of coaching and mentoring in recent decades has led to a plethora of debates around their theoretical and disciplinary roots. Alongside these debates are deliberations about the role of coaching and mentoring in contemporary threats, such as the financial crisis, climate change and the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as wider societal issues of inequality and disadvantage, and empowerment and democratization. In this theoretical paper, I draw on theories and ideas from the field of social movements to explore coaching and mentoring, and their deployment in relation to these contemporary societal, economic and political threats. By exploring key conceptualizations and themes from social movement theory, as well as the classification of social movements, it is possible to reflect on the maturity of coaching and mentoring and its potential to deliver social change. Such insights offer exciting and thought-provoking insights for coaching and mentoring practitioners, commissioners, professional bodies, trainers and educators, mentees and coachees as well as social movements.

*Keywords: coaching, mentoring, social movement theory, social change, challenge, networks*

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### **Introduction**

In the last three decades coaching and mentoring have proliferated as widespread practices in a variety of settings, across all levels of educational provision, in healthcare and many workplaces, and in various community situations. Several authors have even talked about the seeming ubiquitous nature of coaching and mentoring (Koopman, Danskin, Ehgrehard & Groen, 2021; Bono, Purvanova, Towler & Peterson, 2009). Most recently there have changes in the way coaching and mentoring have been called upon, and deployed, to remedy the excesses of corporate behaviours, tackle social inequalities and disadvantage, address climate change and support

empowerment in adverse political regimes (Shoukry & Cox, 2018; Einzig, 2017; Shoukry, 2017; Du Toit & Sim, 2010; Blakey, Day & Hurley, 2009). As such coaching and mentoring are no longer solely described and understood as developmental and learning relationships at the interpersonal level, or even a performance, learning and development intervention at the organizational level, but also as social processes (Shoukry & Cox, 2018; Shoukry, 2017), which may ‘actively contribute to some broad societal concerns’ (Bachkirova, Spence and Drake, 2017 p.7). As such we can argue that there is a ‘social turn’ in coaching, and that this offers an opportunity to introduce new theoretical lenses to our understanding and evaluation of coaching and mentoring and their roles as routes to social as well as personal change and organizational change. By embracing social movement theory as a theoretical lens, this article addresses claims that coaching and mentoring are under-researched and under-theorized (Shoukry, 2017) and provokes broader discussion of coaching and mentoring in light of arguments that they are capable to enabling social change.

In this conceptual article (Jaakkola, 2020) I accept the proposition set out by Western (2012) to ‘theorize coaching by reviewing its wider social impact outside of formal organizations and institutional bodies.’ (p.254). Since my first reading of Western’s (2012) work, I was intrigued by his argument of the potential value of social movement theories to enrich current explanations of coaching and mentoring. The social movement field is primarily concerned with ‘how perceived threats and opportunities can catalyze the mobilization of new actors who, in turn, have the capacity to destabilize established institutions and fields in society.’ (Fligstein & McAdam, 2015 p. 5). Other authors argue that social movements sit at the heart of social change (Castells, 2012). The issues outlined above offer an interesting departure point from preliminary conceptions of coaching and mentoring as primarily dyadic learning and helping relationships, to have much wider social and economic affect, which render Western’s (2012) case for engagement with social movement theories, even more appealing. Indeed as we can recognize from Grant (2017) the evolution of coaching is evident in specific settings, such as the workplace, where there have been shifts in the focus of coaching over time, or across ‘generations’. There appears then to be a real opportunity to use alternative sociological and political concepts and theories, based on insights from the social movement field, to understand some of the developments in coaching and mentoring.

In this paper, I adhere to Western’s (2012) maxim that distinguishing coaching and mentoring is an intractable endeavor due to the interchangeable ways they are used in different contexts. As others have highlighted pursuing

new knowledge and understanding based on coaching and mentoring being related approaches with similar practices, appears a more useful step (Koopman et al., 2021; Schermuly & Graßmann, 2019). I therefore mainly use the term coaching unless drawing explicitly on mentoring research, and offer comparisons between the positioning of the two to help understand their shared ethos but differences in how research hinterlands have been explored.

The ‘social’ turn in mentoring appeared much earlier than in coaching. For many years now mentoring interventions and relationships, whether formal or informal, have been informed by theories associated with the ‘social’. From socialization, to social capital to social exchange theory and social networks, the social dimensions of mentoring relationships, schemes and interventions have been widely acknowledged across empirical and conceptual studies (Hezlett & Gibson, 2016; Majiros, 2013; Chaudhuri & Ghosh, 2011; Feeney & Boseman, 2008). The wider use of mentoring in educational, welfare and institutional settings explains the adoption of ‘social’ concepts and theoretical frameworks. However, even mentoring has seen a shift in focus from supporting the socialization of individuals in key life stages, occupations or organizations, to broader evidence of how mentoring addresses social inequalities and disadvantage (Gannon & Washington, 2019).

The ‘social’ turn in coaching has been a more recent feature of; its rise across various sectors, recognition of the outcomes coaching can provide and a stronger authority voice articulated by professional associations, practitioners and client groups alike. The social (and moral) obligations of coaching have been particularly apparent in queries about the role of executive and leadership coaching in the financial crisis (Blakey, Day and Hurley, 2009; Du Toit, 2014; Einzig, 2017). Beyond these wider calls to arms we have seen a plethora of examples where coaches have come together, or been called upon, to address issues such as; environmental issues (for example, Climate Change Coaches, Climate Coaching Alliance) or unequal access to the labour market (Smart Works, Dress for Success) or healthcare issues (Macmillan Well-Being Coaching and Restore Recovery Coaching). During the early stages of Covid-19, we also saw a raft of groups of coaches offering access to their services to those struggling with the pandemic: specifically to NHS and other healthcare setting workers, and small and medium business leaders (Coaching through COVID, Coaching through Covid-19).

These examples identify recent grassroots collective actions by those in coaching to enact social support and social change. They concur with Shoukry’s (2017 p.176) framing of social change as ‘change that makes society

or workplaces more humanizing, in terms of fostering human rights, and thriving towards what would seem more just, ecologically sustainable, inclusive, empowering and peaceful.’ However, as Shoukry (2017) rightly laments ‘coaching for social change is under-researched and under-theorized.’ Arguably, this is primarily due to the focus on the micro-practices of coaching and fervent application of psychotherapeutic models (Western, 2012; 2017; Louis & Fatien Diochon, 2018). To understand the macro-social influences ‘on’ and ‘of’ coaching and mentoring, there is value in engaging with discourses as ways to reveal ‘how institutionalized patterns of knowledge and power are embedded in our social world and shape and limit both how we think and our social relations.’ (Western, 2017 p. 42). Most recently, this has meant that social movements have emerged as possible routes to navigating the abduction of welfare and wellbeing from being overtly psychological and personalized matters (Jonsen, Tatli, Özbilgin & Bell, 2013) to focus on wellbeing at work and across society (Özbilgin & Erbil, 2021). Understanding how coaching and mentoring may support the wider societal wellbeing agenda as part of social change will require the building of alliances and solidarity with other humanizing groups and their agendas (Özbilgin & Erbil, 2021).

This paper sets out to explore the value of social movement theories and key themes in portraying the changes in coaching and mentoring. It First, I begin by framing and defining social movements. This helps to identify three key themes, which cut across the social movement and coaching and mentoring literature. By examining the shared areas of; the centrality of change, the concept of challenging (or defending) existing institutions and practices, and the networked nature of both coaching and mentoring and new social movements (Western, 2012; 2017; Castells, 2012) it is possible to consider the value of further interdisciplinary conversations of how social movement informed research might shape coaching and mentoring. The conclusions allow me to reexamine the maturity of coaching and mentoring as enablers of social change, and their connections with social movement as fields of study and practice, which can enlighten practice and scholarship in these perplexing times.

### **Understanding Social Movement Theory**

Thinking about social movements emerged in the mid 1800s when seminal theorists such as Marx and Le Bon, from very different philosophical positions, highlighted collective behaviour conflicts and associated actions as part of wider social, economic and political changes (Markoff, 2017). In subsequent years interest in collective action grew around key periods where

people came together to demonstrate against, and for, government actions and social practices. In Europe, collective behavior coalesced around movements based on a variety of issues, leading to: the women's movement, the student movement, the environmental movement, the peace or anti-war movement and independence or post-colonial movements. The US and other parts of the world have witnessed their own movements, most notably, the Civil rights movement and anti-Vietnam war movement in the US, and more recently, the Arab Spring, Hong Kong Democracy and Human Rights movements, Thai anti-monarchy and pro-monarchy movements as well as various movements across Latin America and beyond. Despite Covid-19 and the restrictions of social distancing social movements have continued to materialize, reinforcing the claim by Meyer and Tarrow (1998) that we inhabit a 'movement society' or even a 'movement world'.

Similar to coaching and mentoring (Bachkirova, Drake & Spence, 2017), social movement scholarship can be considered a relatively young field of academic study, which has been informed by several disciplinary lenses (Rojas & King, 2019; Sen & Avci, 2016). Since the waves of protest, which began in the 1950s, research has taken place informed by a variety of disciplinary lenses with their different emphases on the economic, political, sociological, cultural and organizational dimensions (Rojas & King, 2019). Initially the rise and evolution of social movements was explained through deprivation theory, and later resource mobilization theory with a focus on the grievance or deprivation experienced and the necessary support and resources (money, knowledge, social status, support of the media) available to grow a social movement (Sen & Avci, 2016; van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2009). However, the primary criticisms of these theoretical developments were their materialistic focus and influence from economic thinking.

A different theoretical lens was applied through the development of political process theory of social movements where the strength of the State or the government in place, articulates the likely development of social movements (Sen & Avci, 2016; van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2009). Here the occurrence or absence of political opportunities and the associated political conditions frames our understanding the development of social movements. In the mid 1980s and 1990s, there was a shift in thinking about the development of social movements, which saw the emergence of New Social Movement Theories (NSMTs) (Buechler, 1995; van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2009). Rather than being rooted in conventional Marxist thinking these new theoretical explanations highlighted the relevance of new identity definers in the shape of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race and age. Based upon social constructivist

thinking (van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2009 p. 18) NSMT revolve around ‘questions about how individuals and groups perceive and interpret these conditions and focus on the role of cognitive, affective and ideational roots of contention.’ Buechler (1995) analyzed the different contributions to NSMTs by four prominent proponents (Touraine, 1992; Habermas, 1987; Melucci, 1989; Castells, 1983) contrasting their macro and micro oriented versions of the changing nature of social movements. While still influential these theories have been elaborated further, to reflect globalization, and the rise of technology and the internet as key aspects of social movements and their claims for social change (Earl et al., 2017; Earl, 2015).

At first glance, it is evident that many of the contemporary political, economic and social claims for change relate to rationales for deploying coaching and mentoring, and are topics dealt with directly or indirectly in coaching and mentoring sessions and programs. There are also themes beyond these issues, which connect the coaching and mentoring, and social movement fields.

### ***Definitions of Social Movements***

Multiple definitions have emerged which capture how social movements can be understood. Table 1 identifies five definitions used in contemporary studies to reflect this range and the difficulties faced in determining key features of social movements. In all these examples, collectives of some nature are identified; however, they may also recognize the individual participant, various sizes of groups and macro manifestations of people acting together too (Özbilgin & Erbil, 2021; van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2009).

The level of organization (formal, informal and networks) of these collectives is an additional aspect evident in several definitions (Snow et al., 2008; van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2009; Bovey, 2020) highlighting the fluidity of formations which constitute social movements. All the Table 1 definitions also reinforce the change and issue-based nature of social movements identified through the term’s common purposes, vision or goals. In addition to the focus on change, another feature of these definitions is the focus on social movements challenging (or defending, promoting or preventing/resisting) existing authorities, institutions or elites (Tarrow, 1994 in Van Bommel & Spicer, 2011; Snow et al., 2004; van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2009; Bovey, 2020).

Table 1. Definitions of social movements

Definitions	Authors
"Collective challenges by people with common purposes and solidarity in sustained interaction with elites, opponents and authorities"	Tarrow (1994, p. 3–4) in Van Bommel and Spicer (2011) p.1718
"Collectivities acting with some degree of organization and continuity outside of institutional or organizational channels for the purpose of challenging or defending extant authority, whether it is institutionally or culturally based, in the group, organization, society, culture, or world order of which they are a part"	Snow, Soule & Kresi (2004) p.11
"Interlocking networks of groups, social networks and individuals and the connection between them with a shared collective identity who try to prevent or promote societal change by non-institutionalised tactics"	van Stekelenburg and Klandermans (2009) p.19
"Come together to promote or resist change in the experience of health or the systems that shape it. They unite people around a common vision and they grow networks to amplify their message and challenge society, institutions and elites to think and act differently. Often they bubble up outside formal institutions, but they can also come from within"	Bovey (2020) p.5
"Group of individuals getting together in order to achieve one or more goals"	Özbilgin and Erbil (2021) based on Tilly & Wood, (2020) p.120

Snow, Soule and Kresi (2008 p.6) argue that in addition to being joint or collective entities with some level of organization, making change-oriented claims or goals, taking non-institutionalized or extra institutionalized collective action to challenge (or defend) existing institutions, social movements exhibit 'some degree of temporal continuity.'). This dimension of temporal continuity refers to the 'episodic' nature of some social movements, where some movements may appear as fads or fashions and others continue across generations as their importance changes, arising in 'cycles of protest' (Snow, Soule, Kresi & McCammon, 2019; Koopmans, 2004). In addition, two definitions (van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2009; Bovey, 2020) reference networks as ways that social movement groups connect to spread their messages through informal and self-organizing approaches a key point that informs Western's (2012) arguments.

## Discussion

Taking the insights from analyzing these social movement definitions into account, in the subsequent sections I concentrate on three themes. First, is the theme of the centrality of change, which resonates across the fields of analysis. Second, is the theme of challenging or defending existing institutions and practices evident in the research on coaching and mentoring, and resides at the heart of social movement studies. The final theme of networks for causes emerges from the analysis of networks as primary ways of organizing in coaching and mentoring and social movement thinking. Table 2 summarizes the themes and key concepts and theories from the social movement

Table 2. Three main themes and their links to theory and research

Themes	Social movement theories and concepts	Coaching and Mentoring studies
Centrality of Change	Classification of social movements based on level of change and locus of change (Aberle, 1966) Repertoires of action (Tilly, 1978; Van Bommel & Spicer, 2011; Earl & Kimport, 2009)	Change as the focus for coaching and mentoring, from the personal to wider societal change initiatives (Outhwaite & Bettridge, 2009; Western, 2012; 2017; Shoukry, 2017)
Challenging or defending existing institutions and practices	Challengers, incumbents and internal governance units (IGUs), as concepts that help understand the pursuit of social change in relation to the status quo (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012; Gamson, 1975)  Development of unobtrusive activism and grassroots for hire (Rojas & King, 2019)	Coaching and mentoring models exploration of dynamics and institutions to be challenged (Hawkins & Smith, 2007; Whitmore, 2002)  Coaching and mentoring as serving rather than challenging the system (Salman, 2019; Louis and Fatien Diochon, 2018; Shoukry & Cox, 2018; Colley, 2003)
Networks for Causes	NSMT recognition of identity-based networks that nurture collective action (Sen & Avci, 2016; Melucci, 1989)	Coaching and mentoring as isolated outsiders who seek affiliation based on practice and purpose (Salman, 2019; Western, 2012; 2017; Colley, 2003)

### ***Centrality of change***

The diversity of definitions and trials of conceptualization faced by social movement scholars are also evident to similar degrees by coaching and mentoring (Gray, Garvey & Lane, 2016). The attempt by Stokes, Fatien Diochon, and Otter (2021) to build a framework for conceptualizing coaching and mentoring revisits some of these challenges, as have other commentators (Koopmans et al., 2021; Gray, Garvey & Lane, 2016; Salter & Gannon, 2015), and reflect on the importance of context in this endeavor. Across the domains of social movements and coaching and mentoring there is evidence of a shared focus on pursuing issued based change, typically through the terms; goals, common purposes, or vision. Where coaches and mentors are encouraged to support clients and mentees exploration, identification and achievement of specific goals or personal changes, social movements emerge around goals or changes based on shared concerns and interests.

In teasing out this connection it is useful to reflect on an early attempt to classify social movements illustrating this focus on change (Özbilgin & Erbil, 2021). This classification of social movements developed by David Aberle (1966) suggests four typologies based around two dimensions. The first dimension concerns the locus of change which social movements focus on (the beliefs and actions of individuals or wider society), while the second dimension relates to the level of change sought (partial change in one aspect of life or in radical ways).

Figure 1 depicts the four typologies where the Redemptive quadrant denotes social movements campaigning for total change at the individual level – an example would be Alcoholics Anonymous. The Alternative typology represents social movements where the individual is again the locus of change but the change sought is partial in the lives of individuals. The Reformatory typology signifies social movements attempting to get society and its key institutions (companies, organizations and governments) to address problematic issues, such as excessive consumerism, the treatment of ethnic groups and women. Finally, the Transformative or Revolutionary typology depicts social movements seeking social structural change in a radical and fundamental way.

Figure 1. Aberle (1966) Classification of Social Movements

		Level of change – Total & radical			
		<b>Redemptive Social Movements</b> - Alcoholics anonymous		<b>Revolutionary/Transformative Social Movements</b> - Civil Rights movement or movements for communism, XR	
Locus of change - Individual					Locus of change - Societal
		<b>Alternative Social Movements</b> - #madd Mothers against Drunk Driving or Brake		<b>Reformative Social Movements</b> - Buy Nothing Day, #metoo and #blacklivesmatter	
		Level of change - partial			

While there are imperfections in Aberle's (1966) taxonomy, specifically where social movements make claims for radical change but then accept more incremental change, it does offer a deeper understanding of the magnitude of change which can sit at the heart of social movements. Acknowledging change at all levels in social movements, from the individual to the societal, and from partial to radical, resonates with the extent of change possible through coaching and mentoring. Typically, in coaching and mentoring change is chosen and instigated by the individual (coachee or mentee) but the contemporary use of coaching and mentoring initiatives to support organizational change (as part of leadership or graduate development programs, or inclusivity or wellbeing initiatives) and social change (via initiatives targeting youth, refugees, women returners, ethnic or racial communities) reveal that underpinning goals for wider change may provide the crucible for individual goals to be determined, and change to be made.

Various proponents of coaching have made claims that coaching can change society (Outhwaite & Bettridge, 2009; Western, 2012; 2017; Shoukry, 2017) and 'save the world' (notably Sir John Whitmore in Eyre, 2012). Shoukry (2017) identifies three settings where social change can take place, the work domain, the social domain and oppressive environments. His examination of the potential of coaching (and mentoring) to deliver social change in these settings necessitates a shift in requiring coaches and mentors to be 'no longer a

neutral technical expert, but an active agent who contributes, implicitly or explicitly to the definition of what coaching is trying to achieve.’ (Shoukry, 2017 p. 185). More explicit disclosure and explanation of coaches’ social and political commitments, as well as their ethical frames become critical here as does halting illusions of complete neutrality (Shoukry, 2017). For many this will be a freeing experience aligned with the, sometimes considerable, level of pro bono work that coaches and mentors do, but seldom discuss explicitly. It also places coaching and mentoring central to social, economic, environmental and political upheaval, right where the action is and where social movements claim to be too.

These insights also provoke reflection on the extent to which social movement scholars may find it valuable to engage with coaching and mentoring approaches to achieve their goals and vision. For example, how might coaching or mentoring support the #blacklivesmatter or #metoo movements through working with those who are interested in enhancing these campaigns? Likewise, can coaching and mentoring initiatives learn from social movements about how to help individuals change their behaviours and beliefs around excessive consumerism or climate change beliefs and behaviours?

These questions may even galvanize inquiries around whether coaching and mentoring can be considered as part of the repertoires of action, which social movements use to promote and achieve their claims for change. Repertoires of action are the ‘the various forms of activities that are used by challenging groups in a given historical period’ (Tilly, 1978 in Carmin & Balser, 2002 p.366). These activities can manifest in a variety of ways from traditional, overt physical activity, such as protests to online petitions and collaborative activities, and the cultivation of linguistic signifiers as well as scripts and schemas, which help movements appeal to other groups and individuals (Van Bommel & Spicer, 2011; Earl & Kimport, 2009). While the non-institutionalized actions of social movements, some of which involve violent practices appear eccentric in the realm of coaching and mentoring it is interesting to consider how radical these coaching and mentoring themselves can appear when introduced into particular settings for the first time.

This shared focus on change, often through goals, suggests that coaching and mentoring and social movements may be kindred spirits in their support of individual, organizational and social change. For coaching and mentoring the question is whether we are ready to be more blatant about our political and social values, advocate our support for specific causes, and offer our skills sets to social movements who need to extend their repertoires of action. In the

partisan debates, which fuel contemporary social and political arguments, this is not a simple matter. However, from climate change to social inequalities, we do see groups of mentors and coaches, and our professional bodies declaring commitments and actions to these claims for change already, suggesting further learning from social movements will be valuable.

### ***Challenging or defending existing institutions and practices***

Building on the issue of change, social movement thinking also resonates with coaching and mentoring around expressions of change as involving challenging established or institutionalized authorities and elites. Here social movement scholarship offers insights by recognizing aspired changes or goals often confront existing conventions and environments. It is also relevant to identify that social movements regularly arise where individuals and groups face change promoted by institutions and elites and seek to defend the status quo. For simplicity, I will focus on change and not continually refer to defending as well in this section.

Most coaches and mentors would acknowledge that significant segments of sessions are occupied by client discussions on how to navigate prevailing environments and their actors (whether that is within personal mindsets, in workplaces with managers and co-workers, in personal settings with family members or wider professional or occupational communities). Clients' aspirations for change are frequently mired in concerns that the stability of their lives will be uprooted or resisted, and how to manage this (sometimes-perceived) resistance is part of the value of these interactions. Indeed most coaching and mentoring models include a stage where the current dynamics of assumptions, relationships, and settings are considered. For example, Explore in Hawkins and Smith's (2007) CLEAR and Reality in GROW (Whitmore, 2002) determine where difficulties in existing situations and with specific actors, may lie.

Considering the levels at which claims for challenge (or stability) are pitched in coaching and mentoring, is valuable (Louis and Fatien Diochon, 2018). Adopting a political lens based on the work of Lefebvre (1991), they identify the micro, meso or macro levels, which map onto the individual psychological level, the organizational level and the social, economic and political level. They outline these levels as part of their critical evaluation of power and the coaching space in organizations (Louis & Fatien Diochon, 2018). They identify how coaches' experiences of the coaching space along a continuum from limiting (context-free, constrained and restricted) to

empowering (context-sensitive, participatory and open) are dependent upon the nature of discourses across macro, meso and micro levels. For example, they highlight the psychological discourse at the micro level, the performance-centric discourse at the meso level and the adaptive and functionalist discourse at the macro level (Louis & Fatien Diochon, 2018). Other authors have taken a similar frame of analysis while examining mentoring initiatives where mentors, mentees and scheme administrators interpret, adhere and conform to prevalent discourses, at these levels, about disaffection, motivation and labour market engagement and (self) caring responsibilities (Benozzo & Colley, 2012; Colley, 2003).

Drawing on authors with similar concerns (Bachkirova, 2017; Tabarovsky, 2015; Du Toit, 2014), Louis and Fatien Diochon (2018) argue that while often portrayed as a remedy for tackling the trails of contemporary life, ‘coaching inherently serves rather than challenges the system.’ (p.3). Likewise Tabarovsky (2015) also identified the potential for coaching to be used to reinforce a neoliberal agenda rather than truly supporting the individual and wider change. Indeed many Western conceptions of coaching and mentoring unquestioningly espouse the belief that freedom of choice, personal responsibility and resourcefulness are accessible by all coachees or mentees (Colley, 2003; Shoukry, 2016) despite evidence on widespread inequities and inequalities, which are deeply rooted and sustained. We need to question then to what extent are coaching and mentoring complicit in this situation, where our failure to share our clients’ experiences of resistance at whatever level means change for the individual, the organization and society are unrecognized and limited. Moving beyond this situation means espousing Shoukry and Cox (2018 p. 2) declarations that coaching is not solely a technology of the self, but is shaped by the social, cultural and historical processes with its own ‘potential to shift power and support agency, hence affecting the social structure.’ This has profound implications for education, training and development approaches to coaching and mentoring.

More than a decade’s experience of working with coaches and mentors suggests that as individuals, and in groups, we see these challenges and social issues but do not always identify a collective way we contribute to them or can resolve them. By building our networks, and thinking like social movements in these networks, as identified in the next section, we may be able to improve this situation. It would help us bring greater awareness and support to our clients of the inequities and inequalities they are facing as part of wider social dilemmas and how to address them. Situating coaching and mentoring as practices, which individually and through initiatives, can support clients in achieving their goals

and desired change in the face of resistance and oppression becomes an important part of the contemporary debate of the value and rise of coaching and mentoring. Engaging with social movement thinking offers a way to enhance how we are able to garner individual action into shared action to enact desired social changes.

Recent instances where coaching and mentoring have made collective explicit commitments to social change, for example, directed at environmental campaigning or social inequalities suggest we need to revisit some of the foundational principles associated with coaching and mentoring. These examples are also evocative of arguments from Shoukry (2016; 2017; Shoukry & Cox, 2018) for developing a wider critical engagement with social, cultural and political issues, imposed organizational and managerial agendas and extend beyond psychologically-oriented explanations, to enable coaching to support and embrace challenges to existing institutional levels. For example, claiming political neutrality and offering compliance with elites and institutions, which perpetuate current inequities and environmental blindness, coaching and mentoring risks contaminating the change which individuals are willing to make to address wider problems and achieve social change (Shoukry, 2017; Western, 2017). These arguments highlight an invaluable role for coaching and mentoring education and professional development, where they can vocalize and confront the ways coaching and mentoring may be limited and constrained, rather than open and empowering (Louis & Fatien Diochon, 2018; Shoukry, 2017).

In social movement research, issues around challenge (and stability) are depicted as a dynamic represented in distinctions around ‘challengers’ and ‘incumbents’ and internal governance units (IGUs). Initially identified by Gamson (1975) this framing marks out incumbents as those actors (or groups) ‘who wield disproportionate influence within a field and whose interests and views tend to be heavily reflected in the dominant organization’ (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012 p. 13). Incumbents are also imbued with legitimacy and status, the majority of the resources available and the ‘rules’ tend to be in their favor. Incumbents typically resist social change unless that change bolsters their existing legitimized position and access to resources.

Conversely, challengers ‘occupy less privileged niches ... ordinarily wield little influence.’ (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012 p. 13). Challengers are rarely in open mutiny with incumbents, despite being able to identify the injustices they reinforce and opportunities to address them. Instead, challengers live by the prevailing rules that support the status and power of incumbents,

until opportunities arise to challenge the status quo. Based on field theory, Fligstein and McAdam (2012 p.14) added another, final set of key actors or groups here, internal governance units (IGUs), who look after conformity to the rules and facilitate ‘the overall smooth functioning and reproduction of the system’. Typical examples of IGUs are trade or professional associations, and their roles mean they normally act to reinforce the legitimacy of incumbents’ positions.

This field theory lens of social movements can be useful for coaching and mentoring where some studies recognize the role of other professions and clients have played in the professionalization of executive coaching (Salman, 2019). However, this lens also offers opportunities to consider how coaching and mentoring, as supportive relationships and part of organizational or community interventions play into wider social changes (Western, 2012; Shoukry, 2017). For example, where coaching or mentoring interventions directly aim to tackle particular inequalities and enhance widening participation in pursuit of social change, they may face subtle resistance from incumbents and IGUs, in the guise of various stakeholders. Understanding how challengers realize their aims may assist those who instigate coaching and mentoring interventions to achieve such social change goals.

Recently analyses of social movements highlight the range of options challengers can use to achieve their social change goals. Rather than adhering to the directly adversarial role of social movements as challengers or disruptive actors (McAdam, Tarrow & Tilly, 2001) other examples of social movements adopting unobtrusive activism are evident (Rojas & King, 2019). Drawing on the influence of organizational studies research, which show how social movements can affect corporations and industries, Rojas and King (2019) argue that social movements can still challenge and achieve change without directly defying existing incumbents or adopting confrontational conflict styles. Based on examples from a diverse range of movements; the women’s movement, the American Buddhists, campaigns for climate change and LGBTQ+ activists Rojas and King (2019) highlight how movements have been able to create allies and work in parallel with industries and companies to achieve social change. Likewise, companies and industries have, in some cases collaborated with social movements to understand claims for social change. Hiring activists from social movements into corporations or onto industry boards, known as grassroots for hire (Rojas & King, 2019), has often been at the heart of these challenger-incumbent partnerships. Such moves also mean organizations and social movements bypass IGUs or State involvement to legitimize claims for change.

These examples of social movements using peaceful and discreet behaviour appear in keeping with where the majority of coaches and mentors might see themselves as potential activists for social change, as opposed to engaging in violent protest. However, as previously acknowledged coaches and mentors are often ‘outsiders’ and isolated in the organizations they work for, or in (Western, 2012; Salman, 2019), and may have limited opportunities to share the intractable problems that their clients face, and to lobby and leverage the appetite for social change in organizations. This reinforces previous arguments of the importance of coaches and mentors developing their networks and coalitions with each other, to raise their voices for the social change aspired to and leads directly onto the final key theme in this article.

### ***Networks for Causes***

Earlier shifts in social movement theory evolved because explanations established on other identity issues or experiences were seen as more relevant than explanations based primarily on economic and political interpretations of class struggles (Buechler, 1995; van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2009). In this way, NSMTs ‘recognize a variety of submerged, latent, and temporary networks that often undergird collective action, rather than assuming that centralized organizational forms are prerequisites for successful mobilization.’ (Sen & Avci, 2016 p. 442 after Melucci, 1989). Building on Tilly’s (1978) work, Crossley & Diani (2019 p. 152) argue that networks are vital for social mobilization because ‘A mass of isolated individuals is poorly placed to mobilize.’ Identity based social movements are associated with the way resistant communities can materialize and regain their purpose and identity outside of formal organizational structures (Melucci, 1989). These informal communities are self-organizing, and function in less hierarchical ways, though the ties between participants can be strong. Western (2012 p.255) makes the point when considering NSMTs, their communities and coaching:

*There is an application of this theory [NSMTs] to coaching; many coaches are organizational ‘outsiders’ either by choice or by default, working outside the confines of an institution, and carrying a certain ‘liberation’ culture with them. This emanates from their ‘faith and belief’ in coaches, i.e. coaching can be a force for micro-emancipation, individuals freeing themselves from their own tyrannies (anxieties, fear, etc.). Coaches also appear liberated from ‘corporate chains’, often working for themselves and from outside an institution by working from home. Whether this is real or rhetoric is worthy of further research.*

As such, networks may seem particularly relevant to coaches and mentors and we have noted specific examples of those leveraging their skills and awareness to address social problems. However, for other networks of coaches and mentors without explicit provocation to articulate their shared social change concerns, their networks and coalitions may be little more than peer support groups.

A counterpoint to Western's (2012) arguments can also be that coaches and many mentors, in particular executive mentors, are deeply connected in, and influenced by, the corporate world (Louis & Fatien Diochon, 2018; Salman, 2019) revealing a tension to be confronted. While networks can foster participation in social movements, they can also inhibit involvement where social ties through family, friends and communities voice concerns or sanctions (Crossley & Diani, 2019). The liberation that Western (2012; 2017) and others (Shoukry, 2016; 2017; Shoukry & Cox, 2018) identify amongst communities of coaches may be compromised by the checks of other stakeholders (Salman, 2019; Louis & Fatien Diochon, 2018).

Our reliance on networks is a feature of wider forces of globalization and the resultant emergence of the Network society and the Information society (Castells, 2012). In this vein, our contemporary worlds are structured around communication and information technologies rather than around social structures and activities, and our localities. Alongside neoliberal agendas this means formal networks in the shape of organizations are replaced by informal networks based upon individuals' own life-worlds and the changes in technological connections reinforce these less formal networks (van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2009). Connections with groups or networks appear because not only do individuals relate to the cause or issue, but also as van Stekelenburg and Klandermans (2009 p.17) identify 'but because they identify with the other participants.' This group identification resonates strongly across the contemporary examples from coaching and mentoring, where association with other coaches and mentors (or professionals in specific settings) results in initiatives to support particular groups, tackle social inequalities or problems. Again we can reflect on Western's (2012 p.254) key arguments for the value of social movement theories in understanding coaching and mentoring, where he identifies; 'This is not an organized or formal collective impact (as the body politic) but a collective informal influence that often goes unnoticed and is not theorized.' Understanding and using social movement theory facilitates some of this missing theorization of coaching and mentoring, specifically around the wider collective action taken by coaches and

mentors, and their impact beyond the individual and local impact of coaching and mentoring.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

This article sets out to provoke wider discussion of coaching and mentoring in light of arguments that they are capable to enabling social change. By using social movement theory, a discipline which has social change at its heart, I have built on Western's (2012; 2017) provocation to contemplate coaching and mentoring in relation to social movements concepts and thinking. I have positioned these arguments based on recent examples of coaching and mentoring addressing social problems (Covid-19 pandemic, climate change and social inequalities) and emergent literature (Shoukry, 2016; 2017; Shoukry & Cox, 2018).

During this highly selective assessment of social movement theory and coaching and mentoring, I was struck by the perceptions of the ubiquitous description of both areas in practice and scholarship. Earl and Kimport (2009; Earl, 2015) have explored how the practices of social movements, the tactics, scripts and schemas, have been diffused beyond the social movement setting. This article highlights the value of using social movement interpretations to develop a better understanding of the tactics, scripts and schemas of coaching and mentoring. This would be a fertile opportunity for helping situate coaching and mentoring in its wider social context and appreciate what shapes coaching and mentoring practice, and extend how we work and engage in coaching and mentoring education, training and professional development (Western, 2012; 2017). Specifically there are challenges here to educators and trainers to explore wider social (movement) theories with coaches and mentors and expect them to engage in deep questioning about their personal values and what they mean for social change and wider contemporary problems.

There are also opportunities to adopt coaching and mentoring in social movements to tackle particular issues (Edwards, McCarthy & Mataic, 2019), as well as promote examples of more issue or cause based coaching and mentoring (Rhize and the Social Change agency) to address climate change and social disadvantage. Practice suggests both areas have been able to diffuse their ideas and approaches into society. In this light, there is support for Bachkirova, Spence and Drake's (2017 p.9) argument for extending the 'use of coaching to address the issues of importance to societies as a whole.' However, Bachkirova and colleagues (2017 p.9) also caution that this can only happen when 'when it [coaching] does not shy away from the needs of the marginalized and oppressed

in the world and those who care about more humanized workplaces, essential rights and the environment.’

Social movement research in many ways delivers that call to arms that might assist coaching and mentoring move beyond being solely located as delivering empowering and supportive relationships without really grappling with the social structures, which inhibit real social change. The themes explored highlight the ways we might recognize and use our networks to share with each other our concerns regarding the institutions or elites, and identify ways to leverage for change. In line with social movement research coaches and mentors could develop their own awareness be more explicit about where they stand in respect to social issues, disseminate these insights and learning, rather than taking a neutral position. This may make some in coaching uncomfortable but we must engage if coaching and mentoring are to become compelling means of social change (Shoukry, 2017). Supervision, and educators and trainers may play a key role here. Social movement research also encourages further critical engagement with social, cultural and political issues, imposed organizational and managerial agendas, and extending beyond psychologically-oriented explanations, to enable coaching and mentoring to support and embrace challenges to existing institutional structures (Louis & Fatien Diochon, 2018; Shoukry, 2016; 2017; Tabarovsky, 2015; Western, 2012; 2017).

This is a very limited foray into social movement scholarship and I am mindful of the numerous inadequacies of my own depth of knowledge in condensing and evaluating this vibrant field. Readers may have concerns regarding my attempt to cling onto mentoring alongside coaching in this exploration. I committed to do this because the strength in the pre-existing ‘social’ turn in mentoring means it can act as a valuable ally to the newer developments in coaching.

I close this provocation piece with some thoughts and implications for practice and research. First, this analysis leads me to suggest coaching and mentoring could think more like social movement activists, identifying our values, causes and stealthily identify where intractable issues in current institutions and structures can be tackled. Second, we can build our networks and reevaluate our commitment to absolute neutrality in line with our own personal values and aspirations for wider change in the world. Third, we can have the conversations and raise awareness of the commitments to social change through coaching and mentoring. Drawing attention to coaching and mentoring as proponents of social change within education, training and development activities for coaches and mentors appears to be a critical issue

here. Finally, some recommendations for researchers and other commentators revolve around how we articulate the wider impact of coaching and mentoring. By exploring the pro-bono work that coaches and mentors do, alongside their paid work, and creating a better understanding of the networks that coaches and mentors create and develop, we will be able to identify real examples of social change. In order to achieve such insights, new methodologies, such as netnography or network analysis could be deployed. Finally, expansion of studies which capture the coaching and mentoring as fields (Salman, 2019) will be valuable so we can develop a deeper understanding of the political, economic and social forces structuring the sector, and their implications for the work coaching and mentoring tries to do.

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