What are the experiences of challenges to confidence during senior leadership transition and how does coaching support leaders with confidence at this transition point?

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Abstract

Existing research into senior leadership transition acknowledges that it is a challenging process but does not look at the impact on the leader and, in particular, on their confidence. Confidence in the coaching literature seems to have been neglected, other than quantitative studies of self-efficacy as a measure of the effectiveness of coaching, and yet increased confidence for the coaching client is often a key incidental outcome of the coaching process. In response to these gaps, this qualitative study aimed to investigate the experiences of challenges to confidence for senior leaders during leadership transition and to gain an understanding of how coaching supports leaders with confidence at this transition point. This was a multi-perspective study exploring the experiences of both senior leaders and executive coaches working with senior leaders, using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).

This study gives a rich multifaceted description of the experiences of challenges to confidence at this transition point. The findings show that confidence within this context is described across the following four inter-connected areas: a feeling of ease and energy; control (primarily of emotions); having clarity; and being able to be vulnerable. Loss of confidence is described as the opposite of each of these. This study also provides empirical understanding of the organisational impact on the confidence of the leader, in particular the organisational lack of feedback, support and preparation for the transition and the perceived difficulty in being able to show vulnerability within the organisation. The findings provide an empirical multi-perspective understanding of how coaching works with confidence at this transition point, in particular through the safe space of coaching; the process of revision and ownership of leader identity; helping the leader to find clarity; and through feedback and support.

By focusing on confidence as the main subject of the research, this study provides a rich and multifaceted understanding of the challenges to confidence within the context of senior leadership transition, as well as of the critical role that coaching plays in supporting confidence. It contributes to literature across the fields of psychology, leadership and coaching. Practical suggestions are made for organisational leadership development and for executive coaches to help them to better support the confidence of senior leaders in transition.

Keywords

Confidence, self-efficacy, leadership transition, executive coaching, leadership coaching, coaching outcomes.

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Chapter One: Introduction

In this chapter, I will introduce the background to, and my motivation for, this research, followed by an overview of the research problem, the literature explored, the research aims and objectives, definition of key terms used and an outline of the whole thesis.

1.1 Background to the research

I have spent my entire career working with leaders in transition: initially in executive search, recruiting leaders into new senior roles; and then in 2006 as an in-house coach at a business school, coaching Executive MBA students navigating their first leadership transition. My interest in the psychological challenges of significant professional transitions has increased over time and I was able to explore this further in my MSc thesis on the loss of identity for professional women during maternity transition. The findings showed a shared experience of a loss of confidence, often related to loss of professional identity, and since then I have started to work with confidence more explicitly in my coaching practice.

I have coached many successful and very able leaders and have noticed how so many of them have found the transition to senior leadership difficult, with significant impact on their confidence. As the coaching relationship develops, many of these leaders openly share the challenges that they are experiencing with me and it feels that the coaching space is one of the only places where they can do this. One of the key coaching outcomes that such clients describe when we review the coaching together (and which is evident throughout the course of the coaching) is increased confidence. However, it is rare for the loss of confidence to be the explicit reason for the coaching assignment at this transition point and more often this focus has emerged as the coaching relationship unfolds. This has motivated my desire to understand more about confidence: How do senior leaders and coaches describe confidence at this transition point? How is confidence impacted during the transition to senior leadership and what is it about this transition that is so challenging? How does coaching help to support confidence at this transition point? This research then is born from my desire to understand more from my practice in order to help my own understanding and quality of my work as a coach and, potentially, to help other coaches, leaders and those supporting leaders in organisations and as such I embarked on the new journey of being a “practitioner researcher” (Fillery-Travis and Lane, 2006, p. 178).

My initial exploration of these questions in the literature showed that confidence was a multi-dimensional concept which was difficult to define and that there was no research in either the coaching or leadership fields exploring it in relation to leaders in transition. More research was

available on the challenges of leadership transition, but very little of this was empirical work and none of the research showed the impact of transition on leaders themselves. The largest body of research on confidence in the coaching and leadership fields explored self-efficacy, but not confidence, and this was mostly in passing rather than as the main research interest. These gaps in literature prompted the desire to learn more and to conduct an empirical first-person study of working with confidence in the transition to senior leadership from the perspective of leaders and coaches working with leaders.

1.2 The literature overview

The literature search was focused around three key areas of interest to this study and where there appeared to be gaps in research. The first area concerning the challenges of the transition to senior leadership for the leader led me to explore the fields of leadership, psychology and coaching. The second key area in the literature search concerned the concept of confidence. The research led me to where confidence was explicitly or empirically explored and this took me to the field of psychology in order to understand self-efficacy and its differentiation from confidence, to sport psychology where there seems to be the most developed and empirical work on confidence, to healthcare which builds on the understanding from sport confidence, and finally to leadership where there was very little research on confidence. Finally, I turned to the coaching literature to explore what had been researched on coaching leaders in transition and confidence as an outcome in the coaching process. The following section gives a brief overview of all three areas.

1.2.1 Challenges of the transition to senior leadership for the leader

The transition to senior leadership is shown to be challenging and this is well documented in the leadership and coaching literature (Watkins, 2003; Terblanche, Albertyn, and Van Coller-Peter, 2018a; Terblanche, 2019). Some of the challenges that leaders face include: lack of preparation for the new role (Keller and Meaney, 2018); loss of mastery and control (Hill, 1992; Conger and Fishel, 2007); a lack of concrete feedback (Hill, 1992; Manderscheid and Ardichvili, 2008); anxiety, lack of certainty and stress (Manderscheid and Ardichvili, 2008; Terblanche, Albertyn, and Van Coller-Peter, 2018b; Wiggins, 2019). Self-efficacy theory, and sport confidence theory which builds on this, suggest that some of these challenges such as lack of preparation and lack of feedback impact self-efficacy negatively. However, the impact of senior leadership transitions on leaders' *confidence* is not explored in the leadership or coaching literature.

There is a body of research which explores some of the psychological challenges of the transition to leadership including changes to – and loss of - identity (Hill, 1992; Ashforth and Saks, 1995; Watkins, 2009; Snook, Ibarra and Ramo, 2010; Terblanche, Albertyn, and Van Coller-Peter, 2018a). Transitions in working identities, particularly when the individual is in a leadership position, can be quite destabilising (Bond and Naughton, 2011). Indeed, some of the leadership literature explores the leader identity development process, suggesting that it is a complicated process of revision, construction, experimentation and internalisation of the new leader identity (Ibarra, 1999; Miscenko, Günter and Day, 2017; Skinner, 2020). However, none of this literature focuses on what impact this difficult process has on the leader, and more specifically on their confidence.

1.2.2 The concept of confidence

Of central interest to this study in relation to leadership transition is the concept of confidence. Confidence is a broad term which encompasses several related but different concepts, such as self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977; Baron and Morin, 2009), self-belief (Reynolds, 2011; Lancer and Eatough, 2018), self-doubt (Hindmarch, 2008), self-esteem (Bachkirova, 2004) and self-confidence (Hollenbeck and Hall, 2004; White, 2009). Perhaps because it is a multi-dimensional concept, there has been a lack of attention to confidence in the coaching and leadership literature. Self-efficacy is shown repeatedly across the psychology, sport, healthcare, leadership and coaching literature as a concept related to confidence, but the task-related notion of self-efficacy (Baron and Morin, 2009) does not fit with the proposed understanding of confidence.

In the sport psychology literature and the healthcare literature there has been a greater focus on self-efficacy and a clearer understanding of its sources and ensuing impact on performance (Vealey and Garner-Holman, 1998). The context in sport psychology, with an emphasis on short-term and easily observable results and performances, is quite different compared with the longer term complex performances of leaders in organisations (Hollenbeck and Hall, 2004), but there are many elements of the concept of sport confidence that could be explored and translated to leaders in transition, such as adequate preparation, support from others, mastery, demonstration of ability, vicarious experience, and the role of the coach.

There have been no first-person studies of confidence in the leadership literature, so there is no detailed understanding of confidence nor what it feels like to experience challenges to confidence as a leader, in particular at a challenging time such as the transition to senior leadership.

1.2.3 Coaching and how it supports leaders in transition

Despite agreement that coaching at the leadership transition stage can provide important, timely and powerful support (Witherspoon and Cannon, 2004; Sutton, 2008; Bond and Naughton, 2011; Weinstock, 2011; Gill, 2017; Terblanche, Albertyn and Van Coller-Peter, 2017; 2018), there is surprisingly little research on executive coaching for leaders in transition (Bond and Naughton, 2011; Barker, 2017). The research that exists suggests the importance of coaching in helping leaders in transition with greater self-awareness, including by challenging previous perspectives (Freedman, 2011; Barker, 2017; Terblanche, Albertyn and Van Coller-Peter, 2018). It also shows that coaching at this stage helps by normalising the leader's experiences (Freedman, 2011); providing a safe space to help leaders to manage frustrations, solve problems and avoid pitfalls (McGill, Clarke and Sheffield, 2019) as well allowing leaders to express feelings of anxiety and self-doubt in relation to the intense pressure of high expectations and scrutiny in the new senior role (Gill, 2017). However, this research does not differentiate substantially between the challenges of transition to senior leadership and previous transitions, so we do not know what it is about this transition that might be most challenging for leaders, nor the impact on their confidence.

1.2.4 Confidence as an outcome in the coaching process

A review of confidence in the coaching literature was conducted, prioritising the sources that contain empirical work. I have paid attention to relevant sources with conceptual discussion; however, their contributions to this research question were of more general rather than specific value. For example, the developmental coaching literature, with a focus on lifespan development (e.g., Palmer and Panchal, 2012), recognizes that "challenges associated with a particular stage, or phase, of life" (p. 4) might influence confidence associated with transitions; however, no research on such influence was found in the literature. The developmental coaching literature, with a focus on adult development theories (e.g., Maxwell and Bachkirova, 2010), raises the very relevant question of whether the concept and experience of confidence are influenced by the individual's stage of development and might therefore require different coaching approaches. However, this particular paper looks specifically at self-esteem rather than confidence.

Although the analysis of the coaching literature showed that there are very few studies that explore confidence as an outcome of the coaching process, there is a body of literature on self-efficacy as a coaching outcome (Popper and Lipshitz, 1992; Evers, Browers and Tomic, 2006; Finn, Mason and Bradley, 2007; Baron and Morin, 2009; Grant, Curtayne and Burton, 2009). These studies tend to use self-efficacy as a measure of the effectiveness of coaching.

They do not explore self-efficacy – or confidence - in and of itself. There are just a handful of qualitative studies which show confidence as a coaching outcome, particularly in relation to leadership transition. We therefore do not have an in-depth understanding of working with confidence from the perspective of leaders themselves or of coaches working with such leaders. Furthermore, though the very few qualitative studies that exist are helpful in providing some understanding of how coaching helps with confidence, they do not look at confidence as the *main* research interest. There is one very recent coaching study which is the exception to this latter concern (Kane, Lewis and Yarker, 2021). Although it is not conducted in a leadership context, it explores confidence and coaching as a central focus of the study. Apart from this paper, our understanding of confidence as a concept and how coaching works with confidence is very limited.

1.3 Research aims and objectives

The state of knowledge on this topic, as shown above, points to the need for a qualitative study which shines the light specifically on working with confidence in coaching at the point of the transition to senior leadership. This will help us to understand more about the experiences of the challenges of this transition point, the impact on confidence and how coaching supports leaders with this. It will also help us to understand more about the concept of confidence, which is so often an important outcome of coaching research, but which is not defined in relation to leaders nor transition and is only mentioned in passing in extant literature.

This study has two broad aims. The first aim is to develop a multi-perspective understanding of the challenges to confidence commonly experienced by senior leaders during a leadership transition, from the perspective of the leaders themselves and from the perspective of executive coaches working with senior leaders in transition. The second aim is to explore the perceptions of senior leaders and executive coaches of how coaching might have helped to support them with confidence during the transition to senior leadership.

This study will fulfil the following objectives:

1. To conduct a critical review of 1) the challenges of the transition to senior leadership for the leader (including psychological challenges and changes to leadership identity); 2) the concept of confidence in the following literature: psychology, sport psychology, healthcare, and leadership; 3) coaching and how it supports leaders in transition and confidence as an outcome in the coaching process.

2. To explore the experiences of challenges to confidence for senior leaders during leadership transition and the role of coaching in supporting them with confidence.

3. To explore the perspectives of executive coaches working with senior leaders experiencing challenges to confidence during leadership transition.

4. To develop a multi-perspective description of the phenomenon of confidence for senior leaders during leadership transition and an understanding of the role of coaching in supporting leaders in transition with confidence.

5. To make a theoretical contribution to the leadership and coaching literature in the form of a conceptual framework of the experiences of leaders and coaches working with challenges to confidence during senior leadership transition.

6. To make a practical contribution to coaching practice and to organisational leadership development in the form of greater understanding of how coaching can support leaders experiencing challenges to confidence at this transition point.

1.4 Definitions of key terms

1.4.1 Executive coaching

According to the Association for Professional Executive Coaching and Supervision (APECS), executive coaching is differentiated from other forms of coaching by being "primarily concerned with the development of the executive in the context of the needs of their organisation" (APECS, 2020). Important aspects of executive coaching commonly include helping an individual to develop into a more effective leader (Peltier, 2010), as a form of leadership development (De Haan, Duckworth, Birch and Jones, 2013) or "to improve leadership skills, professional performance, and wellbeing and the effectiveness of the organisation" (Grant, 2014, p. 259). Similarly, focusing on helping the senior individual to be more effective through their leadership, executive coaching is defined as "work with senior-level executives that focuses on the executive taking up their leadership and management roles with greater effectiveness" (Stokes and Jolly, 2018, p.248).

Executive coaching does not, however, refer exclusively to coaching leaders in transition and the term "transition coaching" was suggested by Witherspoon and Cannon (2004), who noted that leaders in transition faced a different set of issues compared to more "typical" coaching assignments. They argued for the importance of providing coaching at points of leadership transition. The term has become more widely used since then (Barker, 2017; Terblanche, 2019) although there is not yet a lot of research on executive coaching for leaders in transition (Bond and Naughton, 2011; Barker, 2017).

The term “client” will be used throughout this thesis to describe the coaching client, using the term that is most commonly used by the coaching accreditation bodies, rather than the term “coachee” which is also used throughout coaching research and practice.

1.4.2 Coaching Psychology vs. Coaching

The literature reviewed in this thesis can be seen to focus on both coaching and coaching psychology, because confidence is clearly a psychological phenomenon and is of interest in many types or genres of coaching. According to O’Riordan and Palmer (2021, p. 5), coaching psychology definitions “tend to highlight the psychological approaches, theory, and evidence base that underpin the coaching process”. Coaching psychology has also been described as the “scientific study of behaviour, cognitive and emotion within coaching practice” (Passmore, Stopforth and Lai, 2018, p. 122). The term ‘coaching psychology’ has caused some debate. Passmore and colleagues suggest that there are few observable differences between coaching and coaching psychology, but that “the study of psychology can enhance practice, and may lead to materially different outcomes” (Passmore, Stopforth and Lai, 2018, p. 122). This study prioritises research - across the fields of psychology, leadership and coaching - which uses psychological approaches, theory and evidence base. Therefore, I see coaching psychology as relevant to any reference to coaching research that naturally includes elements of the above definitions of coaching psychology: the psychological, theoretical, evidence-based study of behaviour, cognition and emotion.

1.4.3 Senior leadership and leadership transition

The literature on leadership transition that exists mostly focuses on leadership transition for first-time leaders or established leaders but does not seem to specify seniority further. One coaching study establishes seniority by using the term executives or C-suite leaders (defined as the individual being on the senior leadership team or executive committee) and makes the point that with transitions at this level, risks and costs of failure are acute (McGill, Clarke and Sheffield, 2019).

My experience of coaching senior leaders for many years has shown me that at the transition to the most senior levels in an organisation the leader typically feels more exposed, less supported and more visible. The focus of this research was therefore not on junior or first-time leaders but on senior leaders. In order to define “senior leadership” in the recruitment of participants, I adapted a definition from a qualitative study exploring executive coaching and leadership transitions (Reynolds, 2011) as follows: a senior leader that is either on the senior

executive team, a head of a major business unit or service line, or a senior manager operating at one level or two levels below the executive team, depending on the size of the organisation.

In this study, leadership *transition* is defined as stepping into a new and more senior leadership role, requiring a change from expert to broader senior leader. This definition is influenced by the work of Charan, Drotter and Noel (2011). When interviewing participants, it was unanimously this part of the transition, relinquishing one's expertise when becoming a broader senior leader, that posed some of the more significant challenges to confidence. However, this only became apparent once participants had been recruited. For example, one participant fitted all the criteria though his leadership transition did not require a change to his role or area of expertise, merely a move onto the Executive Committee (a significant enough transition), but it was noticeable that he did not experience as many of the same challenges as the other participants.

Whilst it was not the purpose to solely identify leaders who had undergone the transition within their current organisation, participants who self-selected had all made the transition internally and had not made the transition from an external organisation. It has also been acknowledged that leaders from outside the organisation can potentially have a more difficult time transitioning into a new organisation than those from inside (Ciampa and Watkins, 1999; Watkins, 2003; Charan, Drotter and Noel, 2011), though this is not within the scope of this research.

1.4.4 Confidence

As the literature review will show, confidence is seen as a broad term which encompasses several related but different concepts. The most closely related term to confidence is self-efficacy and it is the term which appears most frequently when searching for confidence, coaching and leadership. Self-efficacy theory was developed by Bandura (1977) and is a person's belief in his ability to perform a task in a certain specific area (Popper and Lipshitz, 1992). Self-efficacy is task-specific. The concept of general self-efficacy brings us closer to the understanding of confidence which will be explored much further in this study, however it will be argued that in its task-related nature it does not fully fit with the understanding of confidence for the purposes of this study.

There is a clear distinction, articulated strongly in sport psychology, between state confidence and trait confidence. Vealey (1986) describes trait sport-confidence as a dispositional construct and state sport-confidence as a state construct with a time reference of "right now". This distinction helps clarification for this study which will focus on state confidence of senior

leaders, i.e. the potential temporary challenge to confidence during the transition to senior leadership, rather than trait (dispositional) confidence.

1.5 Research design and methodology

Given the aim of this investigation to understand the first-person experience of challenges to confidence for senior leaders in transition, I used the phenomenological methodology of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). In IPA, the researcher interprets and makes sense of the meaning that participants make of their experiences (Smith, 2008; Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). This study was positioned within a constructivist epistemology (Crotty, 2015) and an interpretivist research philosophy (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2015).

IPA is a qualitative research approach which is committed to examining how people make sense of their major life experiences (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). IPA examines individual cases of a particular experience, aiming to understand in detail what the experience for that person is like (Smith, 2008), as well as examining convergence and divergence of experience across a reasonably homogeneous sample (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009).

The research comprised two stages. Stage one included semi-structured interviews with eight senior leaders who had experienced a transition to senior leadership in the previous 12-24 months. The aim of the interviews was to understand more about the individual experiences of the leaders of challenges to confidence during senior leadership transition and the role of coaching in supporting them with confidence at this transition point. Stage two included a focus group with four experienced executive coaches. The aim of the focus group was to develop a multi-perspective understanding from the coaches of working with clients who had experienced challenges to confidence during senior leadership transition.

The focus of this study is on the individual experiences of the leaders, with an in-depth investigation in the specific context of transitions. The small sample, while appropriate for such an investigation, does not allow for valid comparison in terms of any particular demographic, such as gender. Although it would have been possible to select participants according to such criteria as gender, for example, the decision was made not to restrict it in this way. I anticipated that it would be difficult to find participants because of the sensitive nature of the research, which was the case (as I describe in section 3.4.1.1). Some demographics, such as gender, nationality and age have been detailed for all participants (see Table 2) in order to give as much information about participants as possible, thus adhering to the important quality criteria of trustworthiness and self-evidential quality (see section 3.8 and Figure 4). In addition, the nature of this in-depth qualitative study allowed me to be open to any factors from the experiences of the leaders that might assume prominence as they emerged. This led to an

opportunity to challenge the popular discourse around confidence being a gender issue. In my practice, I had found that confidence was affected at this transition point for leaders of all genders. This was borne out by the research, as well as other research relating to confidence such as that on Impostor Phenomenon (see section 2.3.5).

The interviews were transcribed then analysed by numerous readings of each individual transcript as well as of field notes. Following this, the transcripts were coded for initial themes, supporting the development of emergent and super-ordinate themes and moving from the particular to the whole and back again (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). The focus group was transcribed, then analysed, paying attention both to the individual level and the group level of analysis, as a form of modified and multi-perspective IPA (Tomkins and Eatough, 2010; Larkin, Shaw and Flowers, 2018).

1.6 Thesis overview

Chapter One sets out the background to the research, an overview of the research and the gaps in the literature, the aims and objectives of this study, key definitions, as well as an overview of the research design and methodology.

Chapter Two provides a critical review of the literature on: leadership transition and the challenging aspects of it for leaders; confidence and how it is understood across the literature (psychology, sport psychology, healthcare and leadership); coaching and how it supports leaders in transition and confidence as an outcome in the coaching process.

Chapter Three sets out the research design and methodology, including the theoretical framework and methodological approach using IPA and multi-perspective IPA. It will explore ethical considerations, quality standards and researcher reflexivity.

Chapters Four to Six detail findings of the research from the individual leader interviews and focus group discussion with executive coaches. Chapter Four explores the findings related to confidence and provides a multi-perspective description of confidence; Chapter Five focuses on the organisational challenges to confidence; and Chapter Six focuses on the intrapersonal challenges to confidence.

Chapter Seven provides a discussion of the findings in relation to literature explored in the literature review as well as additional literature.

Chapter Eight concludes the thesis, with contributions to theoretical knowledge and contribution to coaching practice and to organisational leadership development, limitations of

the research and potential further research areas, and personal reflections on learning from the research process.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this literature review is to gain an understanding of the challenges of leadership transition for leaders and the potential impact on their confidence, as well as considering coaching for leaders in transition, namely how coaching supports them and confidence as an outcome of the coaching process. A further purpose is to explore how confidence is understood across different studies, in order to form a better understanding of this concept as it relates to senior leaders in transition.

An extensive literature review was conducted using Oxford Brookes University's electronic library across several databases including: Web of Science, Emerald, ProQuest, EbscoHost databases including Business Source Complete, as well as Google Scholar. Relevant peer-reviewed articles and grey literature were identified, as well as several print books. The primary search terms and topic areas were: leadership transition, confidence, self-confidence, self-efficacy, executive coaching, leadership coaching, transition coaching and coaching outcomes.

The review of the literature covered primarily the three main fields of psychology, leadership and coaching across which this study is positioned, with a focus also on the sports psychology and healthcare literature where self-efficacy has been particularly well researched and defined. A review of the literature will be presented covering the three following areas:

1. Challenges of leadership transition for the leader (including psychological challenges and changes to leadership identity);
2. Concept of confidence in the following literature: psychology, sport psychology, healthcare, and leadership;
3. Coaching for leaders in transition and confidence as a coaching outcome in the coaching literature.

2.2 Challenges of leadership transition for the leader

The transition to leadership is widely shown to be a period of uncertainty and vulnerability for leaders, with many difficult challenges to navigate (Watkins, 2003; Terblanche, Albertyn, and Van Coller-Peter, 2018a; Terblanche, 2019; Wiggins, 2019). Indeed, failure in leadership transitions is high (Watkins, 2003), with between 27 and 46 percent of executive transitions regarded as failures after two years (Keller and Meaney, 2018). There is a core body of

research and popular literature on the failure of executive transition or executive derailment, though these typically look at the cost to the organisation and not the impact on the individual during the transition. In order to explore the potential impact on individual leaders during leadership transition, it is important to understand some of the challenges that might be experienced as part of this transition.

One of the challenges that leaders face is the lack of preparation for the transition to a new role and as many as 83 percent of global leaders think they are unprepared for their new roles (Keller and Meaney, 2018). It is shown in sport psychology literature that one of the most important sources of self-confidence in athletes is physical/mental preparation (Vealey and Garner-Holman, 1998; Hays, Maynard, Thomas and Bawden, 2007), and also that successful transitions are due in part to preparation for the transition. This is illustrated in a study of role transitions in sport psychology literature where the athletes who prepared fully for retirement by re-investing in new identities ahead of this transition (or decreasing the prominence of their athletic identities) and were able to prevent a major identity crisis and experience a more "successful" transition (Lally, 2007). If adequate preparation for the transition is what helps to make a transition more successful, and preparation helps with self-confidence at least in the field of sport psychology, what impact does not being adequately prepared for the transition have on leaders and their confidence?

Another major challenge is considered to be the lack of concrete feedback (Hill, 1992) which is shown to help the adjustment process in transition (Manderscheid and Ardichvili, 2008). Developmental feedback is rare for those at the top of the organisation and the lack of it, along with the expectations that the new leader will have the capacity to lead in the new situation without a honeymoon period, is one of the key dilemmas that newly promoted senior leaders face (Conger and Fishel, 2007). The concept of self-efficacy will be explored later in this chapter as a related concept to confidence, but it is acknowledged here that feedback, in the form of positive messages from various sources regarding an individual's ability in a specific area, is an important element in building self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). It might therefore be expected that the lack of feedback for newly appointed senior leaders is a contributing factor in any loss of confidence, but this is not explored in the leadership literature.

A distinguishing feature of the transition to senior leadership noted in the leadership literature is the increased visibility and scrutiny (Zaccaro and Klimoski, 2002; Gill, 2017). As explored in one of the main leadership transition models, the leadership pipeline model (Charan, Drotter and Noel, 2011, p.87), visibility at the level of general manager (as opposed to functional manager) is "much more intense from above and especially from below". At this level, leaders

often feel their most exposed and yet they are expected to demonstrate public confidence (McGill, Clarke and Sheffield, 2019).

Anxiety, lack of certainty and stress are also experienced during leadership transition (Wiggins, 2019; Manderscheid and Ardichvili, 2008; Terblanche, Albertyn and Van Coller-Peter, 2018b). These are shown to cause a lack of self-confidence in newly transitioned leaders (Terblanche, Albertyn and Van Coller-Peter, 2018b), though these findings are mentioned briefly and not explored in detail. Beyond this, the loss of confidence of leaders is one of the key findings in a study exploring the experiences of leaders as they transitioned into senior roles (Terblanche, Albertyn and Van Coller-Peter, 2018b). However, research on the impact of senior leadership transitions on leader confidence is not explored anywhere else in the leadership literature despite the challenges outlined so far pertinent to this transition, such as increased visibility and scrutiny, lack of feedback, lack of preparation and uncertainty.

Despite these challenges of leadership transition, and many more besides, organisations are shown to spend little effort in supporting leaders' transition into new roles (Watkins 2003; Wiggins, 2019; Keller and Meaney, 2018). Leaders in transition to senior leadership face extraordinary challenges above and beyond those of normal transitions and arguably need the support that individualised, tailored programmes such as executive coaching can provide, in order to explore the psychological impact on individual leaders and, in particular, on their confidence. In the following section, one of the psychological challenges of leadership transition, in particular the complex process of changes to leadership identity, will be explored further.

2.2.1 Psychological challenges of leadership transition: changes to leader identity

Leadership transition often requires a transformation or change to ways of working, to one's beliefs and behaviours and to what has defined an individual's professional identity thus far (Hill, 1992; Ashforth and Saks, 1995; Watkins, 2009; Snook, Ibarra and Ramo, 2010). Freedman (2011) notes that at each crossroad, managers-in-transition must reinvent or transform themselves to some degree. It is understood that transitions in working identities, particularly when the individual is in a leadership position, can be quite destabilising (Bond and Naughton, 2011).

A transition model created by Terblanche, Albertyn, and Van Coller-Peter (2018a) puts the challenges of leadership transition into five categories: cognitive; behavioural; interpersonal; psychological; systemic. Of interest here are the psychological challenges of transition which, according to Terblanche, Albertyn and Van Coller-Peter (2018a), include learning to deal with

anxiety and loss of identity, as well as fostering self-awareness and increasing their level of emotional intelligence. The psychological challenge of changes to leader identity and loss of identity during transition will now be explored further in an attempt to understand more about the impact on the leader and their confidence.

2.2.2 Leader identity development during leadership transition

With a few exceptions (Ibarra, 1999; Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010; Ibarra and Obodaru, 2016; Gjerde and Ladegard, 2019), there has been little empirical research on leader identity development in relation to leadership transitions and seemingly no research which explores the impact of leader identity work (e.g. having a stronger or clearer leader identity) on the leader's confidence. Leader identity has been defined in numerous ways, most commonly referring to how one thinks of oneself as a leader (Lord and Hall, 2005; Day and Harrison, 2007; DeRue and Ashford, 2010).

Leader identity development is described across the leadership literature as a process of revision, construction, experimentation and internalisation. The process of leader identity work is often defined, based on identity work, as "forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a precarious sense of coherence and distinctiveness" (Svenningsson and Alvesson, 2003, p. 1165). Focusing on leadership transitions, in an empirical study of role transitions to more senior roles for investment bankers and management consultants, Ibarra (1999) suggested that the leader identity development process involves individuals observing role models and copying some of their behaviours, experimenting with provisional selves and evaluating their provisional identity through feedback. In empirical work focusing on leader identity development in a leader development programme, leader identity development is shown to be a process of de-construction then strengthening of leader identity after understanding and absorbing new meanings and social expectations about leadership (Miscenko, Günter and Day, 2017). In an empirical quantitative investigation of leader identity formation, Skinner (2020) proposes a dynamic formation process of the internalisation of leader identity, involving three stages of internalisation: from not identifying as a leader (under-developed), to establishing and acknowledging identity (forming) and then recognising the uniqueness of the leader identity (well-developed).

Much of the leadership literature explores the social construction of leader development and the role that others play in helping leaders to create their new leader identity. De Rue and Ashford (2010) suggested that leader identity is co-constructed in organisations, through a process of leaders claiming and followers granting leader identities, and that it is a reciprocal process, where leader identity is endorsed within the organisation. They therefore proposed

that leader identity is a relational and dynamic concept, building on earlier social interactionism literature on identity (e.g. Goffman, 1959), and conceptualised leadership identity construction across three levels of self-construal: individual internalisation, relational recognition and collective endorsement. In order for the process of claiming and granting leader identity to work effectively, they suggested the importance of having clarity and visibility of leader identity.

In Ibarra's (1999) model of leader identity development, the role of others in the construction of the leader identity of individuals in transition is critical, in particular the importance of feedback from others on the adapted new leader identity, to allow the new leader to adapt or discard the potential leader identity. Whilst the leader identity research mentioned here implicitly suggests a positive process of social construction of leader identity, Petriglieri and Stein (2012) argued that leaders feel the pressure from followers in the organisation concerning how the leader *should* be and that this leader identity work involves resolving the "intrapersonal and interpersonal incongruency between one's personal identity and the leader identity to which one aspires", entailing "crafting, experimenting with, and revising identity narratives or stories about the self" (p. 1220).

The impact on the leader of the potential inherent pressures and reconciliations between personal and leader identity, or of intrapersonal and interpersonal incongruences, and the "undoing, emotional distress, and existential puzzlement" (Ibarra *et al*., 2014, p. 6) in leader identity development work has scarcely been researched. And yet leadership research suggests that transitions involve identity loss, using insights from grief and bereavement literature (Ibarra,1999; Bridges, 2002; Snook, Ibarra and Ramo, 2010; Conroy and O'Leary-Kelly, 2014), which surely suggests that this is a difficult experience for the leader. Some of the leadership research does describe the difficulty of the period of liminality of identity during transitions, a lingering between old and new identities (Ibarra and Obodaru, 2016; Bennett, 2021) and this is seen to be an ambiguous and unstable period for the leader (Conroy and O'Leary-Kelly, 2014; Ashforth, 2001). However, whilst none of this research looks at the impact on the leader's confidence of identity changes during transition, non-empirical studies in the leadership field do acknowledge the process of grieving and withdrawal that may be experienced (grieving the many cherished elements of their previous roles and identities, things they did well and received approbation for) (Freedman, 2011) and the emotional experiences that leaders may experience, making a call for organisations to be aware of this (Conroy and O'Leary-Kelly, 2014). "Identity undoing" is the focus of a study of the danger of identity work in leadership development, showing that new leaders can experience moments of being destabilised, unravelled and deconstructed and the sense of loss and fear that they experience in this process is highlighted (Nicholson and Carroll, 2013) and this suggests that

sufficient attention needs to be paid to supporting the leaders adequately when exploring identity.

The deep psychological work that is needed for supporting leaders in transition which pays attention to identity shifts or transformations has been acknowledged by Snook, Ibarra and Ramo (2010). They argue for the importance of "transitional space" and "holding environments" for new leaders, such as can be found on leadership programmes, and they critique "surface level" skill development for leaders rather than deeper work. The argument for "deep structure" work rather than surface level development programmes for leadership transitions and leader identity development work is also supported by Lord and Hall (2005), although neither they nor Ibarra and her colleagues have explored coaching as a means of achieving this and arguably this could be seen as a more relevant form of "deep structure" work essential to leader identity development. Further research on how executive coaching supports leader identity work has been limited, except for two very recent empirical studies showing how executive coaches can play a fundamental role in the leader identity formation process through dedicated identity work and through adopting a sense-making perspective (Skinner, 2020; Bennett, 2021).

Leadership research suggests that the psychological challenges of leadership transitions, particularly the leader identity work, are complex and important to support. None of the leadership literature explores the impact on the leader of these psychological challenges, nor in particular on their confidence, though recent coaching studies show how important it is to support leader identity work through executive coaching. Further attention should be paid to what the impact of such psychological challenges is on individuals and on their confidence, and how this can be supported through tailored support such as executive coaching, which will be explored later in this chapter.

2.3 The concept of confidence

The concept of confidence is a central concern of this research and it will now be explored in terms of how it is understood across the different literature, including psychology, sport psychology, healthcare and leadership studies. Confidence seems to be a broad term which repeatedly encompasses several related but different concepts, such as self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977; Baron and Morin, 2009), self-belief (Reynolds, 2011; Lancer and Eatough, 2018), self-doubt (Hindmarch, 2008), self-esteem (Bachkirova, 2004) and self-confidence (Hollenbeck and Hall, 2004; White, 2009). Perhaps in part because of the difficulty of defining the concept, there has been a lack of attention to confidence and self-esteem in the coaching literature (Bachkirova, 2004; Hollenbeck and Hall, 2004). No further studies dedicated to the

topic of coaching with issues of confidence have been found since these observations were made over a decade ago. A recent exception to this is in the model for self-confidence for use in executive coaching which gives very helpful clarity on the concept of self-confidence (Kane, Lewis and Yarker, 2021), though it is not clear how coaching informed the research questions. The sport psychology and healthcare literature give a more detailed conceptualisation of self-efficacy and its sources and impact on performance (Hays, Maynard, Thomas and Bawden, 2007) which could help us to understand confidence as a related concept and inform the coaching and leadership fields.

2.3.1 Self-efficacy

Whilst there has been an increasingly large body of research on coaching outcomes in recent years, the majority of this literature that is most closely related to confidence, as a specific outcome, explores self-efficacy (Popper and Lipshitz, 1992; Evers, Browers and Tomic, 2006; Finn, Mason, and Bradley, 2007; Baron and Morin, 2009; Grant, Curtayne and Burton, 2009). It is interesting to note that in the literature search conducted here, the search terms “confidence” and “coaching” led immediately to the term “self-efficacy”.

Self-efficacy is shown to be a related concept to confidence (McCormick, 2001; Shipman and Mumford, 2011) and it is often even used interchangeably (Oney and Oksuzoglu-Guven, 2015) or synonymously with confidence. Self-efficacy theory, developed by Bandura (1977), defines self-efficacy as a person’s belief in his ability to perform a task in a certain specific area (Popper and Lipshitz, 1992). Bandura’s self-efficacy theory is therefore task-specific. Bandura’s theory suggests that expectations of personal efficacy are derived from four principal sources of information: performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion and physiological stages (Bandura, 1977). It describes the learning process that an individual goes through to build confidence, based on feedback from various sources regarding his/her abilities in that specific area, which in turn affect the perception of one’s ability. Feedback is seen to create a high level of self-efficacy in the case of positive messages and successes, and it has the opposite effect in the case of messages of failure (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy is described as unstable or fluctuating (Bandura, 1977; Hollenbeck and Hall, 2004; Manchida and Schaubroeck, 2011). There is clearly a connection between self-efficacy and confidence, and there is much that can be understood about confidence from self-efficacy theory, but the short-term and task-related notion of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977; Baron and Morin, 2009) does not fit with the proposed understanding of confidence, which is not purely tied to a specific task or achievement and is experienced over a more sustained period of time.

General self-efficacy is potentially closer to the proposed understanding of confidence for this study. It is a generalised sense of self-efficacy that refers to a broad and stable sense of behaviours and coping outcomes when the context is less specific and not constrained to a particular task (Luszczynska, Scholz and Schwarzer, 2005). It is seen as a separate construct to task-related self-efficacy (Stajkovic and Luthans, 1998).

In turning more specifically to self-efficacy in leader development**,** Machida and Schaubroeck (2011) argued that the self-efficacy beliefs of leaders play a critical role in their development, though that the role of self-efficacy in leader development is more complex than shown in other studies. They define leader self-efficacy as "leaders' confidence in their abilities, knowledge, and skills in areas needed to lead others effectively" (Machida and Schaubroeck, 2011, p. 460). Self-efficacy according to them – or confidence, a term they use frequently - is therefore still related specifically to a task: leading others effectively. Four self-efficacy concepts that are key to leader development are discussed in their study: preparatory self-efficacy; efficacy spirals; learning self-efficacy and resilient self-efficacy. The authors suggested that fluctuation in self-efficacy beliefs is critical to leader development (as also argued by Bandura) and used the term "efficacy spirals" to refer to the patterns of downward or upward spirals in self-efficacy and performance, followed by an important self-correcting cycle. In addition, their research also addresses contextual factors that influence a leader's self-efficacy, similar to those seen in sport confidence as below, such as assessment or feedback (appraisal, positive encouragement from others) which can increase the self-efficacy of leaders (or lower self-efficacy if it encourages self-doubt in leaders); challenges (requiring an individual to move out of their comfort zone and to master the challenges); and support from others. This is helpful to understand, as it gives us more understanding of the importance of self-efficacy in leader development and, whilst still task-related and therefore less fitting with the proposed more generalised understanding of confidence for this research, it also raises the importance of self-efficacy beliefs impacting performance and other factors influencing self-efficacy, such as feedback and support from others.

The research highlighted helps us to understand more about self-efficacy in order to gain more understanding of the concept of confidence, proposed in this study as a related but distinct concept given the task- and situation-specific nature of self-efficacy. The concept of generalised self-efficacy is closer to the concept of confidence proposed in this study. However, it is the sport psychology literature which provides a clearer understanding of the concept of confidence and which will now be explored.

2.3.2 Sport confidence in sport psychology literature

Research in the sport psychology literature has certainly paid more attention to defining and understanding confidence or self-efficacy (Hollenbeck and Hall, 2004) and this, building on Bandura's self-efficacy theory, has given us a very helpful conceptualisation of sport confidence and its components. So much of this could inform our understanding of confidence and its antecedents in the leadership and coaching fields, specifically in relation to leaders in transition, and it merits further attention.

The work of Vealey (1986) is prominent in sport confidence and this has influenced a significant body of further recent research (Vealey and Garner-Holman, 1998; Hays, Maynard, Thomas and Bawden, 2007). Vealey and Garner-Holman (1998) point out that self-confidence is widely acclaimed to be the most influential psychological characteristic influencing performance in sport. They created a conceptual framework of sport confidence which aimed to understand sources of self-confidence in sport. Their study of college athletes showed that there were nine sources of self-confidence in athletes, in the following order of importance: physical/mental preparation, social support, mastery, demonstration of ability, physical self-presentation, environmental comfort, vicarious experience, situational favourableness, and coach's leadership (Vealey and Garner-Holman, 1998). The conceptualisation of sport confidence helps us to understand what leads to self-confidence in sport and this detailed understanding is missing in any other field besides healthcare, which will be explored next.

Building on Vealey's work in understanding sport confidence, Hays, Maynard, Thomas and Bawden (2007) noted that little research had been done using top elite performers (as opposed to college or university performers). World class athletes were likely to be subjected to additional organisational stressors that were not present in lower-level competition and this might impact confidence levels further. In a meta-analysis looking at anxiety and self-confidence and their relationship to sport performance, Woodman and Hardy (2003) also found that the mean effect sizes for anxiety and self-confidence were higher for higher-level athletes than for lower-level athletes. This understanding of the impact on confidence for elite performers in sport might help us to understand what happens to confidence levels at different levels of seniority and ability more broadly, including within organisations.

Whilst Bandura's work has shown a clear positive relationship between self-efficacy and performance, some research challenges the linear relationship that he proposes, for example Beattie *et al.* (2010); Vancouver and Kendall (2006); Bandura and Locke (2003); and Woodman *et al.* (2010), who show that a reduction in self-confidence (or a "little self-doubt") leads to an increase in effort which leads to an increase in performance. It should not be assumed then that a loss of confidence always has a negative impact on performance.

In a study which defines and contextualises the characteristics of sport-confidence (Kingston, Lane and Thomas, 2010), it was shown that having a *general* sense of confidence in one's ability to perform was not enough to perform successfully, and actually elite sports people needed resilient and robust confidence longer term in order to overcome setbacks. Robust confidence is described as a multidimensional concept "that is able to absorb setbacks and fluctuations in an athlete's levels of day-to-day confidence" (Thomas, Lane and Kingston, 2011 p.198). This study addresses the durability of confidence, which has not been studied elsewhere, and brings in notions of resilience and the development of the strength of confidence over time. Each of these could be of importance in understanding more about confidence in senior leaders in transition.

These studies in sport psychology literature, building on Bandura's self-efficacy theory, help to give a clarity to the concept of confidence that is not found in other literature, in particular regarding the importance of the sources of confidence and the impact on performance. This might be because the emphasis in sport psychology is on short-term easily observable results and performances, compared with the long-term complex performances of leaders in organisations (Hollenbeck and Hall, 2004). Although the context is so different from that of senior leaders, and the prime focus for them is not on competitive performance, there are many elements of the concept of sport confidence that could be explored for leaders in transition, such as whether adequate preparation, support from others, mastery, demonstration of ability, vicarious experience, and the role of the coach have a bearing on their confidence and, indeed, whether some of these sources are even present for these leaders.

2.3.3 Confidence in the healthcare literature

In the healthcare literature there is an appetite to try to understand more about the concept of confidence, including two concept analyses: one of self-confidence in nursing (White, 2009) and the other of professional confidence in relevance to occupational therapists (Holland, Middleton and Uys, 2012).

Holland, Middleton and Uys (2012) noted that studies showed newly qualified occupational therapists experienced a loss of confidence when first entering the work environment and that, although the loss of confidence was often noted as one of the findings of these studies, yet again no direct definition of professional confidence could be found. Holland, Middleton and Uys (2012) find that professional confidence underpins competence and that both are linked to professional identity. Confidence and self-confidence are differentiated: confidence is defined as "a belief in one's own abilities, self-assurance" and self-confidence as "a self-

assessed belief….in one's own powers, judgements". The authors showed that some of the factors impacting confidence are: transitional periods, change, unrealistic expectations, uncertainty, anxiety, and stress. They summarise that there are four components to professional confidence: affect (feeling at ease, feeling good about oneself); reflective (looking within and reflecting on self); higher cognitive functioning (intellectual insight, confirming and consolidating from feedback and reflective practice); action (doing, taking initiative and seeing through to fruition). As in sport confidence, Holland, Middleton and Uys (2012) suggest that mastery and perceived success, as well as support from others and feedback, are important antecedents for professional confidence.

Whilst in sport confidence, the consequences of having more confidence are explored in terms of better performance, in the concept analysis by Holland, Middleton and Uys (2012) it is suggested that consequences of such in the healthcare literature are broader and more multi-faceted: taking more risk, greater learning, growing as a professional, thinking more broadly as well as critically and being more engaged in work, which in turn would be likely to contribute to greater job satisfaction, as well as less anxiety and stress.

In a concept analysis of self-confidence in nursing, White (2009) explored the nursing, education, business and psychology literature to understand self-confidence. She looked at the antecedents and consequences of self-confidence and included past experience as a key component of confidence, alongside self-reflection. The concept analysis shows that self-confidence is an essential part of the skill set for effective leadership, making the connection between self-confidence, leadership and effectiveness. What recurred "overwhelmingly" in the definitions of self-confidence in the concept analysis across this wide range of literature was that self-confidence was also task-specific, like self-efficacy, and that it was difficult to discriminate between the terms self-confidence and self-efficacy. To help develop self-confidence, other important factors were: having an internal locus of control to help one become self-aware and lessen anxiety; persistence when faced with difficult situations; adequate preparation; recognising when to ask for help; acquisition of knowledge; and support.

These concept analyses explore how confidence is understood in the healthcare literature and bring us more clarity over the concept and its related concepts, as well as important antecedents and consequences of confidence. There are several similarities to how confidence is understood in the sport psychology literature, particularly including mastery, feedback and having supportive relationships, but also some new understanding, such as the components of professional confidence (affect, reflective, higher cognitive functioning, action).

The consequences of having more confidence, beyond better performance such as in sport psychology, were also understood to also include taking more risks and being more engaged at work. This brings in the question of the impact of having more confidence as well as what this might mean for senior leaders in transition and, through the components of professional confidence, potentially gives us new understanding of the concept to relate to leaders in transition.

2.3.4 Confidence and leadership

In a review of self-confidence and leader performance, Hollenbeck and Hall (2004) showed surprise that self-confidence hasn't been researched more in the leadership literature and they suggest that this is partly because the research literature on self-confidence (e.g. Bandura's work on self-efficacy) has not been easily accessible ("both dense and abstract – a difficult combination" p. 255) and far removed from most organisational life. Self-confidence is defined similarly to self-efficacy in terms of one's belief in carrying out a task, so it is task-specific and changeable. According to Hollenbeck and Hall, self-confidence is based on: a leader's actual experience of having done something before; modelling (watching others do something); social comparison and social persuasion (for example a boss's confidence in them). This is similar to how confidence in the sport psychology literature is conceptualised, as the previous section shows us.

Other researchers have explored confidence in leadership and have shown it as a key positive trait for leaders to possess. In an exploration of leadership traits, Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991) defined self-confidence among the six traits defining effective leaders (including drive, desire to lead, honesty and integrity, cognitive ability, and industry knowledge). Confidence is shown as being important in convincing followers, overcoming setbacks, overcoming uncertainty and taking risks, in gaining trust from others and in decision making. According to Kirkpatrick and Locke, "a person riddled with self-doubt would never be able to take the necessary actions nor command the respect of others" (Kirkpatrick and Locke, 1991, p. 54). Self-confidence is included in many of the definitions of what makes a leader effective (Goleman, 1998; Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee, 2001; Yukl, 2001). Goleman described self-confidence as a hallmark of self-awareness, such that the self-confident leader is aware of his/her capabilities, knows when to ask for help, plays to their strengths, takes calculated risks and doesn't over stretch themselves and potentially set themselves up for failure (Goleman, 1998). In an exploration of the effects of self-confidence on leader behaviours, Axelrod and Marques (2017) included a wide range of behaviours, such as: goal-setting and taking risks; motivation and performance; psychological empowerment; management of emotions; executive presence; and authenticity.

There are several studies of over-confidence in leaders which show the less appealing facets of hubris and narcissism as related concepts and as a darker side of the concept of self-confidence. In an article exploring over-confidence in leaders and the detrimental effects of such on leader performance, Shipman and Mumford (2011, pp. 650-651) defined over-confidence as an "overestimation in judging one's ability to do something", building on the concept of self-efficacy. In a review of hubristic leadership, over-confidence is seen as a way of operationalising and measuring hubris, though distinct from it, described as a "cognitive bias towards over-estimating the likely positive outcomes of future events" and "an untenable faith in one's ability to achieve target outcomes" (Sadler-Smith, Akstinaite, Robinson and Wray, 2017, pp. 528 & 531). Over-confidence can lead to derailment (Wiggins, 2019), especially if it discourages leaders from seeking feedback and support early in their new role (Conger and Fischel, 2007), and is clearly seen as a dangerous and unattractive opposite to confidence. This raises the question of over-confidence in leaders in transition and whether they experience it, or perhaps whether they carefully manage themselves such that they avoid being seen as over-confident, given the negative connotations associated with it.

2.3.5 Impostor Phenomenon and confidence

A term which frequently comes up in relation to confidence is 'Impostor Phenomenon' (also called Imposter Syndrome). There is significant evidence that Impostor Phenomenon (IP) is strongly correlated with low self-esteem (Cozzarelli and Major, 1990; Sonnak and Towell, 2001; Schubert and Bowker, 2019) and some evidence that IP is correlated with lower self-confidence (Want and Kleitman, 2006; Lane, 2015). When IP was first introduced, there was a lot of interest in the popular press, with *Time Magazine* suggesting that some 70% of individuals will experience signs and symptoms of IP at least once in their life (Cozzarelli and Major, 1990), though this has never been tested empirically. Nonetheless, it illustrates the widespread interest and recognition of the topic. In this section, Impostor Phenomenon will be explored by focusing on the elements of the phenomenon that might relate to what has been understood about confidence/self-efficacy so far, and in an attempt to understand how relevant it might be to senior leaders in transition.

The Impostor Phenomenon concept was first introduced by Clance and Imes (1978) to describe the intense feelings of intellectual and professional fraudulence experienced by high-achieving women in particular, though more recently this has been shown to affect both genders, with no association between IP and gender (Rohrmann, Bechtoldt and Leonhardt, 2016). It is an internal or secret belief (Clance and Imes, 1978; Clance *et al*., 1995) and despite objective external evidence to the contrary (such as stellar academic achievements or positive

feedback from others), individuals suffering with IP are unable to accept their success. The core characteristics of the IP have been summarised as (1) “the sense of having fooled others into overestimating one’s ability, (2) the attribution of success to some other factor than intelligence or ability, and (3) the fear of being exposed as a fraud” (Rohrmann, Bechtoldt and Leonhardt, 2016, p.1). As such, those suffering with IP are convinced that others overestimate their abilities; they go through life believing that they are impostors and live in fear of their fraudulence being found out and exposed. Clance (1985) refers frequently to the mask of the Impostor which reveals a very different external face to what is felt internally, and the notion of acting is prevalent in some studies of IP (LaDonna, Ginsburg and Watling, 2018).

The importance of providing feedback in building self-efficacy has been explored above, and it is also shown to be an important part of the concept of IP, though in a quite different way: in the self-efficacy process, feedback from different sources in turn affects the perception of one’s ability and positive feedback is seen to create a high level of self-efficacy, whereas it is widely understood that individuals suffering from IP cannot take on board positive feedback from external sources and that positive feedback does not erase self-doubt (Clance and Imes, 1978; Lane, 2015; LaDonna, Ginsburg and Watling, 2018).

Clance and Imes (1978) articulated a pattern of behaviour, or a cycle, with those suffering from IP, where an individual is faced with a new situation or challenge and is likely to respond by over-preparing or procrastinating until the last moment, either of which will give them the reason for being an impostor by forfeiting the affirmation of a job well done. This is also referred to as “self-handicapping” (defined as “placing an obstacle in the path of an evaluation, so that possible failure can be blamed on the obstacle”, Want and Kleitman, 2006, p. 963) and sometimes, in doing so, individuals will prevent themselves from moving to higher managerial levels. Kets De Vries (2005) calls such individuals “neurotic impostors” and also describes this pattern of setting impossibly high standards, living with the fear of being “found out” and never allowing themselves to achieve the highest levels of management even though others would promote them into those positions frequently. Of interest here is whether IP is experienced by some senior leaders to the extent that it is a life-long deep pattern of working, such as described above, or whether instead they experience some of the elements associated with IP or “impostor fears” (Sakulku and Alexander, 2011). The assumption will be made that leaders who have already reached a senior level in organisations are unlikely to experience a “clinical level of self-perceived intellectual fraudulence” (Sakulku and Alexander, 2011, p. 76) and may instead experience just some of the elements of IP. This distinction is illustrated in a study of IP amongst physicians moving to new roles (LaDonna, Ginsburg and Watling, 2018), where several (though not all) participants identified that they suffered with some elements of IP. The study showed that self-doubt affects clinicians at all career stages, but that IP occurred

only at the extreme end of a spectrum of self-doubt, and concluded that transitions, challenges, and increased responsibilities triggered self-doubt.

Whilst the concept of IP is shown to have a relationship with lower self-esteem, self-doubt and confidence and to share many aspects of the concept of self-efficacy such as the importance of feedback (even if IP victims are unable to hear it and dismiss it), it seems that the pattern of working for those suffering with lifelong IP and lack of confidence inherent is so extreme that it is unlikely that senior leaders will be amongst them. What remains to be seen is whether some elements of IP such as the sense of fraudulence, the need to put on a mask and to act in front of others in order to hide the internal fears, is found amongst senior leaders and activated at the point of transition.

2.4 Coaching and its role in supporting leaders in transition

The difficulty of leadership transition for leaders may not be recognised in the leadership literature, but it does seem to be recognised in the coaching literature, specifically with agreement that coaching at the leadership transition stage can provide important, timely and powerful support (Witherspoon and Cannon, 2004; Sutton, 2008; Bond and Naughton, 2011; Weinstock, 2011; Gill, 2017; Terblanche, Albertyn, and Van Coller-Peter, 2017; 2018). Witherspoon and Cannon (2004) noted that leaders in transition face a different set of issues than are involved in more “typical” coaching assignments, and they argue for the importance of providing coaching for leaders at points of leadership transition, specifically naming it “transition coaching”, a term which has become more widely used since then (Terblanche, 2019; Barker, 2017). However, despite this, there is not yet a lot of research on executive coaching for leaders in transition (Barker, 2017; Bond and Naughton, 2011), which is a surprise and a disappointment given the challenges of leadership transition and the clear need for support at this transition. Such research would allow us to understand more about what leaders in transition need, particularly psychologically, what specific elements of the coaching process would be the most useful, and how this might differ from coaching for leaders at other stages of their careers. The small body of research that does explore how coaching supports senior leaders in transition will be outlined below.

Exploring the experiences of C-suite leaders in transition and of being coached at this stage, McGill, Clarke and Sheffield (2019) found that the volume and complexity of the challenges during leadership transition were significantly greater at this level of seniority compared to previous career transitions. External coaching was of critical importance to the leaders and it helped them to manage frustrations, solve problems and avoid pitfalls. Coaching gave the leaders a safe space to help them reframe and resolve problems, to gain new perspectives

and to be open and honest. The sense of loss that Ibarra and others have explored for leaders in transition was also supported in this study, suggesting that it was important for leaders in transition to explore the negative feelings of loss during coaching in order to arrive at a more positive psychological state.

In a study of coaching for senior leaders in transition in the NHS, Gill (2017) found that coaching provided a supportive and reflective space, especially early in their transition, allowing them to express their feelings of anxiety and self-doubt in relation to the intense pressure of high expectations and scrutiny in the new senior role. It was also shown to help the process of "letting go" of old skills and developing new skills and developing a new role identity. This is interesting because it raises the question of the timing of coaching and shows that coaching at an early stage of the transition is very helpful. The timing of coaching for leaders in transition was also explored by Bond and Naughton (2011) in their review of transition coaching literature and case studies and they suggested that coaches should be appointed early in the process so that the new leader can have coaching before, during and after the first critical few months in post. Other than this, to my knowledge, there are no other studies that explore the timing of transition coaching.

There is some focus in the literature on the importance of coaching to help leaders in transition through the coach prompting critical reflection and challenging previous assumptions that may no longer be helpful in the new role (Barker, 2017; Freedman, 2011; Terblanche, Albertyn and Van Coller-Peter, 2018). Executive coaching is also recommended for helping "distressed managers-in-transition" by normalising their responses at a difficult time (Freedman, 2011) though it should be noted that this comes from a review of the leadership pipeline concept and is not based on empirical work.

There are some references in the coaching literature to structured programmes for coaching leaders in transition, for example Sutton (2008), who suggested a six-step process, or Bond and Naughton (2011) who created a transition planning tool, including transition coaching as a key element. However, neither are based on empirical research: Sutton's process was based on recommendations in the field and Bond and Naughton's tool was recommended following a SWOT analysis of leadership transition coaching literature and case studies. Bond and Naughton's tool is simplistic and looks like a standard coaching tool which could be applied to any individual in an organisation; it does not seem like it has been tailored to senior leaders in any way, nor leaders in transition, and does not include the psychological challenges that such leaders will encounter. There is a need for more empirically-driven research on leadership transition coaching and on any programmes or tools to support this. One transition coaching model which does offer this is that created by Terblanche, Albertyn and Van Coller-Peter

(2018) who addressed the lack of transition coaching in corporate South Africa. They created a Transformative Transition Coaching model based on Mezirow's transformative learning theory (1978), based on empirical research, with the aim of identifying and transforming problematic perspectives held by the transitioning leader. The framework helps newly transitioned leaders to look at the challenges in their new role before exploring and identifying problematic perspectives that they might hold through a reflective process, creating an action plan to practice new behaviours in order to change their problematic perspective and embed the new perspective.

Despite the paucity of research on coaching leaders in transition, findings point to the critical role that coaching can play at this stage. Very little research explores in depth the importance of the psychological focus that leaders might need at this stage through the kind of deep structure work that has been proposed in some of the leadership transition literature (Snook, Ibarra and Ramo, 2010; Lord and Hall, 2005). A more detailed understanding is needed of how coaching, as a tailored deep-structure approach, supports leaders in transition with the challenges of the transition to senior leadership, particularly the psychological challenges.

2.5 Confidence (self-efficacy) as a coaching outcome in the coaching process

The concept of confidence and its related terms have not been explored much in the coaching literature, with the exception of the very recent study of self-confidence in executive coaching (Kane, Lewis and Yarker, 2021), though there is a small body of literature which looks at confidence or self-efficacy as an outcome of the coaching process, as will be explored in this section which will discuss it across the coaching literature.

In her exploration of the self-concept, Bachkirova (2004) expressed surprise at the lack of attention to confidence and self-esteem specifically in the coaching and mentoring literature, as well as in management and organisational behaviour literature. She suggested that this may be explained by it being an internal state, which may not explicitly affect one's behaviour and performance. Bachkirova differentiated between the terms 'confidence' and 'self-efficacy' by the inclusion of the feeling component (Bachkirova, 2004 p.30), as well as the term "self-esteem" as "feeling good about oneself in some particular area of one's life" and "self-worth" as an "overall cognitive and emotional attitude towards oneself as a person" (Bachkirova, 2004 p.31). Given that it is also asserted that the themes of confidence and self-esteem in coaching are often present in one form or another (Maxwell and Bachkirova, 2010), it is even more of a surprise that there has been a lack of attention to confidence in coaching and a lack of attempt to understand more about how coaching works with confidence.

Most of the literature on coaching outcomes that is most closely related to confidence in leadership coaching explores self-efficacy (Popper and Lipshitz, 1992; Evers, Browers and Tomic, 2006; Finn, Mason and Bradley, 2007; Baron and Morin, 2009; Moen and Allgood, 2009; Grant, Curtayne and Burton, 2009). Popper and Lipshitz (1992) argued that self-efficacy is the key psychological variable in coaching and they looked at a number of features in executive coaching which support this, including the importance of the provision of feedback from the coach and the focus on clear goals, allowing mastery and the chance to show successful achievement. They differentiate self-confidence clearly from self-efficacy, suggesting that self-efficacy is more "amenable to change than general and amorphous concepts such as "self-confidence"" (Popper and Lipshitz, 1992). The self-efficacy coaching outcome studies that exist are largely quantitative and they mostly look at self-efficacy in relation to setting goals (Evers, Browers and Tomic, 2006; Baron and Morin, 2009; Grant, Curtayne and Burton, 2009). There are very few qualitative studies which show increased confidence as a coaching outcome, and even fewer which explore this in relation to leadership transition. This means that there is no real understanding of working with confidence from the perspective of leaders (or indeed coaches). The quantitative studies that explore increased self-efficacy as an outcome pay so little attention to self-efficacy itself that little is understood about it other than as a way of measuring a client's ability to achieve goals and therefore showing the effectiveness of the coaching as a return on investment. Self-efficacy, then, is seen as a way of measuring other concepts and showing the effectiveness of coaching, but what of self-efficacy – or confidence - in and of itself?

The mixed methods study by Grant, Curtayne and Burton (2009), exploring the effectiveness of coaching, is an interesting example of where a quantitative study measured increased self-efficacy in relation to goal-setting through coaching but where the qualitative comments from participants referred to confidence rather than self-efficacy. Despite the qualitative comments showing that increased confidence was the most important outcome from the coaching, there is no further attention paid to the concept other than one illustrative comment which shows how one leader had gained confidence (shown through a 360-degree feedback process). This also showed that the increased confidence through self-awareness equipped the leader to go back into meetings and manage staff with more confidence; so confidence in oneself helped the leader to act with confidence.

The importance of research into self-efficacy as a coaching outcome is well understood because the connection between self-efficacy and performance has been demonstrated frequently (Baron and Morin, 2009). For example, the meta-analysis of 114 studies by Stajkovic and Luthans (1998) showed a significant correlation between self-efficacy and work performance, which translated into a 28 percent improvement in work performance (Baron

and Morin, 2009). Alongside an increase in performance, increased self-efficacy also contributed to increased adaptation to stress and organisational changes, creativity and productivity and idea generation (Baron and Morin, 2009). This helps us to understand more about the benefits of increased self-efficacy generally, and when this is combined with understanding from the concept analysis of self-efficacy in the healthcare literature outlined above (Holland, Middleton and Uys, 2012), several different ways in which increased self-efficacy can impact an individual, beyond increased performance, can be seen.

Using qualitative and quantitative research methods, Ladegard and Gerde (2014) explored whether coaching may increase a leader's general feeling of mastery of his/her role (what they then refer to as leader role efficacy). They also studied the perspective of coaches working with leaders and found agreement amongst them that as the leaders became more aware of their values, strengths and weaknesses and experimented with new behaviours, they became more self-confident. Using elements of Bandura's self-efficacy theory, they argued that leader role efficacy could be developed through various ways in coaching: breaking goals into manageable steps; reflecting upon ways to use their strengths to address challenges; challenging them to act and to see new perspectives. This study is helpful, firstly because it gives us a view from coaches themselves of what helps to build confidence in the coaching process for leaders, and also because it shows what contributes to confidence (largely self-awareness) and the impact in turn of this (leaders experimenting with new behaviours*).*

Furthering our understanding of confidence, and how confidence might impact further changes, is a study by Wales (2003) which showed that a key benefit of coaching was confidence (at times described interchangeably as self-confidence and self-esteem) and that increasing confidence was seen as an internal process, which then stimulated external competencies. The internal change and impact on external behaviours was a key focus of this study, showing that increased confidence had been noticed externally by colleagues, which also helped managers to bring more of themselves into the workplace (through more clarity on what they stood for and being able to link their beliefs and values to their work), further impacting their ability to make tougher decisions. This is interesting because it shows a process of internal understanding which helps the client to *feel* more confident, which then impacts an external behaviour. It brings to the fore some understanding about how the confidence process might work and how coaching helps this process. Another study which suggests that increased confidence impacts further areas of change is that of Kombarakaran, Yang, Baker and Fernandes (2008), which found that 72% of executives reported that coaching increased their confidence. Whilst this was the first finding that they reported, and they repeatedly referred to increased confidence as an outcome of the coaching, they did not explore it in any further detail nor make links between increased confidence and the five areas

of executive change that followed. This perhaps suggests that it is difficult to make explicit how confidence impacts further outcomes.

The qualitative studies which do explore confidence in coaching, including a very small number which study leaders in transition, bring us a more detailed understanding of how coaching helps with confidence. In a study of resilience in leadership, a finding was that coaching enabled the leaders to regain confidence (defined as both self-belief and confidence), by bringing back the inner self and through being able to take a wider perspective on difficult situations (Lawton-Smith, 2015). Confidence as the key benefit of coaching is explored in a study using IPA (Gyllensten and Palmer, 2014), though it is not clear whether this was amongst senior leaders or more junior employees. The findings showed that increasing confidence through coaching helped to improve job performance, with more assertive behaviour and benefits outside work. Disappointingly, this research gives no detail at all about *how* coaching helped with confidence. In their research on coaching high achievers, and exploring the elements of the coaching process which help to increase confidence, Jones and Spooner (2006) found that such individuals generally need constant positive reinforcement of their skills, knowledge and competencies and that such reinforcement is expected by them from a well-respected and trusted coach. This reinforcement and feedback, and the role of the coach, concurs with sport literature where the coach and feedback are both important sources of confidence, as shown above. Again showing the importance of the source of support, in a study of self-doubt amongst coaching clients, Hindmarch (2009) found that an important element in helping clients overcome self-doubt was the positive support from coaches. These studies suggest, then, the importance of the coach themselves in the confidence process, through the support that they provide, and it would be interesting to understand more about the role of the coach in this process. In a qualitative study looking at the benefits of coaching amongst university undergraduates, confidence was a “near unanimous achievement of coaching” (Lancer and Eatough, 2018, p. 84) and it showed that the following helped with increasing confidence: increase in conviction of what was important, through the opportunity to articulate thoughts out loud; the coach challenging limiting beliefs; reassurance from coaches, and then internalising the reassurance themselves; and validating their own solutions. Similarly, in research on the impact of coaching for new senior leaders in the NHS, Gill (2017) found that the use of challenge in coaching, as well as providing a space in which to off-load, helped most to increase confidence and self-belief.

Of particular relevance to this research question, Reynolds (2011), in a study of the impact of coaching for newly appointed leaders in their first 12-18 months in role, found that coaching helped to enhance self-belief in the leaders’ abilities to make positive changes in the

organisation, to build confidence in their abilities and to create a new identity for themselves within the role. Already explored earlier in relation to how coaching supports senior leaders in transition, the McGill, Clarke and Sheffield (2019) study of C-suite leaders who had received coaching during their recent transitions showed that increased confidence was a clear outcome for all of the leaders, as was strengthened leadership identity, although there was no perceived link explored between strengthened identity and confidence, which would have been interesting to understand. Furthering our understanding of the pressures upon leaders and the impact of this on confidence was the finding that leaders felt that they had to demonstrate public confidence and capability just at the time when they were feeling most exposed, and that coaching provided a crucial confidential space for this discrepancy and pressure to be explored.

What is evident in all of these studies is that, although they show us that confidence is an explicit outcome of coaching, and some consider how coaching helps with confidence, none of these studies look at confidence as the *main* research interest. Our understanding of confidence as a concept and how coaching works with confidence is therefore limited.

2.6 Summary

This literature review shows that the transition to senior leadership is challenging and difficult for leaders but that there is very little understanding of the impact of such on leaders themselves. There is some interesting research on some of the psychological challenges of the transition, in particular the difficulty of changes to leadership identity and the importance of working with leaders through deep structure work to help them to understand and acknowledge these changes, but it would really help coaches to understand what impact the psychological challenges have on leaders themselves in order to be able to support them properly. Coaching for leaders in transition is shown to be recognised as critically important but there is very little research on this and the research that exists does not differentiate substantially between the challenges of transition to senior leadership and previous transitions. It is argued that the challenges at this transition point are significantly more difficult and likely to impact confidence.

Confidence is seen as a broad term which encompasses several related but different concepts, most notably self-efficacy, which is used in particular in sport psychology and healthcare literature and from which it is possible to gain some clarity of the concept, including sources that contribute to self-efficacy and its impact on performance. Although confidence is a similar concept to self-efficacy, and is often used interchangeably in studies across all related literature, the concept of confidence in this study in relation to senior leaders in

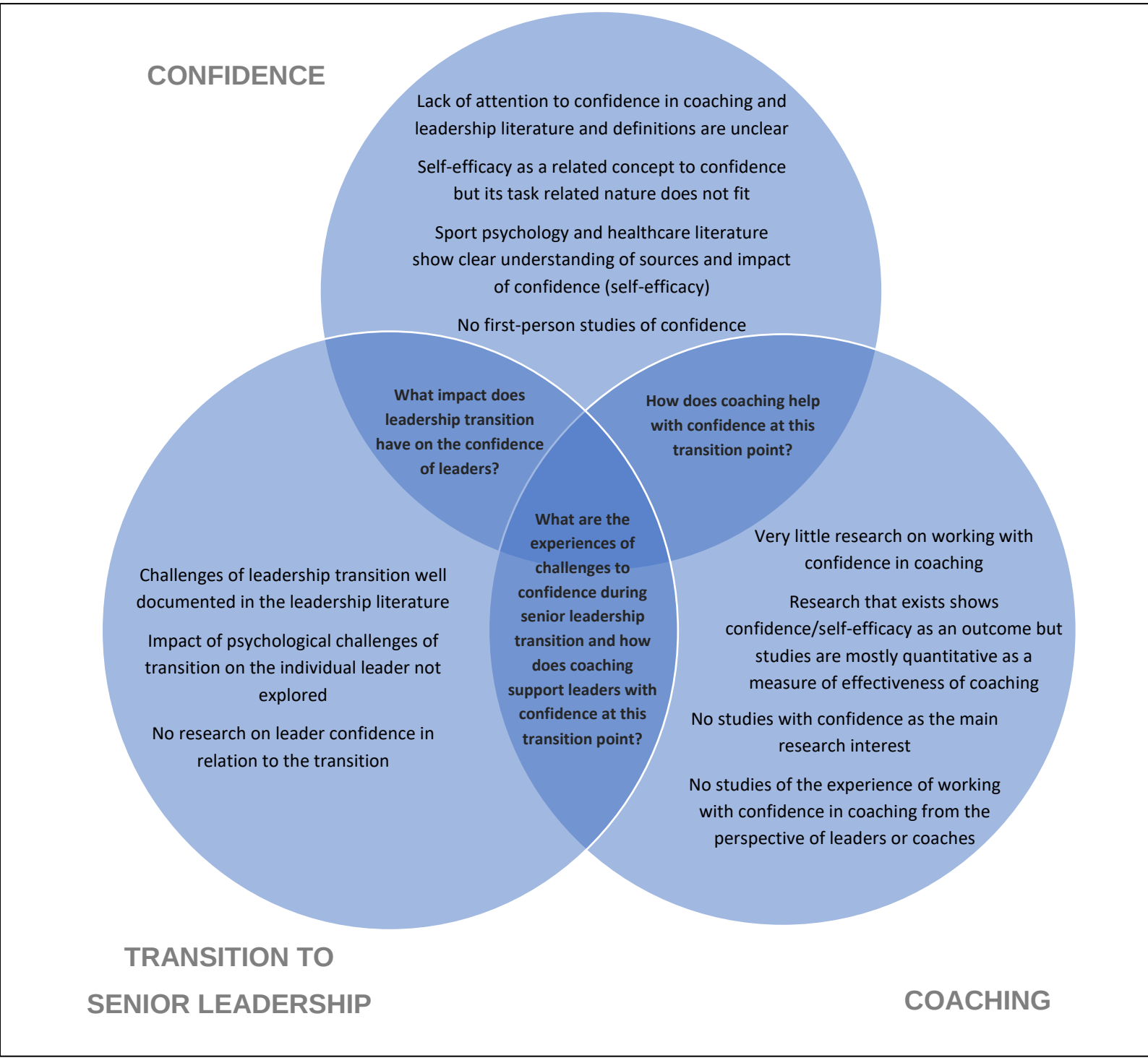
transition does not fit with the concept of self-efficacy in its short-term and task-related nature. General self-efficacy, which is not situation specific, is seen as closer to the proposed understanding of confidence for this study. However, the understanding of self-efficacy for sport confidence needs to be explored further to help us understand more about confidence in relation to senior leadership in transition, most notably the importance of adequate preparation, feedback, support from others, mastery, demonstration of ability, vicarious experience, and the role of coaches as sources of confidence. Several interesting aspects of confidence are shown in relation to leadership, in particular the impact of confidence on leadership effectiveness, as well as the dangers of over-confidence in leaders. Confidence has also been explored in relation to the notion of Impostor Phenomenon, which might be of relevance to senior leaders. In summary, confidence is difficult to define, and it would be helpful to have a clearer definition of the concept, which seems so important for the effectiveness (and potentially well-being) of senior leaders.

The concept of confidence in the coaching literature has been paid very little attention. Studies which explore confidence as an outcome of coaching most typically look at self-efficacy and measure it quantitatively, mostly as a way of measuring the effectiveness of coaching, but they do not explore self-efficacy in and of itself. There are very few qualitative studies which show increased confidence as a coaching outcome, and even fewer which explore this in relation to leadership transition. There is therefore no real understanding of working with confidence from the perspective of leaders themselves or of coaches working with such leaders. Furthermore, with the exception of one very recent coaching study (Kane, Lewis and Yarker, 2021), the qualitative studies that exist do not look at confidence as the *main* research interest and our understanding of confidence as a concept and how coaching works with confidence is therefore limited.

In summary, there is a real need for qualitative research which gives us a detailed understanding of the experience of challenges to confidence in the transition to senior leadership from the perspective of leaders themselves and of coaches working with them, where confidence is the main focus of the study. This will give us a crucial understanding of the concept of confidence as it relates to this transition point and a clarity which is missing across the leadership and coaching literature, in order to enable coaches and those working with senior leaders in transition to work as effectively as possible.

(See conceptual map below which shows the three distinct and overlapping areas of relevance to the literature review)

Figure 1: Conceptual map of literature review



Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will discuss the theoretical framework in which the research is situated, the methodological qualitative approach of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), as well as all aspects of research design including participant recruitment, data collection and data analysis. I will discuss the ethical challenges I sought to address, as well as how I considered quality standards and researcher reflexivity.

3.2 Theoretical framework

3.2.1 Beliefs and assumptions

Understanding one's own assumptions, values and position is an important stage prior to making these explicit in the research (Elliott, Fischer and Rennie,1999). I realise that three different strands from my background inform my research: academically, through my undergraduate degree in interpreting and analysing meaning and themes in French/Italian literature, with a clear focus on language; privately, as a cellist with a continuing passion for music, used to thinking about how to interpret the music and the meaning that I want to communicate to the audience; and professionally, as an executive coach working closely with individuals and their human lived experience (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). All of these strands have led me to phenomenological study and a constructivist epistemology (Crotty, 2015) within an interpretivist research philosophy (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2015).

3.2.2 Interpretivist research philosophy

Interpretivism is closely linked to constructivism (Gray, 2014). It reflects the distinctiveness of humans and focuses on the *understanding* of human behaviour rather than an explanation of it (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Schwandt, 1994). Interpretivists emphasise the meaning-making of humans (Bryman and Bell, 2011) and interpretivist research aims to create "new, richer understandings and interpretations of social worlds and contexts" (Saunders, Lewis and Thornill, 2015 p.140). Phenomenology, as one strand of interpretivist research, will be discussed later in this chapter.

3.2.3 Constructivism

My assumptions are that reality is experienced and interpreted through meaning-making. This situates my research in a constructivist epistemology, with relativism – the belief that entities exist as "reality" in the minds of individuals but depend on human interpretation – as "the basic ontological presupposition of constructivism" (Lincoln and Guba, 2013 p. 39). Meaning-making activities are of central interest to constructivists (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). In constructivist research, the meaning of the phenomena under investigation is co-constructed by participants (Rodwell, 1998), though the emphasis is "placed on the *individual* or social context in the interpretation phase" (Denicolo, Long, Bradley-Cole, 2016) as opposed to social constructivist research which, though closely aligned to constructivism, places the emphasis on how group meaning is created and how a consensus is reached based on shared meanings (Gray, 2014).

My intention in using a group methodology with the focus group was to explore how meaning was created first and foremost at an individual level, as inherent in IPA (see below), and how this was either shared, not shared or developed within the group, and therefore I did not use a social constructivist approach. Furthermore, social constructionists give primacy to "relational, linguistic and social factors in the development of the individual person" (Denicolo, Long, Bradley-Cole, 2016 p. 29), while I did not intend to prioritise those factors in this study. Social constructivism takes a critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge (Burr, 2015), for example about gender and language. Whilst this study could have taken a critical stance towards gender in relation to confidence in leadership transitions, my experience actually showed that men and women alike experienced challenges to confidence in the transition to senior leadership in their individual ways. With IPA, there will inevitably be a focus on the language used, but it was not the social construction of language first and foremost which was intended to be the unit of interest, rather the experiences of the individuals, how they were described and how they made meaning from these experiences. Finally, in constructivist research, the nature of truth is seen as neither fixed nor permanent, bringing a lack of certainty or definitiveness around knowledge for which there is "never a finally correct interpretation" (Schwandt, 1994, p.195).

3.3 Methodological approach

3.3.1 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

Given the aim of this investigation to understand the first-person lived experience (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009) of challenges to confidence for leaders in the transition to senior leadership, the phenomenological methodology of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) seemed the most natural choice of methodology.

IPA is a more recently developed qualitative approach, introduced in 1996 by Jonathan Smith, and it has rapidly become one of the most commonly used qualitative methodologies in psychology (Smith, 2011), though more used in health psychology – specifically the experience of illness - and only becoming more popular in coaching psychology in recent years. IPA is concerned with the detailed examination of personal lived experience, the meaning of experience to participants and how participants make sense of that experience (Smith, 2011). In IPA, the researcher plays a crucial role in interpreting and making sense of the meaning that participants make of their experiences (Smith, 2008; Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). IPA follows an inductive and iterative approach to building theory, focusing first on the phenomenological account and then comparing the fit between understanding from the participants and constructs in the literature. As such, IPA follows a process of engaging with the theory but not testing it (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009).

IPA is also used frequently to explore themes of identity changes associated with major life transitions (Willig, 2001; Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009), which felt appropriate for this study on the assumption that the transition to senior leadership would be a major experience for the participants and that identity changes were likely to be a part of that experience. As such, this speaks to the phenomenological and the idiographic nature of IPA, both of which are important tenets of IPA. Indeed, IPA is informed by three theoretical principles: phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography (Smith, 2011).

3.3.1.1 Phenomenology

Phenomenology is the foundation of the IPA approach. It is the philosophical approach to the study of human lived experience and aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences. It is retrospective, a reflection on an experience that has been lived (Van Manen, 2003). This picks up on a difficulty often debated regarding phenomenology: that it is difficult to access a human experience as it will inevitably be distorted (by time, culture, social influence), although phenomenological researchers aim to

access the experience as it appears to the individual whilst taking this into account (Vagle, 2009).

There are two schools of thought, each producing different approaches to phenomenological research: descriptive and interpretive. As my research is situated within an interpretivist paradigm, it naturally follows the interpretive, rather than descriptive, phenomenological approach: the phenomenon is not so much a "thing itself" but is "brought into being" in contextualised living and through the world (Vagle, 2009, p. 9). Those who use the interpretive phenomenological approach tend to believe that the researcher interprets meaning and therefore, inevitably, also gives some meaning to the phenomenon. This leads us to explore hermeneutics, as below.

3.3.1.2 Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is the second major underpinning of IPA and this is the theory of interpretation. Individuals are seen as sense-making creatures and accounts from participants in IPA research will reflect their attempts to make sense of their experience (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009), as active interpreters, rather than passive recipients, of their subjective world (Wagstaff *et al*., 2014). IPA also recognises that access to experience is always dependent on what participants tell us about that experience and that the researcher needs to interpret that account from the participant in order to attempt to understand their experience (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). This is described as the double hermeneutic, where the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of what is happening to them. To understand the processes of interpretation further, we should touch on the hermeneutic circle, which shows the important and dynamic relationship between the part and the whole. To understand the part, you have to look to the whole, and vice versa (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). It is an iterative and circular process and the "part" and the "whole" can be interpreted in many different ways, for example as:

The part	**The whole**
The single word	The sentence in which the word is embedded
The single extract	The complete text
The particular text	The complete oeuvre
The interview	The research project
The single episode	The complete life

(Smith, Flowers, Larkin, 2009, p.28)

Unlike descriptive phenomenologists who aim to put aside one's knowledge or assumptions, known as bracketing, and to describe rather than interpret the phenomenon, interpretive phenomenologists suggest that it is impossible to forget or ignore what we already know and to bracket these. Interpretive phenomenologists take care to restrain "personal beliefs, theories, and other assumptions", otherwise described as fore-knowledge or preconceptions (Dahlberg, 2006, p.16), and to make sure that these are made explicit (Van Manen, 2003). These preconceptions may be known in advance or may emerge during the process and require the researcher to be open and aware. The reflexivity of the researcher about their involvement with the phenomenon and its meanings becomes paramount, and yet some suggest that many are not reflexive enough when working with IPA (Vagle, 2009).

3.3.2.3 Idiography

The third major underpinning of IPA is idiography, the privileging of the particular. This is shown through the sense of detail and depth of analysis, as well as through how the particular experience might have been understood by the perspective of particular people, in a particular context (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). In IPA, the researcher has to take care to balance the individual analysis with cross-case analysis at all times, presenting shared themes as well as pointing to the particular way in which these themes play out for individuals (Smith, 2011).

3.3.2 Alternative methodologies

Although IPA was a natural fit with the aims of my research, I also considered heuristic inquiry as an alternative qualitative methodology. This research topic was fuelled by personal interest and experience, as is inherent to heuristic inquiry. It was associated with my longstanding interest in challenges to confidence around professional transitions, sparked from my own experience during maternity transition which then became my professional interest when working with clients going through leadership transitions. Heuristic inquiry includes the researcher as participant, in an internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of experiences and develops methods and procedures for further investigation and analysis (Moustakas, 1990). It is a process of personal immersion in a topic (McLeod, 2003), with the researcher "as instrument for data collection, self-inquiry as well as the inquiry into the phenomenon" (Jackson and Cox, 2020, p. 77). Participants are treated as active co-researchers and partners and the researcher openly engages in personal reflections as part of the research process (Etherington, 2004). However, as a researcher I wanted my focus to be fully on the experience of the leaders, and the coaches, not on myself, and heuristic inquiry was discounted for that reason.

3.4 Research design

The research comprised two stages: stage one focused on the interviews with eight senior leaders and stage two included a focus group with four experienced executive coaches. The aim of the interviews was to understand more about the individual experiences of the leaders of the phenomenon of confidence during senior leadership transition and the role of coaching in supporting this. It was initially thought that, given the potential difficulty of talking about a topic such as confidence, participants might require more than one interview in order to open up, but in reality, one interview proved sufficient in all cases. The aim of using a focus group was to develop a multi-perspective understanding of the phenomenon from experienced coaches who had worked with multiple senior leaders in transition, as well as to gain shared and new understanding and to create meaning around the phenomenon through the interaction of the group (Lambert and Loiselle, 2008), building on their individual experiences first and foremost. Whilst this research could have gained an understanding of each individual coach's experience through individual semi-structured interviews, as with the leader interviews, the focus group was deliberately planned as a means of understanding the group and individual sense-making process of a shared experience and also as a way of building upon the individual interviews, so that some data and understanding from stage one could be shared to prompt the discussion, and as a form of "triangulation" in checking or challenging my interpretation of the data (Elliott, Fischer and Rennie, 1999). The focus group was therefore planned as a second stage to take place after stage one.

3.4.1 Participant recruitment

Participants – both senior leaders and executive coaches - were chosen via purposive sampling. This is a strategic approach where participants are selected according to their relevance to the research question (Bryman and Bell, 2011) and common in IPA research (Brocki and Wearden, 2006). Participants were recruited through my own professional network of experienced coaches and organisational HR contacts who had some oversight of coaching for senior leaders.

3.4.1.1 Recruitment of senior leaders

It is important in IPA that the sample is reasonably homogeneous (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009; Brocki and Wearden, 2006). Leaders recruited for this study therefore fitted the following criteria:

- they had transitioned during the previous 12-24 months to a senior leadership role with a high level of responsibility and visibility, defined further as positioning them on the

senior executive team, or as a head of a major business unit or service line, or a senior manager/director operating at a level below the executive team in a larger organisation;

- they had experienced executive coaching to support them during this transition, though the nature and length of coaching was not specified, and participants had experienced differing amounts of coaching and at different points of their transition;

- challenges of confidence needed to have been of some significance to them and to their coaching discussions.

The timing of the senior leadership transition was initially defined as within the previous 12-18 months, for presumed ease of recall of the experiences. However, in reality, some of the leaders who came forward had transitioned up to 24 months previously and it was decided that this should not preclude them if they otherwise fitted the criteria. In fact, during the interviews it turned out that their recall of the experience of transition, even for the earlier stages of the transition, was not a problem and their experiences easily became “live” again.

3.4.1.2 Recruitment of executive coaches

Executive coaches were recruited according to the following criteria:

- practising executive coaches with 10+ years’ coaching experience (based on my own view from being in the coaching community of what constituted a minimal length of experience for experienced coaches);

- ideally accredited by a professional body or with an equivalent of stamp of seniority and quality (such as contributing to the field);

- used to working with senior leaders in transition and with challenges to confidence experienced by their clients.

I have a large network of executive coaches and was able to target individuals from within this network. I sent all participants a participant information sheet so that they could decide whether they were interested to take part and met the relevant criteria. I then followed this up with a phone discussion with each senior leader participant, where possible, in order to ascertain relevance for myself, given that they were self-referring to me (see ethics section), as in one case one individual had not had coaching during any part of the transition, despite putting herself forward after reading the criteria. The other aim in speaking with them was to understand whether they would be articulate and reflective enough to be able to offer rich, detailed accounts of their experiences (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). As I knew of all of the executive coaches, I did not feel that I needed to speak with them to ascertain relevance

or commensurability with the methodology. It was not, however, possible to speak with all of the leaders, as in one or two cases they were just not able to give the additional time or because the timing coincided with the difficult very early days of the coronavirus pandemic. I sent a follow-up email to all participants with the consent form, asking for their fully informed consent in this process. Closer to the time of the interview, I emailed all participants with an outline of the areas that I was hoping to explore, in order to give them a guide for the interview and in the hope that it would allow them to take the time to reflect beforehand on their experiences. This proved to have been very helpful and did aid the reflective process, allowing us to work at a deeper level more quickly.

3.4.1.3 Sample size

In IPA, importance is placed on the quality of the sample rather than quantity (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009), so typically sample sizes are quite small with the suggestion that "less is more" and that "IPA challenges the traditional linear relationship between number of participants and value of research" (Reid, Flowers and Larkin, 2005 p. 22). Furthermore, a typical sample size for a professional doctorate of between four and ten data points is suggested (Smith, Flower and Larkin, 2009), with "10 participants at the higher end of most recommendations for sample size" (Reid, Flowers and Larkin, 2005 p. 22) and therefore I used these recommendations as my guidance. There is a risk with a large sample that the focus on the idiographic is lost in the quest for common themes. I aimed to recruit 6-8 participants, also as I felt from researching other IPA studies that this would maintain the balance between the individual account and shared themes, as they emerged. I ended up interviewing eight participants. These were senior leaders who worked largely in financial services and professional services, where my network mostly resided, and one from education. There were six women and two men, across a range of nationalities: five were British and one was Italian (all of whom worked in the UK) and two were German (working in Germany). For the focus group, I recruited four executive coaches (see section on Focus Group: Size of Group).

Figure 2: Table showing senior leader and coach participants

Senior Leaders

Pseudonym	Age bracket	Previous role prior to transition	Title and level of seniority	Date of transition to current role	Nationality	Gender	Timing of coaching during transition
Rosie	45-50	Head of Division	Member of Board, Partner and Head of Division	December 2018	British	F	6 months after transition, ongoing
Susie	35-40	Head of Sector	Joint Managing Partner and Head of Sector (reporting to Board)	June 2018	British	F	Ongoing before and during transition
Freya	35-40	Head of Professional Development (not reporting to Board)	Commercial Director, reporting to Board	September 2017	British	F	6 months after transition but for limited sessions
Sophia	45-50	Partner (no management responsibility)	Head of one of major offices (Country Board)	June 2019	German	F	Before and during the transition, ongoing
Graham	50-55	Chief Information Office (not Executive Committee)	Chief Information Officer (Executive Committee)	June 2018	British	M	Just prior to transition, ongoing
Frederik	45-50	Head of Division	Group Sector Head (reporting to Board)	May 2019	German	M	Prior to transition, but only one session after transition
Irene	40-45	Head of Department	Deputy Dean (reporting to Board)	January 2018	Italian	F	Throughout 2019/20 including one 1:1 coaching session, and several group coaching sessions
Tess	50-55	Head of Division	Managing Partner (Management Team and Partnership Board)	February 2020	British	F	1 year prior to transition, ongoing

Executive Coaches

Pseudonym	Age bracket	Nationality	Gender
Rebecca	50-55	British	F
Renée	45-50	British	F
Donald	50-55	British	M
Colin	45-50	British	M

3.5 Data collection

In the first stage, individual leaders were interviewed from February 2020 to the end of March 2020. All interviews were audio recorded, with written consent from participants. The initial interviews were conducted face-to-face in a location that was convenient to the participant (mostly in their own offices), other than for those participants who were not in the UK and who were interviewed online using Zoom. The final interviews fell within the COVID-19 lockdown and therefore were also conducted online using Zoom. Interviews lasted for approximately one hour and took the format of a semi-structured interview (see below).

In the second stage, following transcription and very early analysis of the transcripts from the leader interviews, executive coaches were interviewed in the form of the focus group discussion. Some of the initial findings from the leader interviews were explored throughout the focus group, with the aim of gaining another perspective on the findings as well as prompting discussion around the experiences of the coaches. The focus group took place in May 2020 online via Zoom and lasted for one hour.

A pilot interview of a senior leader was conducted at the outset of data collection and I decided to include the data from this interview because it was such rich data. Conducting the pilot study prompted a few important reflections, for example showing me how I slipped occasionally into 'coach mode' i.e. asking questions as I would have done as a coach about something which was perhaps less relevant to the research. This realisation helped me to ask questions in the following interviews that were more relevant to the research. I also realised that I sometimes attempted to ask so much in one question that my questions were too convoluted, such that the participant did not always know what I was asking. I tried thereafter to keep my questions simpler, though I am not sure whether I always succeeded. A pilot focus group was also conducted, using doctorate colleagues, to practise moderating the group online (which I had not previously done), though this was more for the technical and practical aspects of running the discussion virtually than the content, as by this stage I had conducted the leader interviews and the questions were similar but from a different perspective.

3.5.1 Semi-structured interviews

The semi-structured interview is commonly agreed upon as a way of allowing deeper exploration and understanding of a phenomenon (Vagle, 2009; Van Manen, 2003), as well as developing a conversation with the participant about the meaning of an experience. It is ideally suited to IPA as it allows participants to give a rich, detailed, first-person account of their experiences (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). I created a broad interview guide covering three main areas:

a) the transition to senior leadership and how participants had experienced that, in particular focusing on what might have been challenging about it;

b) confidence and how it might have been impacted during the transition, how they experienced this and also in relation to earlier transitions in their careers, as well as how they described confidence for themselves;

c) the role of coaching and how they experienced this in supporting them during the transition and in relation to confidence.

Whilst the initial intention was that the interviews would follow the above structure, from transition to confidence to coaching, in reality the conversation weaved between all three.

Establishing rapport with the participant and gaining trust is paramount in interviewing (Willig, 2001; Smith, Flowers, Larkin, 2009), particularly so given the difficulty of a sensitive topic like challenges to confidence which might not be easy to open up about to a stranger. I started to create rapport with participants before the interviews took place through a telephone discussion and through several emails regarding the set-up of the interviews and the aims and likely topics for the discussion. In the introduction at the outset of the interview I made sure that I took time to acknowledge the referee and explain confidentiality, particularly if I worked within their organisation as an external coach, always with the aim of building trust quickly. In reality, this was not new to me as an executive coach where the early contracting around confidentiality and the building of rapid trust with senior individuals I do not know is of paramount importance.

Although I was comfortable in my ability to ask open questions, to guide the interview and to cover the areas I was hoping to ask about, I was very aware that I came to the interview with prior knowledge and preconceptions about the research question and I worked hard to acknowledge these if they arose (see also reflexivity section). I was aware of the process of co-construction of meaning between researcher and participant, as the following excerpt taken from my reflexive diary shows:

"*I had a real sense of being there as more than an interviewer but much more involved 'in the moment'*."

In doing so, I sometimes deliberately introduced something that a previous participant had said and offered my interpretation of this so that the participant could comment on my interpretation of the analysis (McLeod, 2003) and this elicited their further reflections and meaning making on their experience. However, I was also clear that I wanted participants to feel that they were the expert and the author of their own experiences (Reid, Flowers, Larkin,

2005). I started all interviews by explaining this to the participant and I played the role frequently of "naïve interviewer" (Willig, 2001), asking participants to give examples and digging deeper with my questions in order to have them articulate their experience as freely as possible. In doing so, I was also consciously encouraging "growthful dialogue" between the participant and myself as researcher, such that I was paying attention to "process ethics" (Gergen, 2001, p. 9) i.e. the relational responsibility that I held as a researcher.

3.5.2 Focus group of executive coaches: multi-perspective IPA

This study used multi-perspective IPA seeking to obtain two different perspectives: from the senior leaders and from executive coaches using a focus group. Multi-perspective IPA "retains a commitment to idiography in data collection and analysis but extends this by combining two or more focal perspectives, permitting us to consider the relational, intersubjective, and microsocial dimensions of a given phenomenon" (Larkin, Shaw and Flowers, 2019, p.2). As described by Reid, Flowers and Larkin (2005), using focus groups in IPA allows the exploration of one phenomenon from multiple perspectives and allows a more detailed and multifaceted account of that phenomenon to emerge. They are also used as a form of "triangulation" (Elliott, Fischer and Rennie, 1999) and it was for this reason that the focus group was organised to take place after the individual leader interviews, so that my interpretation of meaning from the leader interviews could be offered and developed with the focus group. Whilst focus groups are increasingly used within IPA (e.g. Loaring *et al.*, 2015; Dancyger *et al*., 2010), this is mostly within the health psychology field and not yet within the coaching field. The following definition of "focus group" resonated with me: "any group discussion may be called a focus group as long as the researcher is actively encouraging of, and attentive to, the group interaction and the importance of the group interaction in producing data and insights" (Barbour, 2005, p. 742), and I aimed to privilege the interactive nature of the group.

Using IPA with groups, however, does pose some problems which need to be addressed, notably: is a focus group, using multiple perspectives and a group interaction, consistent with IPA and its idiographic commitment to analysing each individual case and individual meaning making? This challenge was explored by Larkin, Shaw and Flowers (2018, p. 8), who suggested that in using multi-perspective IPA the analyst needs to retain IPA's "commitment to understanding participants' claims and concerns… whilst also illuminating the insights gained through the inclusion of additional perspectives". Furthermore, does a group setting allow participants to discuss their own experiences? As Smith (2004) suggested, if the researcher is convinced that participants are able to discuss their own personal experiences in sufficient detail, despite the presence of the group, then the data may be suitable for IPA. This, however, would depend on factors such as the topic, the skill of the facilitator, and the

participants themselves. These points will be discussed below and suggested as a modification to IPA which is argued to be consistent with this approach.

3.5.2.1 Focus groups as modified IPA

Focus groups offer a more complex interactional environment for IPA researchers, but allow multiple voices to be heard, and the group dynamics have been shown to add something to the analysis which might be otherwise missed (Palmer, Larkin, De Visser and Fadden, 2010). Importantly, the presence of multiple voices in focus groups and the interactional environment make it difficult to develop phenomenological accounts (Palmer, Larkin, De Visser and Fadden, 2010) and any research using IPA and focus groups must take account of this. Tomkins and Eatough (2010) explored the difficulties inherent in using both IPA and focus groups when unmodified, and instead proposed a modification to both the use of IPA and how focus groups are used with IPA, in order to keep consistency with IPA. They argued that the assumption of the stark division between the individual unit of analysis in IPA and group unit of analysis in focus groups need not be so. They suggested that whilst the group level of analysis within focus groups in an IPA framework is problematic for IPA, particularly the potential of privileging the "whole over the parts" and the potential "eclipsing of the individual", it is possible to pay attention to both the individual and group and to gain richer data because of the interaction and interplay between the two units of analysis. However, they cautioned that IPA cannot used without modification to theoretical grounding or practical procedures and that it is important to show the epistemological and theoretical tensions (Tomkins and Eatough, 2010). The problematic nature of using IPA with focus groups also includes the need for awareness of the additional levels of interpretation. Tomkins and Eatough described this as a triple hermeneutic: the researcher trying to make sense of participants trying to make sense of their experiences and of each other's. In my research this also took on a fourth layer of sense-making, or quadruple hermeneutic, of the researcher trying to make sense of the focus group participants trying to make sense of their clients trying to make sense of their experiences, as well as of their own experiences and each other's experiences of coaching their leader clients. The interpretation for the researcher is therefore of the third or fourth order, versus the second order interpretation that you would find with research and individual participant interviews.

Modification on a practical level when working with IPA and focus groups is suggested by Smith (2004, p. 50), recommending approaching the analysis twice: "once for group patterns and dynamics and subsequently, for idiographic accounts". Similarly, working with IPA and focus groups uncritically is cautioned against by Bradbury-Jones, Sambrook and Irvine (2009), using research in the healthcare field that combines individual interviews and a focus group

within an interpretive phenomenological framework. They showed that in the focus group, individuals were able to discuss their own experiences, and that "the interaction and comparison of experiences helped to illuminate the complexities of the phenomenon under discussion" and that this allows a richer understanding of the phenomenon (Bradbury-Jones, Sambrook and Irvine, 2009, p. 668). In a recent study exploring how IPA could be used with multiple focus groups, Love, Vetere and Davis (2020), the authors set out a step-by-step guide for carefully using focus groups within IPA, including the use of an additional iterative loop to assess where individual dialogue remained uninfluenced by the group discussion, where the group discussion did influence the individual dialogue and where there was agreement/disagreement in a collective voice. Taking all of this into account, I took care to analyse the focus group transcript at both the individual and the group level. The individual voices of the coaches have been paid attention throughout the findings, as have the interactional elements of the group which shed light on the key themes. This included moments of agreement, prompting development of the interpretation, and of disagreement, for example about difference, belonging and 'stuckness', which led to a richer understanding and then to the development of the theme throughout the discussion. Further details of the interactive elements of the focus group have been referenced throughout the Findings chapters.

3.5.2.2 Online versus face-to-face (FTF) focus groups

Due to COVID-19, I was unable to conduct the focus group in person as I had intended. The COVID-19 situation did not change my timing or the order of data collection and I was still able to conduct the focus group after the individual leader interviews as I had planned.

Much has been written about online focus groups, but the literature that exists mostly focuses on text-based chats (both synchronous – in real time – and asynchronous) (e.g. Turney and Pocknee, 2005; Woodyatt, Finneran, and Stephenson, 2016) rather than the verbal discussions conducted online via video conferencing, termed "web conference focus groups" by Tuttas (2015). Web conference focus groups offer a closer "mirror" to face-to-face focus groups, although at the time of writing this has been seen as an under-used approach (Kite and Phongsavan, 2017), perhaps due to change with the move towards a more a virtual world prompted by the pandemic. More recent studies found that videoconferencing offered similar data richness and authentic focus group experiences to face-to-face groups (Abrams, Wang, Song, and Galindo-Gonzalez, 2015; Tuttas, 2015; Kite and Phongsavan, 2017; Flynn, Albrecht, and Scott, 2018), however, after analysis of the focus group discussion I realise how much the videoconferencing experience did impact the discussion: participants waited longer for each person to finish speaking rather than interjecting, as would have been more natural

and easy face-to-face, and this meant that a more stilted and careful approach was taken by participants, at least initially, and that contributions were typically longer and less interactive. Some research details the difficulties and unfamiliarity of technology impacting the research (Kite and Phongsavan, 2017), but thankfully this was not an issue because the focus group took place well into the COVID-19 lockdown, by which stage all participants were very familiar with the technology and experience of working online. I used Zoom, which I was very comfortable with, and which allowed me to visually record the discussion to help with the complexity of multiple voices during transcription.

3.5.2.3 Role of the facilitator/moderator

Research suggests that conducting the group online requires slightly different moderating skills, including providing more clarity on communication and guidelines (Krueger and Casey, 2015). I emailed the participants in advance with clear instructions regarding the discussion, such as asking them to put up a hand if they wanted to speak if someone else was already speaking, so that I could know to turn to them, as I didn't want to lose the richness of interaction of thoughts when sparked from one to the other (on the assumption that the cues of when someone wants to speak are easier to detect in person than online). I was clear in conducting the focus group that I was in the role of moderator and researcher, rather than as participant, and I tried not to give any examples of my own coaching experience of the phenomenon, though in reality I found this difficult at times (see reflexivity section).

3.5.3.4 Formation and size of the group

There is some debate about whether focus groups should be homogeneous or heterogeneous. Whilst some suggest that the differences between participants can be illuminating (Kitzinger and Barbour, 1999), most research suggests that a homogeneous group allows for a more open discussion (Morgan, 1997; Palmer *et al*., 2010). As discussed in the participant recruitment section, these individuals had similar experience in terms of types of clients and the focus of their work. I was conscious that this would be a group of individuals who did not know each other and therefore that it would be important to build rapport quickly amongst the group. This was a little challenging with the change from FTF to online, but I made every effort to create a sense of group beforehand by emailing them as a group several times when outlining the details for the focus group and spending time introducing everyone at the outset of the virtual meeting. However, in analysing the focus group for group dynamics it is clear that the individuals were very careful with how they interacted with each other: it took time for disagreement to come out (and when it did, it was often an important moment of clarification and development of what became a key theme); there was a lot of hesitation over introducing their own experience, as seen by the significant amount of defending and

qualifying experiences (Phillips, Montague and Archer, 2016) such as “for me…”, “In my experience…”, ”I’m thinking about…”. This drew more focus to the individual experience which, though valuable, detracted from a universal experience that might have been applicable to the rest of the group, and it felt like the others had to work harder to be able to relate to that rather “protected” experience.

There seems to be little consensus on the most appropriate size for focus groups either conducted FTF or via synchronous groups online. However, a smaller group for the latter is recommended, with the majority suggesting 4-8 individuals (Wilkinson, 1998; Willig, 2001; Smith, 2004) to ensure active involvement of all participants. My aim in conducting the focus group was to encourage enough contribution from each participant whilst allowing the discussion to develop amongst the group, so I decided upon a group comprised of four individuals.

3.6 Data analysis

Data analysis started immediately after each interview with a process of familiarisation (see below). The specific process followed is outlined in the table below, following and adapting this six-stage process for IPA used by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009):

Step 1: Reading and re-reading of the data as a form of familiarisation and as a way of beginning the process of entering the participant’s world

Step 2: Initial notes and comments (noting descriptive, linguistic, conceptual comments)

Step 3: Developing emergent themes

Step 4: Searching for connections across emergent themes

Step 5: Moving to the next case and repeating the process

Step 6: Looking for patterns across the cases

The interview recordings were transcribed by a third party, who signed a confidentiality agreement.

Figure 3: Table showing data analysis process

Step	Process and procedure	Further detail
1	Familiarisation: initial listening to each individual recording as soon as possible after interview, making notes. 2nd and 3rd listening to each recording against the transcribed transcript. Reading and re-reading of each transcript to check for accuracy before uploading it into Nvivo.	Notes made on salient moments that struck me as researcher and interpreter, including, for example, a rich description or understanding of the phenomenon, or reflections on the interaction between myself as researcher and the participant, and anything relevant to the joint meaning-making process. I also noted early thoughts on anything that might have resonated with the literature I had read, as well as any initial patterns across cases.
2	Initial coding of each individual transcript using an open-ended approach to coding the data.	Early development of codes from within each transcript, including noting (as annotations within Nvivo) decisions made about coding.
3	2nd round of coding of each transcript	Patterns noted across individual cases and the whole (across all transcripts). Development and continual refinement of sub-ordinate themes and super-ordinate themes once patterns started emerging. For development of themes see appendix H (2nd list of codes to 5th list of codes).

4	3rd, 4th and 5th round of coding of each transcript: categorisation and re-categorisation of coding	Codes reviewed as a whole in order to: check understanding or reason for inclusion; rename some codes; check if the quotes relating to each code belonged or needed to be discarded or moved to another category; refer back to the transcripts to ensure that themes were representative of the participant's accounts (Bramley and Eatough, 2005); and to explore relationships between categories.
5	Conceptualisation	Printed out and went through all annotations made during coding, then mapped out the findings which helped to show how themes were related in order to further develop super-ordinate themes.
6	Peer coding: asked a doctorate peer to code one whole transcript with no guidance or prior knowledge of the codes	This was done in order to compare and challenge my interpretation with that of an objective party. It was not expected that this would fully match my interpretation given that I had been the researcher co-creating the meaning in the interview and had more context to the words on the page. Many of the codes created by my peer were very similar but slightly different language was used, or a different interpretation was given of the same concept. It gave me comfort that an objective person had taken the transcript and interpreted it in a similar way, but it also challenged me to think about how I had interpreted some codes by framing things with a slightly different focus. An example of this is where my peer referred to the importance of status and position for the new leader. It didn't fully resonate with me, but I realised that I had interpreted this as an aspect of how the leader comes across to others and it helped me to interpret this as part of the identity process of how the leader felt that they *should* be in front of others.

7	Deeper interpretation and re-organisation of themes during writing up of findings	All quotations and annotations for each theme were printed out in one document away from Nvivo (so that it was easier to see the whole and work with). This helped me to understand the development of the theme and check initial thought processes of why the quotes had been included in that code and note relationships between and within codes at the time of coding. I also reviewed my reflexive diary and field notes to understand the development of my thinking and of the themes. A new process of interpretation and ordering and re-ordering of themes started as I initiated writing up, with the merging or deletion of many sub-ordinate themes. A lot of new ideas and relationships emerged during the writing up of the findings, as well as an even deeper level of interpretation, for example I was able to pay far more attention to language and work at a deeper level at this time ("pushing analysis further*",* Smith, 2004) e.g. noticing where certain words and metaphors were exactly the same across cases, as well as finding more examples of convergence and divergence of themes.
8	More attention paid to the differences between the data sets: the individual interviews and the focus group with the coaches	Only when writing up the findings did I really start to see the difference (and similarities) between the perspectives of the leaders and the coaches. I went back to the focus group to analyse the transcript at the group level, looking for examples of "groupness" (Phillips, Montague and Archer, 2016) such as interactional elements of picking up on and developing a particular word; change in use of pronouns; disagreement or agreement; and building on each other's points to reach new understanding. Examples of these have been introduced in the Findings chapters, where they were of particular relevance to the development of a theme.

3.7 Ethical considerations

The research was scrutinised by the University Research Ethics Committee and I include copies of the materials that were designed and approved as part of this process, which were then used during participant recruitment (see appendices A, C, D and F). During this process, it became apparent that there would be two main ethical challenges, the first being the approach to recruiting participants. As laid out by Elliott, Fischer and Rennie (1999) in their guidelines for qualitative research, in order to ensure that I had "respect for participants", the recruitment process was managed with care, given the sensitive topic of challenges to confidence which for some might have been difficult to own up to or to discuss. It was made clear in the approach to executive coaches in my network, and to HR contacts overseeing coaching in organisations, that they should not specifically identify individuals who had experienced challenges to confidence (indeed, they may not have known this anyway). Instead, they were asked to send an advertisement out to all who might have had coaching to support a senior leadership transition, suggesting that they self-refer if they thought their experiences were relevant and if interested in participating. In addition, the language in the participant information sheet and participant advert referenced the "temporary" and "commonly experienced" nature of challenges to confidence in order to normalise the experience and not to create any stigma around it. Given that this approach relied upon others to reach out to their network, and not on targeting defined individuals, the recruitment process took quite a long time and required careful vetting of anyone put forward, as some did not meet the criteria. This was ascertained through email exchange or prior telephone discussions. As noted above (see recruitment of participants section), executive coaches for the focus group were recruited via my own network. None of these coaches were individuals with whom I worked closely nor had any potential dependency relationship.

The second main ethical challenge identified was the principle of avoiding harm to participants (Gray, 2014), particularly important given the sensitive topic of challenges to confidence and how discussing this might affect people. I ensured that the participant information sheet referenced information on likely sources of support external to their organisation, which I also had to hand, in the unlikely event that the participants were to experience an emotional reaction as a result of the interview. I also made it clear at the beginning of the interview that the audio recorder could be stopped at any point. Similarly, in the participant information sheet for the executive coaches, it was made clear that I would encourage them to discuss any issues that had arisen with their own coaching supervisors as part of their ongoing professional support and development. In reality, and as I had hoped, the process was seen as a positive

experience and many participants thanked me for the opportunity to be able to explore and make sense of the transition and challenges to confidence in retrospect.

All participants were assured of confidentiality, privacy and that all information about themselves or their organisations would be disidentified throughout all documentation and that pseudonyms would be used in all documentation. One participant, who had had a particularly difficult transition to senior leadership, asked for their anonymised quotes not to be included in publication and this was understood and adhered to. Access to my computer was available by password only and I was the only person with access to it.

3.8 Quality standards in qualitative research

Much has been written about trustworthiness of the research and researcher, which Elliott, Fischer and Rennie (1999) defined by trustworthiness of: observations (including disclosure of the researcher's orientation and internal processes of the researcher); and of interpretations of data (which includes triangulation, coherence of the interpretation, and self-evidential quality for the reader and testimonial validity). Self-evidential quality can be achieved through including sufficient raw data (such as quotes or excerpts from interviews) so that "every reader is in a position to be a judge of whether the analysis is credible" (McLeod, 2003). As Madill, Jordan and Shirley (2000) suggested, qualitative researchers have a responsibility to present their findings in a way that allows them to be evaluated appropriately.

Constructivist research relies on the viability of knowledge and "notions of coherence, and credibility are emphasised over standard notions of validity and reliability" (Franklin, 1995). Similarly, Madill, Jordan and Shirley (2000) suggested that qualitative researchers should make their epistemological position clear and conduct their research in a manner consistent with that position. Elliott, Fischer and Rennie (1999) also included coherence as one of their seven publishability guidelines especially pertinent to qualitative research, suggesting that "understanding is represented in a way that achieves coherence and integration while preserving nuances in the data" so that there is a "data-based story/narrative, `map', framework, or underlying structure for the phenomenon or domain" (Elliott, Fischer and Rennie, 1999, pp. 222-223). Meaningful coherence is one of the eight "big tent" criteria for excellent qualitative research as set out by Tracy (2010, p. 840), applied to research that "achieves what it purports to be about; uses methods and procedures that fit its stated goals; interconnects literature, research question, findings and interpretations with each other". Coherence, or what Passmore and Fillery-Travis (2011) refer to as 'congruence' in their important coaching research, is a key element of research excellence - across paradigm, question, approach, methodology, instrument, analysis and conclusion.

Whilst drawing on Yardley's guidelines (2008) for quality in qualitative research, Smith (2011, p. 24) noted that such criteria are not specific enough for evaluating quality in IPA and has developed his own criteria for what makes a good IPA paper, as outlined below:

1) The paper should have a clear focus;
2) The paper should have strong data;
3) The paper should be rigorous;
4) Sufficient space must be given to the elaboration of each theme.
5) Analysis should be interpretative just not descriptive with interpretative commentary following each extract, showing an understanding of the double hermeneutic;
6) Analysis should point to convergence and divergence, showing patterns across the cases as well as the "particular" or uniqueness of the individual experience
7) It should be carefully written so that the reader feels engaged and that they have learned in detail about the participants' experience of the phenomenon.

These guidelines have since recently been added to with four quality indicators of good IPA (Nizza, Farr and Smith, 2021) including: constructing a persuasive and coherent story through carefully selected extracts from participants; developing a vigorous experiential and existential account; close analytic reading of participants' words; attending to convergence and divergence.

The table below provides a summary of the qualitative criteria I followed in my research, taking into account different aspects from the above, and how I addressed each of these. It is worth noting that during the research I became a member of a Qualitative IPA group online, contributing members of which include several of the names most known in connection with IPA such as Jonathan Smith and Michael Larkin, and this helped me to constantly deepen my understanding of using IPA and to review my practice through the IPA-specific questions asked by other researchers.

Figure 4: Table of qualitative criteria followed

Qualitative criteria	How I addressed this in my research
Trustworthiness and credibility; self-evidential quality; clear focus and strong, high quality data	Overall trustworthiness and credibility are shown through the disclosure of my research philosophy and through reflexivity; in the ethical considerations section; throughout the Findings chapters in relation to my role in interpretation; and excerpts from my field notes during data collection and reflexive journal. Credibility is also addressed by an awareness of the need to challenge my assumptions and interpretation throughout (as below). Clarity of process and interpretation processes are addressed by: clear steps outlined in methodology; details of the process followed in data analysis (see Figure 3) and annotations in Nvivo and reflexive journal about how decisions were made in relation to coding or how themes related (see appendix F). Interpretation of the data is offered in the Findings chapters, though never assumed to be the only way of interpreting the findings. Researcher interpretation and assumptions were challenged by the following: repeated re-reading of transcripts and data analysis steps; conducting analysis by more than one researcher by asking a co-doctoral student to open code one transcript; checking understanding with participants (including taking understanding from the leader interviews and checking this with the focus group) which allowed them to agree, disagree or to offer alternative interpretations. Clear focus is shown by ensuring that the findings were always relevant to the research question. For example, it would have been easy to identify themes that related to confidence in senior leadership transition but without relating it to the coaching (which was always more implicit) and I ensured that the three strands of the research question (transition, confidence, coaching) were interconnected throughout. In accordance with IPA, there is a clear focus on privileging the experience of the participants, paying attention to the individual and making sure that the

	quotes chosen illustrated the findings and developed the narrative and showed interpretation (Nizza, Farr and Smith, 2021) and I addressed this by aiming to include no quote without interpretation. In including illustrative quotes throughout the thesis, I also aimed to show strong, high-quality data, along with the inclusion of a sample transcript (see appendix G).
Rigour	Rigour has been shown through ethical awareness and adherence, as well as through a rigorous data analysis process (including field notes during data collection and researcher reflexive journal) and adherence to IPA. Rigour has also been shown by ensuring an appropriate number of extracts from participants used to evidence a theme. Smith (2011), for example, suggests for a sample of this size that extracts from at least three participants should be shown for each theme. An exception to this is made in one or two cases where the description from participants was so rich that it was still included because it was felt that it provided something particular and of importance.
Coherence	Clarity of researcher position is shown in the introduction and methodology chapters and research has been conducted in a manner consistent with this. In particular, the interpretivist philosophy is applied consistently throughout the data analysis and Findings chapters, and there is consistency with the constructivist epistemology in the privileging of the construction of meaning with participants. Coherence and consistency with IPA has been reviewed throughout, with particular care taken over the inclusion of the focus group and its potential inconsistencies with the phenomenological and idiographic commitment of IPA. Consistency with IPA has also been carefully approached with a commitment to: showing convergence and divergence of themes; privileging the particular along with patterns of experience across participants; showing an understanding of

	the hermeneutic commitment of IPA by providing clear interpretative commentary. The thesis has been reviewed several times by the researcher and two doctoral supervisors, as well as by doctoral peers in the early stages of the research design, to ensure coherence.

3.9 Reflexivity

Reflexivity involves reflecting critically on the self as researcher and it forces us to explore and interrogate the different selves and multiple identities that we bring to the research setting and our interactions with participants, as well as how these might inform the process and outcomes of the inquiry (Etherington, 2004). I kept a regular reflexive diary throughout the doctorate which allowed me to keep a "phenomenological attitude" (Finlay, 2008) of openness alongside being aware of my own assumptions and interpretations. I also noted my awareness of (and difficulty with) the different roles I played throughout the research process. I will discuss both of these below.

The researcher working within IPA is described as combining hermeneutics of empathy with hermeneutics of questioning, seen as akin to standing in the shoes of the participants versus standing alongside and puzzling over the participants (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Whilst this felt relatively natural to do, given the similarities with my role as a coach where I engage both empathy and suspicion in order to get alongside and then question and challenge the client, I did initially struggle with it as a novice researcher. I found it frustrating that the participant would expand on something which didn't feel relevant according to my preconceived idea of what I thought "relevant" was, and during data analysis I sometimes found it difficult to step back and to stay close to the data in order to really understand what they were telling me. An example of this is with Graham, who spoke a lot about working hard to understand the new relationships with individuals and was particularly vocal about being "caught out" by engineering his responses and the relationships. I thought he was repeatedly showing off to me about how clever he had been in playing certain senior relationships, but I then realised during data analysis how much he spoke about it and therefore how important it was for me to pay closer attention to it and to challenge my initial assumptions. It became clear that working hard for something became part of the understanding of lack of confidence (with ease signifying confidence) and performing and acting in order to impress was a significant shared experience amongst participants.

I was acutely aware that I potentially played several roles during participant interviews: researcher; interviewer; part-insider coach within their organisation (in some cases); and former colleague of one participant's colleagues. In order to promote joint sense-making and to privilege the participants' telling of their experiences, I realised that I needed to be aware of this multiplicity of roles, as well as the potential hierarchy of roles involved in the interview process and that it was important to minimise this inevitable tension (Raheim *et al*., 2016) as much as possible. I openly acknowledged my different roles where possible, especially reiterating confidentiality particularly for those whose organisation I worked in as an external coach or where there were any mutual contacts, and I hoped that doing openly so would help to increase their trust in me. I noticed that by explicitly using my knowledge of some of the participants' organisations this helped to show that I understood more about the context for the participant and to allow them to open up further. However, in one case, the participant clearly referred to me as a coach in his organisation several times and it felt like he saw me in that interview as a coach to impress and even to compare with his own coach, and this made it difficult to move him away from his generic coaching experience back towards the research question and to reposition myself as the researcher.

In the focus group, I found managing my multiple roles more difficult and I weaved between researcher, moderator, and occasionally fellow coach. I tried to privilege my role as researcher by steering the conversation and by sharing some of the findings from the leader interviews in order to prompt the discussion and also to check my interpretation, though it was an exhausting experience, and on reflection I could have minimised my role as a fellow coach further and generally spoken much less.

3.10 Summary

In this chapter, I have set out the theoretical framework for my research as that of a constructivist epistemology within an interpretivist research philosophy. I have outlined the methodological approach used, that of multi-perspective IPA using semi-structured interviews to elicit the experiences of senior leaders and executive coaches and, in doing so, I have given a detailed description of IPA and its theoretical principles of phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography. I have also explored the theoretical and practical challenges of using multi-perspective IPA. I have set out all aspects of the research design from participant recruitment, to data collection and data analysis. I have discussed the ethical challenges that I addressed and have shown how I have considered quality standards in this qualitative research and researcher reflexivity.

3.11 Presentation of findings

In the following chapters, I will present the findings from this research across three chapters. Using IPA terminology, the main themes within each chapter will be referred to as super-ordinate themes (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). I refer to the higher level of theme that the super-ordinate themes sit within as the “overarching” theme in both the Findings and the Discussion chapter.

Chapter Four: An understanding of confidence

4.1 Introduction

The research questions that guided the research were as follows:

- how is confidence impacted during the transition to senior leadership and what is it about this transition that is so challenging for the leaders?;
- how do senior leaders and coaches experience and describe confidence at this transition point?;
- how does coaching help to support confidence at this transition point?

The findings from the research will be presented in three chapters, starting with a multi-perspective understanding of the experiences of confidence for senior leaders during leadership transition, presented within four super-ordinate themes. The findings thereafter consist of two further chapters focusing on experiences of the challenges to confidence. Chapter Five is about the organisational challenges to confidence. Chapter Six is about the intrapersonal challenges to confidence, those which occur within the individual, focusing on the psychological transition of the leader and the leader identity development process. The role of coaching will be discussed throughout each chapter.

These findings were structured in this way because I wanted to tell a particular story within each chapter. In reality it was very hard to structure the findings because so many of the super-ordinate themes are inter-related, but after much deliberation it became clear that the Findings chapters needed to start with the main finding: that of the description of the experiences of confidence within this context. It then made sense to me to group the themes into chapters focusing on the organisational challenges to confidence and the individual intrapersonal challenges to confidence.

In accordance with IPA, the findings will be presented with reference to illustrative quotes from participants and interpretation will be offered, with the expectation that the reader will also be able to make their own interpretation from the raw data as shown through these quotes. In order to privilege the multi-perspective design of the study and to show where different perspectives converged and diverged within and between each group of participants, the data will be presented together from both groups of participants – the senior leader and the executive coaches – though often one group will have a more dominant voice than the other, depending on their closeness to the understanding of the particular experience. In order to

keep clarity for the reader, the leaders are referred to by their pseudonyms and the executive coaches have “Coach” in front of their pseudonym.

4.2 An overview of the experiences of confidence

The senior leaders and coaches all described confidence very similarly, both explicitly when asked to define confidence for themselves (or for the coaches in their clients) and implicitly throughout their interviews. Upon analysis, it became apparent that these descriptions of confidence fell into four inter-connected areas: ease and energy; control of the self and of emotions; clarity (of direction, purpose); and vulnerability. Loss of confidence was described as the opposite of each of these areas: effort and exhaustion; loss of control; lack of clarity, and inability to show vulnerability. Each of these four areas of confidence, along with the opposite experience, is shown in the table below. Each of these areas of confidence/loss of confidence will be explored in this chapter as super-ordinate themes and will be referred to throughout the Findings and Discussion chapters.

Figure 5: Summary of the four areas of confidence and loss of confidence

Confidence	**Loss of confidence**
Ease and energy, physicality of space and movement	Effort, exhaustion, energy depletion, battle
Control of self and emotions	Loss of control of self, showing emotions to others, lack of evenness of emotionality, brittleness of emotions
Clarity e.g. of direction, purpose	Lack of clarity, confusion, “stuckness”
Vulnerability: ability to say “I don’t know” and to ask for feedback	Pretence of the “tough leader” that knows all the answers

4.2.1 Confidence as ease and energy; loss of confidence as effort and energy depletion

When all the participants were asked to describe how they experienced confidence within this context, it was striking how nearly everyone used the language and imagery of ease, as well as the language of energy and movement and a physicality of space and height.

Freya defined the early part of her transition where everything felt so easy to her:

> *"It's almost like everything just felt… it just seemed obvious and I remember sitting there and thinking 'they're all scratching their heads and this seems quite simple to me'."*

Susie experienced an initial "*enhanced confidence*" which she also described as a sense of ease and success of achieving:

> "*that confidence to go to pitch and to pitch much much better and to win much better than I had done before.*"

With the description of confidence as ease also comes a sense of energy and movement, and there is a real physical manifestation to confidence when the participants describe it. Freya described how confidence for her is about action as well as movement:

> "*Well, I feel like I'm flying.*"

As such, she is up above others and moving freely. This sense of being up in the air above others was reiterated when she interjected as I summarised her description of her loss of confidence to her (her speech is in brackets):

> *"so…you describe those first six months, that first day back the energy…(of being up here, looking down)…"*

Irene exemplified this physical movement when she described how she feels when she is confident by bursting into song with "*I'm Walking On Sunshine*". Similarly, Susie used a description of significantly increased height, and by implication weightlessness, with her description of how she feels after her coaching session:

> *"I feel about 10 feet tall when I come out of those coaching sessions…"*

This sense of movement and physicality of space of confidence is shared by the coaches, who refer to their clients feeling taller or walking out of the room differently when feeling confident. This was summed up by Coach Renée when describing the confidence in her client after a coaching session, similarly to Susie above:

"…and this just opened something up that was incredibly powerful for her, that she just really ran with, she almost walked taller away from it."

Not only is there a physical manifestation to confidence, as depicted by movement, height and space, but there is also a sense of calmness to this movement – none of these descriptions show frenetic movement – and this calmness was highlighted in the coaching group discussion by three of the coaches, as summarised by Coach Colin:

"building on what R has said, there's a calmness…There's a relaxed [feel] as they kind of feel more natural."

The opposite of ease, the notion of effort and energy depletion, was also described very clearly by many of the participants. The exhaustion and energy depletion of keeping emotional control was described by both Irene and Rosie. Frederik referred to the effort required by this transition compared to his previous role, partly as a result of being careful with the language he uses, and he refers to this as not feeling authentic. There was a suggestion from many of the participants that the effort and energy required in this transition means that it is difficult to be natural and this is highlighted by the requirement to perform that many participants experience, as suggested by Tess:

"…*always feeling that you've got to be on it and using up lots of energy because you're kind of always having to be on show and perform.*"

Freya also describes the exhaustion she experienced from feeling that she has to act in this role:

Freya: *"I could pretend and act like the best…"*

AK: *"And tell me about that."*

Freya: *"Exhausting, so tiring… Draining, and my brain just hurt, I felt like my brain hurt. I'd go home at the end of the day and be just like mentally knackered."*

The felt need to impress others and to act and perform will be discussed further in Chapter Six, but these descriptions are included here to illustrate the repeated references from participants to the energy and exhaustion that they experience in doing so.

Whilst for some of the participants the notion of effort and energy depletion is only implicitly linked to lack of confidence, for others it is more explicitly so, such as for Freya as shown here:

"*so when that kind of sort of start of that lack of confidence kicked in…everything started to feel like an effort and a battle*".

For her, it is even more than an effort, it is a "*battle",* and she described it as if she is struggling against something violent which is being done to her ("*that lack of confidence* ***kicked*** *in*…"), much as she uses language of war and violence and physicality throughout her interview in relation to loss of confidence.

The language of effort, exhaustion and energy depletion as experienced by these leaders describes loss of confidence specifically in relation to loss of control and when performing or acting in the role. These descriptions are in striking contrast to those of confidence as ease, energy, movement and a physicality of height and space used by leaders and coaches alike. The expenditure of effort is suggested as not natural or authentic, particularly so early in the transition where the leaders describe effort most frequently.

4.2.2 Confidence as control; loss of confidence as loss of control

Linked to effort is the notion of control, typically shown by participants in relation to the active management of the self and of emotions as a senior leader. All of the participants referred implicitly – and explicitly – to feeling a lack of control during the early part of the transition and this was felt most acutely with loss of confidence. In this section, control (and loss of it) will be explored in relation to confidence.

Freya described the loss of control the most vividly of all the leaders, shown here through the metaphor of the storm:

> *"I said 'I* ***feel*** *like a storm is starting to brew' and instead of like getting hold of the, you know if I'm on the ship steering it, instead of getting hold of the ship and thinking 'right where do I steer it away from the storm?', it's like I'm out on the deck rearranging the deckchairs!"*

She then used the analogy of the bucking bronco which shows her as being even further out of control when in the middle of the storm:

> *"…and it was like the wind was battering me and I just had to kind of, you know like being on one of those rodeo whatever they are – bulls, and just feeling like you're constantly like…"*
>
> AK: *"So no stability, no core, no..?."*
>
> Freya: *"God, no! Just like being battered around all the time and knackering."*
>
> AK: *"So knackering, exhausting…"*

Freya: *"Exhausting, so exhausting as well when you don't feel, so all that kind of in control, calm, confident – I felt the opposite of all those things."*

Here she contrasts the calm control of confidence she felt previously with the exhaustion and effort and lack of control she felt at the worst moment of her lack of confidence.

Throughout his interview, Graham used language of control – in fact a word search shows that he referred to control 31 times - and he works constantly to fight the feeling of being out of control in the transition. The following example gives a sense of his preoccupation with staying in control of himself during his first off-site retreat with the Executive Committee (Exco):

"*So I was on best behaviour that weekend, completely out of my comfort zone, and I would normally drink a bit more heavily and I just, I kept sober, I was in control…Cos I didn't know, I felt out of my depth.*"

When feeling out of control ("*completely out of my comfort zone*", "*out of my depth*") he tries to find ways of staying in control such as staying sober. Although he didn't link staying in control to confidence, he agreed readily when I reflected this back to him (shown by his emphatic "*yes*" below):

AK: *"But it sounds to me that you've worked so hard on understanding yourself and staying in control and that's what helped you to feel confident, by somehow staying in control…?"*

Graham: *"Yeah, and some of it is actually also… so* ***yes****"*

Tess introduced the idea of feeling out of control when feeling over-confident – in contrast to Freya's description of loss of control with loss of confidence:

"*I mean I don't think I am in any way manic but you know what I mean, I can get more… and so it makes me feel sometimes a bit out of control if I feel too 'up*'."

It is as if either end of the confidence spectrum can feel out of control: loss of confidence, as well as over-confidence.

There seems to be an assumption from the leaders about the need for a senior leader to keep emotions in control. Coach Donald exemplifies this here with the language of control and stability when describing confidence ("calm", "evenness"):

"I'd use the word grounded which is again the same somatic quality that we're talking about. The energy tends to come from lower in the body, there's a calmness to it… there's an evenness to their emotionality which is more supple, less brittle."

Tess also used the same word, "*brittle*", several times when describing one difficult moment early in her transition where she overreacted to criticism in an important meeting (the emphasis below is her own):

> *"one thing that definitely I experienced was a sort of a **brittleness** around anyone questioning me… that my own like anxiety and insecurity was making me overreact and take it personally and therefore display emotion in a situation where I probably would have been better off not…"*

The word "*brittle*" denotes fragility, like a metal that could snap, and so conveys that sense of being on the edge of loss of control. Here, Tess uses it to describe her early moments of loss of confidence prompted by criticism from others, which made her then overreact and display emotion – both of which suggest a loss of control and anything but the "*calm*" or "*evenness*" articulated above.

The pressure of staying in control by keeping emotions inside is shown to be significant, experienced by many of the leaders and described here by Irene:

> *"…so I could feel it kind of like getting up to my head and kind of like this explosion of emotions that I couldn't let out because that is not appropriate in the workplace."*

It is as if it is something epic, beyond her control, threatens to take over her body and she is battling to keep it inside. She does not understand why she can't control her emotions:

> "*why can I not manage this? My emotions are just swirling around and I'm caught in the middle of this.*"

Note that she described it as if she is being acted upon, rather than being in control of it herself, using passive words such as "*I'm caught in the middle of this*", which exacerbate the sense of struggle in controlling herself. She described the threat that loss of control poses to her confidence:

> "…*so I think it was undermining my confidence…so it was affecting me in a sense that it made me feel like I didn't have control over that and so that's what's undermining my confidence in my management of myself in that role.*"

Susie also showed the significant impact of keeping an emotion (rage) inside of her and suggested that it is a process beyond herself:

> *"I can harbour rage so if something really irritates me I've had to learn to let it go in a much more level-headed way, it's not that that rage would come out but internally it would derail me…"*

Susie gave examples of several attempts to stay in control by not showing her emotions and it is a constant process of working hard to keep her emotions in, even if the risk is that they "*derail*" her. Similarly, Rosie described how she tries to turn off her frustration in Board meetings but is disappointed that she isn't able to manage herself when these emotions eventually do come through. Both leaders suggested that they move between attempts to control their emotions and recriminations for lack of control when they are unsuccessful.

Control – and loss of it - has been explored here, in relation to emotions in particular. These senior leaders seem to expect that they need to keep their emotions under control, as well as to show an evenness of emotionality, and this puts significant pressure on them, as seen in many of the examples above. Control and confidence are inextricably linked: loss of confidence (e.g. from criticism, lack of clarity or direction) can make the leader feel like they have lost control and this feels abhorrent to them and becomes a struggle over which they need to preside; loss of control (e.g. of emotions, of being out of comfort zone) can make the leader feel anxious or insecure or "*undermine*" confidence. Control also takes deliberate and careful effort and therefore interrelates with ease, denoting confidence, and its opposite, denoting loss of confidence.

4.2.3 Confidence as clarity; loss of confidence as loss of clarity

Confidence is also described by the majority of participants as having clarity. Clarity will be explored in this chapter in relation to having direction, purpose and the ability to know what to do. It will also be discussed in terms of the opposite of these, for example the experience of feeling stuck early in the transition by not knowing what to do, shown here in particular by repeated reference to the "*unknown*" and the lack of "*template*" and not being able to prepare for the transition. The experiences of coaching working with clarity will be explored throughout the chapter.

It was clear that several of the coaches linked clarity with confidence and showed how they worked with clarity with these leaders, as shown by Coach Rebecca and Coach Renée in these two examples:

> *"they have a clarity of purpose…so they're clear about who they are, they're clear about the challenges, they have confidence that they can overcome the challenges."* (Coach Rebecca)
>
> "*the work that I do around creating this vision of the leader you want to be, if you have some clarity on who you are and what it is you're trying to achieve then that provides the kind of anchor to then, 'well I'm confident in who I am, there's areas that I'm strong*

on, there's areas that I'm not so strong on'…But having confidence I find is built around that clarity suddenly, 'oh yeah it's a blank sheet of paper, I can create the shape of it and this is what I'm going to work towards'." (Coach Renée)

Clarity is linked here with "*direction*", and this, with "*vision*", could perhaps mean both metaphorical direction or purpose or literal sight. The sense of movement, as suggested with "*direction*", as well as the idea of clarity of knowing what to do (as seen above with "*blank sheet of paper…I can…I'm going to work towards*"), was later used by Coach Renée in her definition of confidence:

"*I think related to that is resourcefulness, I think it opens up resources for them, be it the psychological thing, they can deal with things*…"

"*Resourcefulness*", the ability to use resources (internal or external) to find a way forward, and to be able to "*deal with things*", also ties in with the examples above. Clarity, then, is posited as finding a way forward, as also suggested explicitly in relation to the coaching by Freya who suggested that the coaching helped her to work out "*how to go about things a bit more*". Similarly, Graham described how his coach was very good at asking him what "*tools and techniques*" he could use to manage a situation and Susie described how her coach helped her with "*different approaches or coping mechanisms*".

Gaining clarity of direction and purpose is experienced by Rosie and is explicitly linked to confidence:

"My sense of purpose is getting stronger…that's partly confidence driven as well…"

This is specifically supported through the coaching, where her coach asks her to think about what she wants from the next five to ten years and this seems to be one of the most significant elements of how coaching enables her to regain her confidence, by helping her to plan what she wants to do and to have the confidence to try to align her internal sense of purpose with her purpose at work.

However, the opposite of clarity and purpose, along with the unravelling of her confidence, is experienced by Freya:

"…and my kind of sense of purpose, what happened to, kind of, I suppose to me was I just started to, I lost that sense of purpose…"

She showed how she has lost the clarity that came with her initial confidence:

"I just felt so unsuccessful and so confused, just totally confused" and at another point*, "Yeah all of that clarity gone".*

Coach Renée described this for some of her clients as a "*sense of stuckness*" and how this often manifests as a "*I just don't know which way to go*". Interestingly, this was a key moment in the group discussion where there was a lack of agreement between coaches – Renée introduced the word "*stuckness*" and the other coaches questioned it as something that did not resonate with them initially in relation to lack of confidence, nor did it resonate with me in that discussion. However, it was gradually used more by all the coaches throughout the discussion, and it became clear through my analysis of the focus group discussion that it had become something that depicted a shared understanding of the lack of clarity or direction and of being able to move forward. The word "*stuck*", in fact, is the same word used by Freya at one point when describing her early days in the new role:

> *"Whereas in this role I just could not find what I needed, I didn't know where to go for what I needed…I did not know where to start…I just remember…still feeling stuck… I felt literally like I had wellies like stuck in mud and I just couldn't, every time I got one foot out it was like I just got stuck again."*

The magnitude of the "*stuckness*", to which both Coach Renée and Freya referred, and the inability to know what to do, was reiterated by Freya with the repetition of the negative "*not*" "*didn't know*" "*did not know*" "*just couldn't*" and the vivid metaphor of being stuck in the mud only to move forward by one foot and to be stuck again.

The difficulty of the unknown of the new role is experienced by many of the participants and this lack of clarity is incredibly daunting for them. Some participants tried to gain clarity by asking for more help with preparation before taking up the role, such as Sophia who tried to get time with her predecessor, or Freya who met with her boss but was told only to "*hit the number*" and nothing more than that, or Irene who described her handover as a "*joke*", reiterating how important the clarity from preparation beforehand would have been for her:

> *"but for* ***me*** *the unknown was, was…so… I didn't realise how much I would have needed a bit more information/preparation before the role…"*

Graham also described how difficult the "*unknown*" is and showed the impact of this on his anxiety:

> "*I think the things that were unknown and therefore cause anxiety is… I'm not sure about, I don't know the politics of it, I don't know the, so I've never been on this Exco.*"

Note how many times he reiterated the unknown through the use of negatives: "*not sure about*", "*I don't know*" repeated twice, and "*I've never been*".

Freya described her new role not just in terms of the unknown but also as one which had not previously existed and for which "*there was no template*", a word which gives such a sense of a clear format to be followed and the clarity that would really have helped. Susie also described how difficult she found the lack of template (using exactly the same word), and Sophia used the similar word "*manual*" and described how not having this clarity made her question her abilities.

Clarity, at least pre-transition and in the early part of this transition, is seemingly not often there for these leaders; many participants described the lack of preparation with a handover, time with their predecessor, and lack of manual or template, and yet clarity is repeatedly linked to confidence by both the leaders and the coaches. If confidence means clarity (of direction or purpose or knowing what to do), and not the opposite, such as feeling stuck or the unknown and not knowing what to do, then it suggests that it is important both for organisations and for coaches to help leaders to find clarity as soon as possible so that these leaders don't have to experience these levels of anxiety, confusion and stuckness.

4.2.4 Confidence as vulnerability; loss of confidence as inability to show vulnerability

Confidence was described by many participants as being able to show vulnerability, which they defined as not needing to be the "*tough leader*" who knows all the answers but instead showing vulnerability by acknowledging that they don't have all the answers and by asking questions and for feedback. This dichotomy between the pretence of knowing it all and the reality of not knowing it all, and being confident enough to show this, was described by many of the participants.

Frederik exemplified this dichotomy of feeling that he has to be the expected strong leader who knows what to do (his emphasis in bold):

> *"At the beginning…you wanted to **pretend** to be the tough leader who knows what direction/the right direction…"*

However, he learned through a coaching conversation that it's acceptable to ask others for help or tell others if he's not sure. When asked to describe confidence for himself as a senior leader he said:

> "*when I'm confident that does **not** mean that I'm not doubtful of myself or at least I'm not testing myself, the opposite I guess is true. If I'm confident I'm **much** more able to take a step outside of me and to look at me and to say, 'well is this really right what you're just doing?'."*

Confidence then, for Frederik, is actually showing himself being doubtful, as well as *"testing*" himself by questioning what he is doing overtly. He describes it almost as if it is a process of turning outside of himself to look back at himself in order to do so, as if he is enacting an external viewpoint on himself so that he can evaluate himself (or perhaps because he isn't receiving enough feedback so he is having to be critical and questioning for himself). And this is the important point, vulnerability here seems to be about the leader not being afraid to *show* their questioning to others or asking others for feedback.

Tess also linked confidence with being able to admit that she doesn't know. She compared her previous role as a lawyer, where it was acceptable to admit when she didn't know something, to her new role as Managing Partner, where she initially felt less able to do so:

> *"…where you can say to the client, 'Do you know what, I'm going to check' or I'm not sure, my instinct is…' because I'm not in my comfort zone now I've felt less able to say it, as a result of lack of confidence…"*

It certainly feels like there is a pressure at this level to seem as if you know everything, as also suggested by Irene:

> *"So I think people at this level, they honestly think that they need to have it sorted out and they need to know… I think they think 'oh you know at this level I should know'."*

Coach Donald reiterated the link between confidence and vulnerability, where the leader is more able to:

> *"speak less, they can ask more questions, they can be more curious, they can be more vulnerable. Confidence in itself being able to say 'I don't know the answer to this, I'm interested in your answer' when they talk to the team or the organisation."*

In the focus group discussion, there was agreement that leaders didn't always present confidence challenges overtly. This also revealed a gender difference in terms of how confidence was presented, with women feeling more able to show vulnerability in front of their coach by discussing it openly and early in the relationship, while men took longer to discuss it and even hid it behind other topics, as shown in this extended excerpt:

> *"…I was reviewing coachees in preparation for this and I hate to stereotype but I'm more aware of female coachees coming with expressed concerns around confidence and imposter syndrome than I am men. Men find different excuses for it, they find "you know I've got a difficult choice to make here" or "someone's in my way here" or you know it's kind of "I need to deal with this, that or the other"* (Coach Donald)

I would agree with that, I think it is, err, women are more open about it being an issue and will actually use the term confidence earlier on, not always but I would say quite a few of the clients I'm thinking of that would fit and that with male clients it is more about kind of exploring and seeing what's going on and they don't present it as overtly…it takes a bit more time for…the language around it to emerge" (Coach Rebecca)

Tess and Frederik, when asked to describe confidence, immediately contrasted it with over-confidence and suggested that this means the risk of overlooking things and making mistakes, rather than questioning themselves and asking for feedback. The notion of risk in relation to vulnerability is brought in by Frederik and Tess, and also shown by Freya who suggested that showing vulnerability means putting herself at risk and feeling exposed:

"Yeah but what I'd learned was that if I even showed anybody that there was a chink in that armour I got beaten up for it (wow). Because the culture didn't allow vulnerability, you know the culture is a very professional culture of 'well you're the expert, you know'."

She elaborated further:

"it was like 'woah, God this is scary! I feel vulnerable or I feel exposed'."

She then described the lack of confidence directly in relation to vulnerability:

"that lack of confidence kicked in, all of a sudden the way I can kind of describe it is I felt crushed and a bit vulnerable…"

Freya has experienced that showing vulnerability leaves her feeling "*exposed, scared, crushed*" and it is something that she will avoid at all costs, perpetuating the need to perform and pretend, when in reality she is not feeling that she is the tough leader who knows all the answers. Her organisation, with the expectation of the armoured leader, makes her feel that she is on a *"sort of pedestal",* as if she is to be worshipped and without flaws.

In this section, vulnerability has shown to be directly linked to confidence. It is defined by these leaders as being able to show oneself as the questioning leader who asks for feedback and it stands in contrast to the "*tough leader*" who knows all the answers, which participants feel, at least in the early part of the transition (when this is least possible!), that they are expected to be. The coaches also suggested that showing vulnerability, by discussing challenges to confidence in their coaching sessions, is not straightforward, and that there are gender differences in terms of how it is brought up in these sessions. Vulnerability is experienced as bringing a risk of exposure in certain contexts and is directly linked to the lack of confidence experienced by Freya and implicitly by some of the other leader participants as well as by the coaches.

4.3 Summary

In this chapter I have shown that experiences of confidence are described by the participants – leaders and coaches alike – across four areas: ease and energy; control; clarity; and vulnerability. Examples are given throughout of each of these areas, as well as the opposite of each area, to typify moments of confidence and loss of confidence such that we gain a real understanding of what it feels like to have, or to lose, confidence at different stages during the transition to senior leadership. Many of these areas interlink and these inter-relationships will be discussed in Chapter Seven. In the next chapter the organisational challenges to confidence in the transition to senior leadership will be discussed.

Chapter Five: Organisational challenges to confidence for senior leaders in transition

5.1 Introduction

It became apparent in analysing the data that a significant part of the challenge to confidence for new senior leaders stemmed from what the organisation was not doing but which would have helped their confidence. The following super-ordinate themes represent specific areas in which organisations are *not* doing things that could be helpful for the leader's confidence. The final super-ordinate theme – the feedback and support of coaching – represents how coaching helps with the leader's confidence.

- the lack of feedback;

- the lack of support;

- difference and loneliness;

- the lack of empowerment;

- the feedback and support of coaching.

5.2 Lack of feedback

Many of the participants spoke about how they didn't receive feedback at all and how much they needed it. Participants described the impact of receiving affirming feedback - when they did receive it - on their confidence, as well as the reverse: the crippling impact of receiving critical or negative feedback. Both will be explored in this chapter.

There is a clear sense that these leaders receive little feedback, or little positive feedback, perhaps when they need it the most. Frederik made it clear how little positive feedback he now receives in this senior role and described what a difference it made when one person offered an unsolicited 'thank you' and told him that he was doing a wonderful job. He also described how he asks for feedback more often in this role, wanting to hear the negative feedback as well as the *"confirmation that things I'm doing here are well-received".* Similarly, Tess expressed the need for feedback at this level and described it in terms of the parent-child relationship and the need for recognition:

> *"a little bit child, sort of wanting… not to please exactly, I don't think that's it, it's sort of wanting, needing, needing to feel, don't know, valued by… I suppose it is sort of parental, needing to feel you get the pat on the head or the something."*

Note the repetition of similar words: *wanting*, then *needing*, to emphasise the importance of recognition to her.

Freya also described how little positive feedback she receives in this role and just how much she needs it, and compared this to previous roles where she didn't have to ask for it:

> *"Yeah, but interestingly… I've never needed to seek it before, it's always just come to me."*

Unlike the other participants, who expressed that they don't receive feedback at this level, Freya described how she received positive feedback early on in her transition. However, as time progressed, she received no further feedback at all. When she eventually felt compelled to solicit this feedback from her manager, she did not trust that this feedback was reliable. She describes the impact of the feedback that a friend received and how this helped her to perform better, then compared this situation with her own:

> *"and she, having felt like she was a complete failure for those first six months suddenly was like, "I can do this!" and guess what, she's just got better and better and better… but I was saying to her 'but you see the reason that's been so good for you is cos you never asked for it, I asked for it, got it and it didn't give me that confidence it's given you'."*

Freya linked her least confident moments to occasions when she received either no feedback or negative feedback, and her most confident moments to times when she received positive feedback. Similarly, Irene described a moment when the HR Director gave her a "*super confidence boost*" through her feedback. Like Freya and Frederik, Irene feels the need to ask for feedback and reiterates the belief that at this level of seniority most people are "*inhibited in asking for feedback*" and feel that "*at this level I should know*". There seems to be a discrepancy between the external expectations of the leader, that asking for feedback is a sign of weakness and lack of confidence, and the internal experience of the leader, which is that being able to ask for feedback signifies confidence. However, as seen in Chapter Four, this "vulnerability" (showing themselves not as the "tough leader" that knows all the answers but one who does ask for feedback) may not be recognised by others as a sign of confidence.

It seems that negative feedback is given more frequently than positive feedback and this is particularly challenging to the leaders' confidence. For Tess, this was particularly difficult early on in the transition when her anxiety was high and she received quite harsh feedback, causing great self-doubt:

> *"I would sort of think 'oh well that means they don't think I'm going to be any good and everything's going to go wrong because it's me now'.*"

She explained that it was *how* the feedback was delivered that impacted her confidence the most, suggesting that at this level it is expected that the leader can cope with receiving negative feedback delivered in a way which is unfiltered:

> *"People just think by definition you can and ought to be able to take it… I mean I try, I, as I say, in this particular instance she wasn't wrong but she could have done it in a more supportive way… But it's definitely right that you have to accept that it goes with the territory that you're up there, you're up there for people to have a pop at…"*

Similar to the notion of being "*up there for people to have a pop at*" is the word "*punchbag*" which arose in Susie's interview. Both of these together give the impression that the leader is in the boxing ring when it comes to criticism, similar to the image of the leader being on a "*pedestal*" which Freya describes in Chapter Four: these leaders are at once put on a pedestal, such that they feel that they need to be perfect, and also put up to be punched ("*to have a pop at*") through unfiltered criticism from others.

The impact of critical feedback on some of the participants is significant. As the only participant to really experience feelings of being an impostor, Rosie described how receiving negative feedback triggers symptoms of Impostor Phenomenon and how this creates her fear of being exposed as a fraud:

> *"honestly I spend my life thinking that I'm going to get found out… which actually is why when you get negative feedback you think shit, really, goodness, you know."*

The impact of receiving critical feedback from a manager is described by Freya as something that "*crushed*" her, with long lasting impact as follows:

> *"Awful, I can still remember this day, the day after… [long pause]"*

The word "*crushed*" was also used by Coach Renée when describing feedback that one of her leader clients had received about his leadership identity:

> *"And he was almost crushed by what he should be because when he started out in his career he'd been told to tone it down a bit…"*

It seems that these leaders really need feedback in their transition but that they rarely receive it. The findings show that when positive feedback is given it has a real impact on the leader's confidence. However, negative feedback or criticism seems to be more forthcoming for them, often delivered unfiltered with the expectation that the leader should be able to cope with that, and this is an experience described as crushing for some of the leaders.

5.3 Lack of support

The leader's need for support from others was touched on implicitly in relation to confidence by many of the participants and many referenced how they had felt quite unsupported by colleagues, particularly senior colleagues.

Frederik described how in his previous role he had close colleagues who supported him and how in this role he doesn't have a new "*buddy*". Rosie doesn't feel that she has any support from her Chief Executive, nor from her peer group, and described how helpful it has been to have her deputy, as the only close support, to alleviate the loneliness. Tess described the loneliness of decision-making without support – she feels that she is expected to make decisions by herself and misses the support of collaborating with others on big decisions. However, Tess also described how she has deliberately built support around her, anticipating how much she might need it:

> *"I have lots of other very, very solid support who go out of their way to say, 'we're right behind you, we really, come on if you ever need anything we're here for you, it's a team, we're all in it'.*"

Support, when it is there for her, is that sense of having people "*right behind you*", ready to help and share the responsibility ("*we're all in it*") but, similar to others, she does not have support from some of her most senior colleagues and it is this lack of support which is most challenging to her confidence.

Unlike the above leaders, Irene described how she has had the unsolicited support of a mentor from the beginning of her transition who was "*always there at the end of the line if I needed him*". She also referenced supportive colleagues frequently, in particular those who encouraged her to apply for her senior role when she hadn't even considered it for herself. When describing confidence at the end of the interview she included support as one of the key elements:

> *"and then you can ride the wave and the ups and downs I think through support and reflexivity and feedback."*

In summary, some of the participants showed that they had some support in the form of a mentor or a close colleague but many of them discussed the lack of support that they felt and introduced the idea of loneliness, which will be explored below. The voices of the coaches are not present in this section as their discussion turned to the support of coaching, rather than support within the organisation (or lack thereof), and this will be discussed later in the chapter.

5.4 Difference and loneliness

In this transition, the awareness of feeling different to others and the impact on confidence was discussed by all senior leaders and was a prominent discussion in the coaching focus group. Each group of participants, however, shared a different perspective on difference: for most of the leaders, feeling different to their peers was difficult and contributed to a feeling of loneliness; for the coaches and one leader, difference was recognised as a positive differentiator from others and an area which the coaches helped the leaders to embrace. The loneliness experienced as a senior leader was shared by many participants and this included the notion of not belonging and fears of not being accepted.

Frederik described how his difference created self-doubt and impacted his confidence before taking on the new role:

> *"what would they say if well the… leader of the sector who is quite an influential person by this role is not speaking in their terms, not speaking their language, not having that cultural background which they would expect. And that was one of the big concerns, talking about confidence, I thought that would be a real difficult thing for me to overcome and to accomplish and to really get over."*

It is almost as if the differences feel insurmountable to him: he feels that he needs to "*overcome*" and "*get over*" them. However, he later described how his difference was both accepted by others and also hailed as a form of much needed differentiation.

The concept of belonging came up in many of the interviews in relation to difference, with the suggestion that feeling different meant not belonging. Frederik made this explicit, with a sense of yearning to belong but knowing that he can never fully belong if he doesn't have the time to build relationships due to moving frequently between offices:

> *"that is of course also challenging because you are like a visitor (yes) and being a visitor means you are not really belonging to the group."*

The feeling of not belonging is experienced by Susie, who works with two founding CEOs who often make her feel excluded, and also because as managing partner she feels like an outsider from the rest of the company (and perhaps needs to be, though she didn't explicitly say this):

> *"but you're not really one of everyone else either …everyone here comes to you with their issues and problems and good things too but mainly issues and problems."*

Rosie talked about difference repeatedly as her most significant challenge in this transition. She feels that various factors set her apart, including her gender, not operating in the same way as her peers on the Board (because she challenges her seniors more than others), not

being of the dominant nationality, and not being based in the main office. She is seen as *"Too radical, too difficult, too different".* She described a "*whole load*" of difference, and later highlighted again "*so there's lots of differences*" and she's "*not part of the gang*". She then explained how being different makes her feel and introduced the notion of loneliness in connection with difference and not belonging, as experienced by many participants:

> *"So, yes, you're lonely because you've got this divide there, you're then different within the group that you're in…and they don't really understand… So actually I found it very very lonely… you're sort of lonely from above… and then within the group of your peers you're elevated, you're also different because you've been picked to be one and you're not with the others... So I feel quite sort of ganged up against sometimes by people…"*

In Rosie's example, the language of "*divide*", repeated use of "*different*", and the phrase "*they don't really understand*" suggests how isolated she feels, reiterated by the use of "*very very lonely*" and again "*lonely from above*" and "*elevated*" from the group of peers, giving a sense of being outside of any group that she could or should belong to. She described this as "*sort of ganged up against*", perhaps that sense of being pushed out or rejected from the group which contributes to the overall loneliness she feels. This has taken her by surprise, as shown in the excerpt below, which suggests that she also felt lonely in her previous role but that at this level she feels even more so:

> *"I think what has surprised me, what has surprised me is I thought that when you get to the top it would all change, I thought the loneliness would change, I thought the lack of a difference would change… So I thought that when you get to the top you wouldn't feel it anymore. In fact I think you feel it much much worse at the top… and you know, you know it feels much much more… that absolute feeling became more overwhelming rather than less, that difference, having never really felt it or adapted or not really cared, suddenly I was like "wow I feel really lonely!".*

Graham articulated an aspect of loneliness at this level: having to think about breaking personal relationships with direct reports in order to stand back from them. As a senior leader, then, he feels that he needs a certain distance, though it still makes him feel lonely. Similarly, Susie described the loneliness she feels when making big decisions and when not able to turn to others as she might once have done:

> *"a couple of times I guess I had the realisation "who shall I talk to about this?" There is no one, I've got to literally come up with the solution and back myself on the solution. So I think that does feel quite lonely."*

Coach Rebecca describes how difference is a differentiator which has helped people to get to the position they've got to, and feels that they "*have to find a way of being comfortable in using*

it but really owning it". Yet as we see above, the feeling of being different is not seen positively as a differentiator nor owned by the leaders, but it is something which they experience as further reinforcing their loneliness. This approach of helping clients to own their sense of difference was further discussed by Coach Colin, highlighting the important work of coaching in working with difference to build confidence:

> "*he looked like anybody else who he compared himself to… but he felt an identity of 'I'm not the same as them'… it's your inner sense of 'do I feel like the rest of the group in the room?' ... an inner confidence bit which I think is where you do the most powerful work, if you can help them build that muscle, kind of liking themselves and feeling good about what they can bring."*

Only one leader, Irene, talked about using difference in a positive way, as the coaches did, and she refuses opportunities to be the "*same*" as others as she feels that she has a responsibility now in her senior role to use her difference:

> *"No and also if I change that I'm just reinforcing a discriminating narrative that embraces similarity and not difference."*

The coaches discussed how they encourage clients to be comfortable not belonging, as illustrated by this moment in the coaching focus group where Coach Donald disagreed with the interpretation that I offered, from the leader interviews, of the leader finding not belonging difficult:

> *"you used the word belong, and I think the word belong is interesting because I don't think the task is to belong. I think the task is to become comfortable not belonging and it's the being more comfortable being uncomfortable that this is often about, especially for those people who've stepped up to lead a team they were part of. Their belonging came from being part of that team and all of a sudden they have to put one foot out of that team, enough connection to build the engagement but enough detachment to be able to make the kind of decisions they have to make. So actually what they're having to cope with is the guilt of not belonging, not fully belonging."*

Here, Coach Donald described how senior leaders should be *"not fully belonging",* part in and part out. This, however, is not necessarily how the leaders experience it themselves, as not belonging to any team and feeling lonely as a result.

Difference is experienced as something which naturally seems to come with the senior leadership transition - most of the participants described feeling different to their peers and suggest that this is difficult and implicitly that it impacts their confidence. With difference comes the fear of not being accepted and not belonging. The coaches described the importance of

owning the difference, but this is certainly not what the leaders experience and the overarching feeling that they share from feeling different is that of loneliness, as painted so clearly by Rosie.

5.5 Lack of empowerment

Many participants explained that they felt that they weren't empowered in their role, as they had expected, often shaking their confidence. However, having the confidence to challenge the lack of empowerment is not necessarily easy for the leaders, at least early in the transition, and only comes as confidence develops. In this section, examples of lack of empowerment will be explored, along with the impact on the individuals, and the attempts by some of them to overcome the lack of empowerment by challenging the system.

Empowerment is part of the definition of confidence that Coach Rebecca gave and she associates it with "*ease*", one of the four areas of confidence discussed in Chapter Four:

> *"They feel empowered… they're moving freely with a sense of empowerment and ease."*

One of the only participants to experience empowerment was Freya, in the early stages of her transition. She described moments of confidence in which she felt the "*power*" she had to get on and sort things out, and the ease with which she achieved and succeeded at this.

Most other participants, however, felt a lack of empowerment in their senior leadership roles and expressed surprise and frustration at this. Irene described how her position is "*framed*" as that of a "*senior leader*" but that actually as a senior leader she feels she should have more "*power*". Sophia acknowledged a lack of empowerment around decision-making and explained that it is the organisation which often decides things for her. Rosie, despite being a member of the Board, feels totally disempowered. She gave numerous examples throughout her interview of her frustrations at this and how this impacts her confidence, as shown in the following extract:

> *"But actually what happens is you start feeling 1) I'm a little bit paranoid, because could we please have a meeting about x and you think 'oh god what are they going to criticise now?', so you start to feel is a little bit paranoid… and 2) you just want to disengage, so for me I just want to hide under a duvet. So the confidence, real confidence which you go and say 'no I'm right, follow the wall!', the way I have to deal with it, I disengage a bit which actually isn't helpful in the long term."*

Leading with confidence ("*I'm right, follow the wall*!") is not possible for her because she is not empowered and this causes her to "*disengage*".

Similarly, Susie, a Managing Partner, also gave repeated examples of not being empowered in the areas where she would most expect to be and explained that her authority is frequently challenged by one of the joint Chief Executives who goes behind her back to challenge her decisions.

It seems that empowerment, or having the "*power*" to make company-wide decisions and wield authority, is not necessarily inherent in the transition to senior leadership, to some frustration and surprise. Rosie and Susie experienced deliberate attempts from the organisation to limit their "*power*" to make decisions. Whilst Rosie dealt with this by disengaging and stopping her contributions to firm-wide matters, Susie described growing in confidence to challenge this, though it has taken her time to be able to build up the confidence do so. She described how, later into her transition, she feels much more able to challenge more generally and "*do something about things that aren't quite working*", but that she has had to prove herself first, such that:

> *"the courage to challenge in there has just grown and I'm very confident in doing that… I think I've proven myself to my peers, to the firm, I think that there's not much that I feel I couldn't challenge now… whereas I think that that has been a transition."*

Irene, even more clearly than Susie, described how in her role as a senior leader she feels keenly that she is duty-bound to challenge the system (even if she doesn't always feel that she is empowered to do so), including using her difference as a different kind of leader to change promotion processes, as well as mentoring and encouraging junior people below her. She, like Susie, draws a parallel between confidence and being able to challenge and, when asked for her definition of confidence at the end of her interview, she said:

> "*confidence is also about being able to challenge things and change things whilst still being true to myself.*"

Confidence and empowerment are shown to be clearly linked in this section: leaders were surprised at their lack of empowerment and described how this has impacted their confidence; and empowerment is given as an example of confidence. One response to not feeling empowered is to challenge the system, but being able to challenge is also linked to confidence and these leaders show that it takes time to be able to do this.

5.6 Feedback and support in coaching

Coaching is shown to play a crucial role in supporting leaders and helping them to feel more confident by providing much needed feedback as well as support. Both feedback and support through coaching will be explored further in these final sections.

5.6.1 Feedback in coaching

Some of the participants described important moments when their coaches gave them affirming feedback, so often lacking from the organisation. The need for support through affirming feedback was highlighted by Tess in reference to her coaching:

> *"sometimes you do need a third party, a second party whatever, to say 'no you're doing really well' or 'actually I thought it came across fine' or whatever…"*

Susie described how helpful it was for her when her coach reminded her of what she had achieved by saying "*well done, look how far you've come!*" Irene noted the confidence she gained from being shown the results of a psychometric profile, where the coach reiterated how unusually strong her profile was (and pulled her back from dismissing this herself).

Although the coaches didn't explicitly discuss the power of affirming feedback for leaders at this transition point, they did discuss how helpful 360-degree feedback can be as a way of challenging the leader's perception of themselves, as a way of building confidence, or as Coach Rebecca puts it (her emphasis):

> "*to check what your perception of yourself as a leader is against how you are **actually** perceived by people in the organisation".*

Further to this, many of the leaders gave examples of how their coaches challenged their perceptions or provided different perspectives on a situation or belief and how this helped their confidence. Frederik described how coaching helped him to realise that the feeling of difference, which felt like a reason for him not to take the senior role, was an advantage instead of a disadvantage:

> *"my coach was really good in that and said, well, I should speak to many people, what they think, whether they think this is a problem or in the end it comes out that this is just a problem in my head… but nobody else has that problem (OK), and actually this was the case. So people did not really understand what I was talking about [laughs], and they said 'no we are a global firm and not being English or not being British is for that role exactly what we want and this is why we want you and this is not a disadvantage, this is exactly why we want you to take over that role'."*

Later, he articulated another example of how his coach helps him to think of the perspective of others so that he can develop his confidence in his leader identity:

> "'*how would you feel if you had different [participant name] in front of you, how would you feel, how would you respond to that?' And that was the first time I had that conversation or that perspective.*"

Similarly, Tess described how her coach helps her to think about the other person and their needs – both reassuring her that it is "*not usually about something I've done*" but also helping her to see another perspective.

Coaching, through providing or encouraging different perspectives, helps these leaders to see how they are perceived by others, and in doing so allays self-doubts and insecurities about what others will think. Coaching also provides affirming feedback and often the simplest affirmative comment can be seen to make a significant difference to the leader, which is no surprise when we understand how little feedback they receive from others in the organisation at this level.

5.6.2 Support in coaching

The need for support is acute for these leaders in transition and yet it is often lacking, as we have seen, and many of the leaders described how important the support of the coach was to them. Support will be explored here through examples of the coach 'being there' for the leaders, by taking away some of the loneliness experienced and providing reassurance by normalising their experiences.

Susie explained the support of her coach in relation to helping with loneliness:

> "*she is enormously helpful, particularly with that loneliness… the buck stops with you*."

She seems to link loneliness with the feeling of responsibility and suggests that by being able to share this with her coach, she is able to feel less lonely. She further elaborated:

> "…*but then also given me that space to just take away some of the loneliness. I feel about 10 feet tall when I come out of those coaching sessions because it's almost like you've just kind of shared a weight because you can't tell, there's not somebody in the firm that I can tell everything to.*"

It is interesting to note her description of increased height, with increased physical space shown to be one of the four areas of confidence in Chapter Four. It is as if she has literally been weighed down with responsibility and feeling that she can't tell anyone else, and when she is able to do so she grows in height – not just back to her usual height but even taller!

Tess also described how her coach supports her through "*being there*" (her emphasis):

> *"[coach] helped me with that and I had to do a speech at the beginning of it which again she was just like* ***there*** *to help me and just to say 'don't worry, yes that's good…'."*

She referenced her coach being 'there' at two further points:

"it's been really helpful to have somebody there…"

"But also she's been somebody who's there on the end of the phone and there on the end of a text…"

In contrast to a therapist, Tess described how her coach is more supportive by staying in touch between sessions and showing that she cares:

"it's different from therapy where you know, that awful moment…. when your hour and a quarter is up and that's just it and you might be in a total state but that's it, and obviously when I met with [coach], the end of the meeting comes but it never feels you know, I always feel that then the next day she'll be in touch to say, 'I hope you're okay', so yeah it's been really, it's been really good."

Susie described the value of having the "*external reminder*" from her coach, who knows her well and has seen all that she has done, of what she has achieved:

"so she, it just gives me I find the time and space to reflect on the previous month, the things that have happened, how I've dealt with them…and for some sort of external, I think that I mean I find that what's great with [coach] is she gives me that external reminder of 'oh my goodness, look what you have been able to achieve over this period of time!' which does remind me what I have done over the last 18 months."

Providing reassurance to these leaders through the normalisation of their experiences is a form of support which helps with confidence, as acknowledged by Coach Donald who described the importance of this (his emphasis):

"there's quite a lot around just reassuring people that this is what it's like but no one feels completely ready for a move up to a position like this: normalising, allowing them to share the insecurities and the self-doubts. So I think a lot of what coaching provides is that ***that*** *support."*

For Sophia, the normalising that her coach provides helps her to stop pressurising herself about making mistakes, suggesting that it is perfectly normal to do so and helping her to think how she can manage this crippling fear better. For Tess, her coach "*makes it feel normal*" and then allays her self-doubts about not being normal as shown in this excerpt (note the words "*normal*" emphasised again, as well as the starkly contrasting "*freak*"):

"…and helping accept that it's bound to feel difficult and it's bound to feel overwhelming and that's okay cos I'm a ***normal*** *human being, not a freak or someone that's incompetent."*

In this section, support has been discussed in terms of the coach helping to take away some of the loneliness experienced as a senior leader by allowing them to share difficulties, as well as the coach "*being there*" in the much needed role of having someone alongside the leader, to reassure them or help to normalise their experiences and, in doing so, implicitly helping them to feel confident. It seems that this support is critically important for the leaders, all the more so when we understand how little support they feel that they receive from the organisation.

5.7 Summary

In this chapter I have highlighted the interpersonal challenges to confidence in this transition, those which arise between the leader and the organisation. Many of these themes (feedback, support, and empowerment) impact confidence as a result of the organisation not providing them when they are crucially needed or expected. The theme of difference and resulting loneliness is less as a result of actions (not) performed by the organisation, or those within the organisation, but more as a result of the interaction between the leaders and others. The chapter concludes with an understanding of how coaching helps the confidence of leaders by providing what has most been missing from the organisation: feedback (affirming feedback, challenging the leader's perspective) and support (the coach being there for the leader; helping to reduce the feeling of loneliness; providing reassurance and normalisation of experiences).

In the next chapter, the focus will be on the intrapersonal challenges to confidence in this transition.

Chapter Six: Intrapersonal challenges to confidence for senior leaders in transition

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will present the overarching theme of *intrapersonal* challenges to confidence that the leaders face in this transition: those that occur *within* the individual.

The super-ordinate themes within this overarching theme will be presented as follows:

- Acting and performing as a senior leader
- Self-doubts that the leader feels unable to show
- Leader identity development:
  - The process of working out the new leader identity;
  - Expectations from others of how the leader should be;
  - The integration of old stories of the self into the new identity;
  - Ownership of the new leader identity
- Coaching: the psychological work of coaching senior leaders in transition

6.2 Acting and performing as a senior leader

Many of the participants used the language of acting and performing as a senior leader, often in response to the need to prove themselves to others. Participants described how this challenged their confidence as, by acting, they were not able to feel authentic. They also showed how much effort was required in acting, in contrast to notions of ease signifying confidence as we have seen in Chapter Four.

Frederik explicitly referred to *acting* while describing taking over the new senior role, having watched the previous incumbent:

> "*somehow there is probably a tendency that you take over a role in its literal sense, like an actor (yes) and you say "well I want to somehow act like this other person or I've seen this other person acting like that.*"

Tess uses the word "*perform*" six times throughout her interview, summarised as below:

> "*you're kind of always having to be on show and perform."*

At times it is ambiguous whether she means perform as in act or perform as in achieve, for example:

"*you should be performing and you should be all of that and I really want people to see that I'm doing all this stuff.*"

This could refer to both meanings of the word i.e. performing as acting or performing as achieving, but there is a clear sense that it is about her wanting others to see what she is doing. When I noted her use of the word "*perform*" and asked her to describe how she experienced that, she replied as follows:

> *"I think you do feel you've got to perform… it feels like everybody's looking to you to be someone and make a difference and make it better and stuff, and I do feel that and you know there are some people who I know will have doubted whether I was the right person for the job. There are a couple of people who I know who didn't vote for me… and in those circumstances you feel like you have to sort of always be being better than they expected and that's quite hard… But… it* ***is*** *perform… because you feel at any minute somebody might think 'oh god what a mistake that was' or you know, so I do feel that sense of perform, I definitely do….it's quite a pressure, I suppose."*

For Tess, then, the need to perform is about being up there in front of others ("***everybody's looking to you***") in order to prove herself to them, especially to those that doubted her in this role initially. This feels "*hard*" and "*quite a pressure*". And performing means that she isn't herself – she refers to how "*everybody's looking to you to be* ***someone***" and the "*someone*" suggests a created persona and one that is not herself but which is moulded to what is expected by others.

The one participant who does not feel the need to act is Irene, despite acknowledging the "*narrative that… society of the workplace imposes on women…"* She does not feel that she has that "*pressure… in terms of putting up a front*", partly because she actively tries to resist it and partly because she describes her boss as someone who is:

> *"very up front with his insecurities, with 'I don't know how to do this', so he's really nurturing in the sense that you don't feel that you have to fake it 'til you make it…"*

By showing his own insecurities and admitting that he doesn't have all the answers (just as we see with the definition of vulnerability in Chapter Four), Irene's boss allows her to feel that she doesn't need to put on an act ("*fake it*").

Tess also describes how she feels she needs to impress others and explicitly refers to this being "*energy sapping*", exactly the language used in Chapter Four to describe loss of confidence:

"you're always having to deliver and not let people down and make a new connection, have that really important chat with that really sort of scary partner who you know you can't - and need to - impress a bit and you know, it's all quite energy sapping".

Many of the leaders describe the anxiety they feel because of the need to prove themselves and to make an impression on others. The need to prove oneself – particularly in the early part of the transition - is felt even more keenly when there is a fear that their appointment may be perceived as a mistake, as described by three of the participants: Rosie, Tess and Frederik. However, Coach Donald, when describing confidence as he sees it in his clients, links it to *not* needing to prove oneself:

"there's a calmness to it, there's a kind of, there's an evenness to their emotionality which is more supple, less brittle, less to prove…"

Perhaps, then, it is to be expected that the leaders feel that they need to impress others and to prove themselves most acutely during the early stages of the leadership transition, but this often means that the leader feels that they need to act and perform. The process of acting takes energy and therefore, as implied by the understanding of the relationship between energy and confidence seen in Chapter Four, highlights a loss of confidence.

6.3 Self-doubts that the leader feels unable to show

Many of the leaders gave examples of self-doubts they experienced at various stages of the transition (including, for many, before the transition). What was striking was the language used of the internal or the hidden, suggesting that the leaders did not feel that they could share any of their self-doubts. Indeed, there was a sense that it was befitting for a senior leader to maintain an external appearance of confidence, as seen in this example where Irene summarises her need to put on a front of confidence in contrast with how she feels:

"and generally speaking I come across, cos I know cos people have told me that they don't quite believe this side of me but, I come across as very like outgoing and confident, but really inside that's not how I feel…"

Of all the participants, Rosie contrasted her internal self-doubts with external expectations the most and used the language of "internal" or "inner" and "external" throughout her interview. She successfully convinced her senior colleagues of her confidence and works hard to hide her self-doubts, as shown in these excerpts:

"*oh yeah, you're really confident blah blah blah"…*

"*I don't think people see much doubt.*"

"I think you can put on a façade of confidence…"

Despite managing to hide her self-doubts, they are particularly present for her when she is in the Boardroom:

> *"Do I beforehand think 'oh my god I shouldn't have said that, maybe they will think I'm an idiot, maybe I should just be quiet'? Yes, all the time."*

Sometimes, however, it is not possible to keep self-doubts hidden, as shown by Freya when her inner doubts were made manifest to others:

> *"It's almost like I was thinking out loud…rather than just thinking 'right well the reason this is the right thing to do is because boom!' I'd almost shared my thought process which then I think made it sound like I didn't, you know, might doubt myself a bit."*

She contrasts the inner doubting thought process with her usual confident approach and the use of the onomatopoeic "*boom*" really emphasises the usual positive loud confidence that she shows. Freya described what happened after this involuntary sharing of inner doubts: her lack of confidence was noticed by the two people she was trying to impress with the resulting impact of feeling "*crushed*", a word shown throughout these findings to exemplify loss of confidence.

It appears that the one place where self-doubts can be shared is in the coaching space (the safe space of coaching will be discussed at the end of this chapter in more detail), as shown in this excerpt which reveals both the self-doubts and the ease with which Tess can share these with her coach:

> *"I definitely have had moments where I've said, 'I'm just not sure that I'm right for this', you know, 'I'm not sure that I…' But also she's been somebody who's there on the end of the phone and there on the end of a text, so I can be coming home after a really crap day and just say, 'god I'm really doubting whether I've got this'."*

The leaders show that they feel that they need to keep self-doubts hidden from others and to maintain a "*façade of confidence*". As with vulnerability in Chapter Four, this again shows us the paradox between the perceived external expectations of the leader and the internal experience of the leader. The leader does not feel that they can share their inner doubts with others and the leader is caught between what they feel and what they show to others.

6.4 Leader identity development

The discussion about leader identity in relation to confidence at this transition point formed the backbone of the coaching focus group and served as a good example of the value of the group

in developing the discussion and co-creating understanding. The focus on the individual in the coaching discussion was so dominant, such that I noted this in my reflexive journal:

> *"it is all about the individual! Their story, narratives, differences or uniqueness, taking ownership of self, coaching to help them "how you feel about yourself and what you bring", clarity on who they are and what they bring…"*

The importance of leader identity development in relation to confidence was an important shared experience amongst the coaches, as summarised at the outset of the focus group discussion, when the group were first considering the research question, and then developed throughout the discussion:

> *"…the nub of it with the identity… I think the identity transition is the fundamental one."* (Coach Donald)

The coaches refer repeatedly to identity transition as one of the key challenges of this transition linked to confidence. They use the language of identity, perhaps showing their more distanced, external perspective on the concept, unlike the more frequent "*self*" that the leaders themselves used.

6.4.1 Working out the new leader identity: a process

The process of working out and having clarity of the new identity or self is described by some of the leaders as well as the coaches alike, and this shown clearly by Graham describing his early Executive Committee meetings:

> *"…I had the same sort of feeling going into Exco cos it was this formal meeting and it's a governance meeting so it's not a chat, you know… it's formal, and it's that anxiety, that senior audience of… you're wanting to make an impression but likewise you don't want to be caught out, you don't want to be, it's so, you're trying to work out what self you're bringing to that meeting cos my self normally would be, you know, discursive… so that required a different approach and behaviour and the quieter [own name] rather than the more boisterous [own name] would be in that environment and more thoughtful as well."*

He refers here then to the "*normal self*", perhaps the pre-senior leader self or the self that is untainted by the need to impress others, and suggests that this cannot be the self that is now presented. Instead, he has to gauge or "*work out*" which different self is required.

The *process* of formulating a new identity is also described in the focus group discussion:

"but it was about, I suppose, finding a new identity and working their way through that." (Coach Rebecca)

Coaching is described as the space which facilitates the *process* of this identity work as it allows the leaders to stop and think about themselves and their identity, something which they may not have been able to do until this point:

"…they've just been always working towards the next step, the next step, the next step without necessarily stopping and reflecting on what that actually meant. So they haven't really thought about their identity… and what that means…" (Coach Rebecca)

6.4.2 Expectations from others of how the leader should be

Part of the leader identity development process seems to be the response to the pressure of what others require of them as senior leaders and the inhibiting effect of this on the leader's own attempts to take ownership of their leader identity. Coach Renée describes this very clearly when referring to how her clients had been told how they *should* be:

"And he was almost crushed by what he should be because when he started out in his career he'd been told to tone it down a bit… because he was a bit frivolous and so he'd created this persona of being quite earnest and the Director was now saying to him "you know, we need more from you" and he was kind of suppressing that. So his story had been "well I can't be myself, I need to be earnest" but now this Director's saying "you need to be a source of optimism and hope" and there he had to really go inside himself… in both cases it was they kind of were weighed down about what they thought and what they'd been told and ideas of leadership that had come to them in the past."

This excerpt shows us the leader's inability to own his leader identity because of the expectations of others, shown with the use of "*how he should be*" and "*he'd been told*" in the past as well as the present day demands with "*the Director was NOW saying to him*" and the repeated use of "*we need*…" then "*you need to be*…" and "*I need to be…*". It shows a continual back and forth between what the leader had been told by others and how he wanted to be for himself. It suggests a very reactive process, as typified by the use of "*ideas of leadership* ***that had come to them*** *in the past*" rather than a process that the leaders are actively able to shape. This excerpt also shows the significant impact on the leader of being told by others how he should be, such that he felt "*crushed*" and "*weighed down*". It is interesting that these are gravitational images, quite the opposite to the weightless and physically spacious imagery used in Chapter Four by participants to describe confidence, and it implicitly suggests loss of confidence.

Irene described how in the earliest part of her transition she was aware of the "*narrative*" that was imposed on her as a senior female leader, and she gave many examples of challenging how she feels she *should* be as a leader. Her boss showed her that he doesn't expect her to copy her predecessors (and their identity/way of being) and proposed that they will together "*work out*" (the notion of process again) their new identities:

> *"you're not [predecessor] and I'm not [his predecessor], we'll put our own mark on this and we'll just work it out together."*

The pressure to take over a role in a certain way as others have done before seems to be commonly experienced by the leaders. Frederik suggested that by copying others or acting the role "*you make so much noise about how to behave that you're just losing sight of your own identity".* He reiterated how difficult it is to be himself or natural given the needs and expectations of his team:

> *"and the problem was that… I found it difficult to be really myself… they did not really know which [participant name] they have in front of them now, is it the more comrade buddy guy or is it the chef or is it the boss… I was always myself [laughs] but not for the others."*

Rosie described how she feels that she should adapt herself to what is expected by others but she is ultimately not prepared to change herself as much as is required. She repeatedly shows her refusal to change and says "*I'm not*" at least 20 times throughout the interview, for example "*I'm not made that way*" or "*I'm not going to play a political game*" or "*I'm not wired that way*".

Tess also showed an awareness of the expectations from others, as shown with the below excerpt:

> *"it is a massive deal, it's a massive deal cos you're holding yourself out as something that… and people want you to be, they need you to be confident and they need you to give them confidence and so it's hard so you don't want to be, you know I am always going to be me and I am a real person and I am a kind of expressive person and I'm a bit heart on sleeve… and I can't not be that person but I do need to be, I need to keep it a little bit more on a level somehow."*

As above with Frederik and Coach Renée's examples, Tess shows the confusion between what others expect, what others need, what she is trying to be like, and ultimately the recognition that she wants to stay true to herself. The use of "*holding yourself out*" suggests a tentative identity, as if expecting others to help her to form her identity.

The process of listening to the expectations of others about how to be as a leader seems to be one that is reactive, and which inhibits the leader from proactively forming their own identity and taking ownership of it. It is shown to be a confusing process with the leader caught between what they are being told and wanting to be themselves.

6.4.3 The integration of old stories of the self into the new identity

Part of the identity process is shown to be an exploration, and ultimate integration, of "*old stories*", as discussed predominantly in the focus group but also referred to by some of the leaders. These are old stories of the self which might now be holding them back, or which have remained hidden and may have impacted their confidence by being hidden. In this section examples will be given of these old stories, showing the impact on the individual and their confidence.

Coach Renée described how working with confidence, for her, is about helping the client to work out "*what their best looks like*" and to manage the "*interferences*" which stop them from being their best. She described such "*interferences*" as:

> "*a story that they're bringing, whether it's because they don't feel they're good enough or something that happened before…"*

The coaches built on and developed the concept of the leader's "story" introduced by Coach Renée, which both Coach Donald and Coach Colin referred to as the "*inner stories*" or "*very deep stories*". These stories were often seen to be holding the leaders back from being confident. Coach Colin described how one of his clients was "*struggling with…the inner story about his legitimacy and capability and what his parents had told him".*

Coach Donald described the process of "*releasing*" and then "*integrating*" these stories (into the new leader identity):

> *"So I think you're talking about all kinds of ways in which a story that people have held about themselves, and there will be different ways of coming at this, but there'll be what releases that story to a fuller integration of their greater potential."*

Here he suggested that by releasing and integrating these stories, the leader is more whole and able to reach their "greater potential". It is interesting to note how the coaches used active verbs to describe the inner stories: stories "they *bring*" or that they "have *held* about themselves" (rather than, simply, "their stories"), as if these never quite fully belong to them but are inhabiting them. The words "*release*" and "*hide*" are used several times and the juxtaposition of these brings to mind the notion of captivity, as if the leaders have been held captive by their old stories and reinforcing the importance of the need for them to be "*released*".

For Tess, her old and *"personal*" story is that of the "*small person*" who defers to seniors, but this story is no longer helping her when she is one of the most senior people around the Boardroom, which she admits that she needs to "*get over*":

> *"this is something quite personal to me that I need to sort of regularly try and find ways of getting over… 'I'm a small person and the people that are older than me they're very important and I need a pat on the head from them and that really means a lot'…I will defer, I'll defer to the person who's more senior than me even though they're not…"*

Note that she referred to herself as a "*small person*" who needs the "*pat on the head*", as if being squashed down. This is very similar to the word "*crushed*" referred to in Chapter Five to describe what leaders experience after receiving critical feedback and it the opposite to one of the four areas of confidence as ease of movement and physical space, suggesting that it denotes a feeling of loss of confidence.

Part of the leader identity development process then needs to include the time to explore old stories that might impact the confidence of the leader, as with Tess who has to work hard to "*get over*" it so that she can literally and metaphorically stand tall, side by side with the other senior people in the Boardroom. The findings suggest that these stories need to be released and no longer hidden.

6.4.4 Ownership of new leader identity

As the coaches describe it, the leaders use the coaching to help them work through the above leader identity development process and ultimately begin to own their leader identity. The process of ownership is made clear in this excerpt:

> *"…for both of them it was about owning, 'no hang on this is the leader that I want to be, I can create this'. And then once they realised it was up to them to create it and then suddenly there was that real excitement and energy burst because they could become the leaders that suited them, not what other people wanted from them."* (Coach Renée)

Ownership, then, is about being the leader that they "*want to be*", something that they can create for themselves, and this implicitly suggests that it also brings confidence through the language of energy and movement (seen here with "*energy burst*") associated with confidence in Chapter Four.

Part of the ownership process is that of uncovering old stories about the self, such as discussed above, and assimilating them into the new identity. Coach Donald described this as a process of being able to "*embrace what they actively or actively at least subconsciously*

rejected/closed down…", as if re-opening a part of the self and incorporating it into the new leader identity. He described this active process of ownership further in relation to one of his clients:

> *"And essentially he took himself straight back to a 12/13 year old boy who's had a very very difficult childhood, and as soon as he was able to own that and the power in that young self and bring that into who he was, suddenly he not only seemed more powerful, he felt more powerful too, and there was a sense of the amount of effort that was going to try to hide who he was but was released more fully into who he is."*

The word "*powerful*", used twice here to describe how the leader seemed to others *and* how he felt inside, is a word which is used ten times throughout the coaching discussion, and seems to signify some level of transformation – both for the individual in terms of their internal psychological transition in working through the identity process, and also through the use of coaching, as will be discussed further at the end of this chapter.

Note the words "*effort*" and "*hide*" associated with the old story, and then the contrasting sense of "*release*" through ownership into a more whole ("*more fully*") person as a consequence. The notion of the "*effort*" involved in hiding the old story also contrasts directly with the energy referred to above in the creation of the leader identity.

As well as a confidence which comes with the ownership of one's leader identity, there is an acceptance of not being the perfect leader, shown in this excerpt:

> *"well I'm confident in who I am, there's areas that I'm strong on, there's areas that I'm not so strong on……I'm not going to be brilliant but I'm confident that I'm able to bring my* ***own self*** *and all I can to the situation." (*Coach Rebecca, describing her clients)

Coach Rebecca interpreted this as the confidence and acceptance to bring one's "*own self*" despite any shortcomings. This is experienced similarly by some of the leaders, for example Irene, who contrasted how not doing something perfectly earlier on in her transition would have hit her "*really hard in terms of confidence*" with later being able to accept that she's human, and Tess, who summarised this acceptance:

> *"I'm bringing a whole load of different skills to it because I'm me… you bring what you bring… I won't be able to do it all but that's because that's not what I do but I do this other stuff…"*

The ownership process involves the leaders creating their own leader identity and deciding how they want to be, in part by uncovering and assimilating hidden internal stories. It brings

with it a confidence, as typified by a sense of energy, a sense of wholeness and power. It also brings an acceptance of being human and not being able to do everything.

6.5 The psychological work of coaching senior leaders

The coaches in the focus group discussion show how personal, complex and deep their work is with leaders at this transition point. I was particularly struck by this during the discussion and summarised it to the group at the end of the discussion:

> *"…but there's something coming out about the multi-faceted support of coaching, it is a very tailored… approach that will be right for that individual… But it's something that they appreciate when dealing with lack of confidence that feels very personal and very helpful with self-awareness, that's the biggest piece I think."*

Each coach gave examples of how they work at a deep level with these individuals, helping them to explore and understand something psychological which might be impacting their confidence as a leader, as discussed in this chapter mostly in relation to the leader identity development process.

Working at a deep level will be explored here through the use of the word "*powerful*", which was noted earlier in this chapter as a word used frequently throughout the coaching discussion and denoting something transformational, both in terms of the impact on the leader during the process of ownership of leader identity and also in relation to coaching at this transition point. The following excerpt from the focus group discussion shows how the word "*powerful*" is developed from Coach Donald through me as moderator to Coach Renée:

> *"And so there's something peculiarly personal about the challenge that individuals face at this point because in order to grow personally they have to embrace what they actively or… at least subconsciously rejected/closed down, so I find it… very, very powerful when you realise that's what's going on for people."* (Coach Donald)
>
> *"And that's very interesting isn't it…. I'm assuming then that in your role in coaching someone at this stage you, and Renée and all of us, are using our psychology backgrounds to do so much more than just look at some of the sort of external challenges and the depth of coaching, therefore, considering some of the things we talked about: identity, mid-life crisis, deep transitional, personal stories, personal narratives, all of that suggests that deep coaching is what can be really powerful."* (Me)
>
> *"One of the most powerful questions I use is if people have children how close are you to the adult you want your children to become, because that's quite a deep question*

but it often helps people make some choices about the way they want to live…" (Coach Renée)

Here the word "*powerful*" is used by Coach Donald to suggest an active awareness that the coach has in working at a personal level with the client (understanding the subconscious); I then use it to summarise what I am hearing as examples of "*deep coaching*" (the examples I summarise are of working at a personal and psychological level); and Coach Renée then takes the word to explore a coaching technique which opens something up (powerful questioning) so that the leader is able to access something more deep and personal in order to understand themselves better.

Part of the transformational process of coaching seems to be the creation of time and space allowing access to the deep, personal and sometimes subconscious world of the leader. The coaches and leaders alike referred to the "*space*" of coaching and this was both literal and metaphorical: the metaphorical "*safe*" space and the literal space to stop when so busy and to make sense of themselves, as well as to use the coaching space to talk through issues in order to help them move forward.

Freya describes the frustration of her time-limited coaching sessions and implies that it was the deeper work "*underneath*" which she really needed help with, which would only be possible with time and space:

"it doesn't give you the space to just breathe and kind of just sit with what you're dealing with… and I felt just this tension between tackling the here and now, the things that were like burning in front of me and then actually having the time and space to really look at what's actually going on underneath all of this."

Several of the leaders described the "*safe space*" of the coaching. This is particularly striking in the following excerpt with the war metaphor, emphasising the sense of safety in the coaching space in contrast to the danger outside of this space, perhaps reiterating the scrutiny and exposure of being a senior leader that has been described elsewhere:

"it was like momentary kind of reprieve, it was almost like I could go into the little trench with her, batten down the hatches and breathe for a few minutes, but then I still had to climb my way back out and run across the field with people shooting at me." (Freya)

The work of coaching senior leaders is shown to support them by providing the space – literal and metaphorical – to help them to explore themselves more deeply at a psychological level. This was described by the coaches as a very individual process which requires an individual, tailored response from the coaches and which can be seen as transformational when working at this level.

6.6 Summary

In this chapter I have focused on the overarching theme of the intrapersonal challenges to confidence at this transition point. These reflect the challenges that are shown to be within the leader and are often referred to as the psychological challenges of transition. I have shown that the leaders felt that they were required to perform a role as a senior leader and that the language of *"act"* and *"perform"* was predominant throughout the interviews, often as a response to feeling the need to prove themselves to others. This introduces the notion of inauthenticity as a senior leader and it is seen how exhausting and effortful the process of acting is for the leaders, in direct contrast to the language of ease used to describe confidence in Chapter Four. I also explored the theme of self-doubts kept hidden from others, with the suggestion that the leader is not expected to show self-doubt but to maintain a façade of confidence.

The predominant theme in this chapter is that of the leader identity development process, which shows that exploring and owning a leader identity is an important part of the confidence process as a senior leader, understood by the coaches as a key part of their work in supporting senior leaders at this stage but not necessarily understood as such by the leaders themselves. The leader is shown to be caught between the expectations from others and the desire to take ownership of their leader identity. Ownership of the leader identity involves a process of release, integration of "*old stories*" and acceptance of oneself and this gives the leader confidence. The findings highlight the change during the leader identity development process from a reactive to proactive approach such that these leaders own their leader identity, often for the first time.

Finally, in exploring the role of coaching in supporting the intrapersonal challenges to confidence I have shown that this requires deep psychological work which focuses on the individual. This is described as transformational work, with the potential to access the deep, personal and sometimes subconscious world of the leader, although doing this requires time and space.

In the following chapter, I will discuss the findings of this research in light of the literature across the fields of psychology, leadership and coaching in which this study is positioned.

Chapter Seven: Discussion

The findings of this research, presented in the three previous chapters, give an understanding of the experiences of confidence and loss of confidence within this context across four main inter-connected areas - ease and energy; control of emotions; clarity; and vulnerability. The organisational challenges and intrapersonal challenges to confidence for senior leaders in transition were also considered. In this chapter, the findings will be discussed across four overarching themes that arise, building upon the literature already reviewed in Chapter Two and bringing in additional literature that has become relevant. I have made a judgement about what to discuss, based on the findings that stood out to me most as meriting further exploration and discussion against the literature, though this inevitably means leaving out some aspects of the findings.

The four overarching themes are:

1. Understanding confidence within the context of the transition to senior leadership
2. Vulnerability and confidence
3. The role of organisations in confidence of senior leaders
4. Coaching and working with confidence in senior leadership transition

7.1 Understanding confidence within the context of the transition to senior leadership

Definitions of confidence are broad and unclear and include several interchangeable terms and concepts (Kane, Lewis and Yarker, 2021). This might be one of the reasons for the lack of attention to confidence in coaching and this study has sought to address that. Although IPA does not claim generalisation and pays attention to the detailed examination of individual experiences (Smith, 2011), it was possible to gain an understanding from this research of the commonalities of experiences of confidence. In this sense, this study offers a unique attempt to define a complex term, which has mostly only been studied quantitatively, seemingly never from the first-person perspective, and most frequently only in relation to self-efficacy. In this section, I will discuss and compare how confidence is experienced and understood by participants within this context to the concept of confidence as it is portrayed across the psychology, leadership and coaching literature, as discussed in Chapter Two.

The dominant theory most closely related to and often used interchangeably with confidence is self-efficacy, and most studies across the literature which explore any aspect of confidence are based upon our understanding of self-efficacy from self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977). However, the findings of this study suggest an understanding of the experiences of confidence

which is not related to any aspects of task, as seen in self-efficacy theory, such as achievement, mastery or demonstration of ability. **However, although this study shows confidence to be a concept which is distinct from self-efficacy, it is shown to share what are considered to be some of the key sources of self-efficacy, further developed in sport confidence theory (Vealey and Garner-Holman, 1998): feedback, support and preparation.** The findings do not support a relationship between confidence and performance as in self-efficacy theory or sport confidence theory (Vealey and Garner-Holman, 1998; Hays *et al*., 2007), or in the coaching literature (Evers, Browers and Tomic, 2006; Baron and Morin, 2009; Grant, Curtayne and Burton, 2009). In fact, the impact of confidence on further behaviours or outcomes (such as performance, or achievement) is not shown in the findings at all and participants did not describe how feeling confident or not had an impact on any further behaviours.

To some surprise, given how frequently the term Impostor Phenomenon is seen in relation to confidence (anecdotally, for example, most of the individuals who I talked to briefly about my research asked whether this was about Impostor Phenomenon), it was not experienced as being a significant part of the challenge to confidence for these leaders. With one exception, the leaders did not describe feelings of fraudulence nor the fear of being found out (Clance and Imes, 1978), which are key defining features of Impostor Phenomenon. Instead, they experienced merely some of the elements associated with Impostor Phenomenon (Sakulku and Alexander, 2011), although they did not link them to the concept, and these included the need to put on a mask and to act in front of others. It is quite possible that leaders who have reached this level of seniority have either been able to overcome such feelings, or never significantly suffered from them and have been able to progress in their careers as a result. This might suggest that the concept of confidence should not be conflated with Impostor Phenomenon as it frequently is.

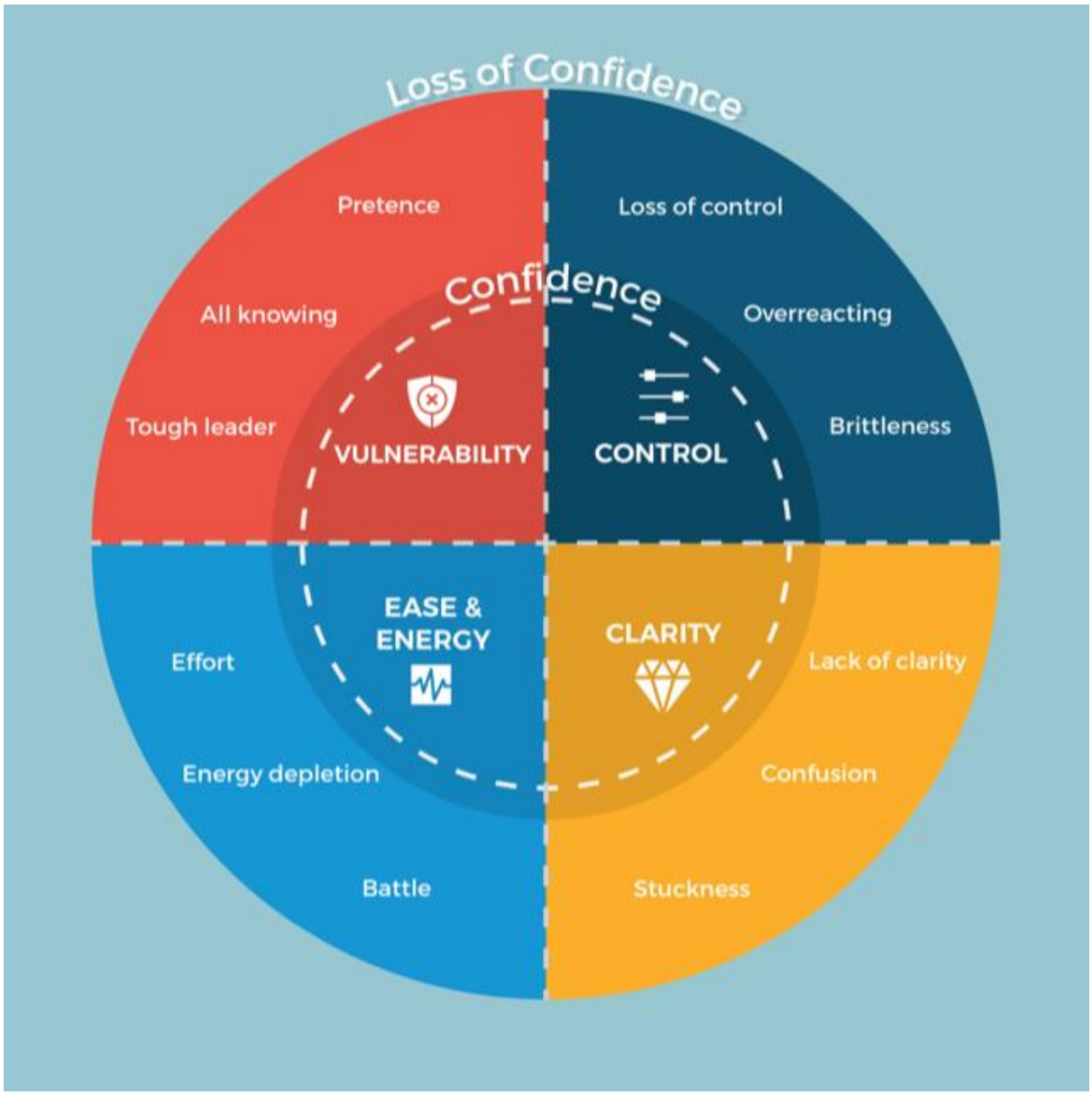
In this study, and within the specific context of senior leadership transition, the experiences of confidence were described by participants across four inter-connected areas, as shown in detail in the four super-ordinate themes in Chapter Four: a feeling of ease and energy; remaining in control (of self and emotions); having clarity; and being able to be vulnerable. The experiences of loss of confidence, shown as the opposite of each of these, were even more prevalent in the findings and these were described as: the inability to show vulnerability and instead maintaining the pretence of the "*all knowing*" and "*tough*" leader; loss of control of self and emotions; lack of clarity and an experience of "*stuckness*"; exhaustion and energy depletion. **None of these descriptions of confidence have been explored in the literature across any of the fields of psychology, leadership and coaching.**

Furthermore, there was a physicality to confidence as experienced and described by the participants in this study. Both leaders and coaches described confidence as a feeling of ease in physical terms, suggesting an ease of movement, flying, walking tall, increased height or space. This was in absolute contrast to loss of confidence, which was described as reduced physical space such as feeling "*crushed*" or "*small*". These descriptions of confidence in physical terms have not been noted before, to my knowledge, beyond one very recent coaching study which explores self-confidence and coaching (Kane, Lewis and Yorker, 2021), and this is not in the context of senior leadership transition. The researchers note that their study moves beyond cognitive and emotional concepts to 'embodiment'. They suggest that embodiment has an important role to play in self-confidence and that coaches seeking to develop confidence in their clients might use a more embodied approach. It has been suggested elsewhere in the coaching literature that "concepts such as the body, embodiment and physicality have been largely absent" (Jackson, 2017, p.256) but that outward manifestations of emotional and psychological states may be "visible to the coach and others" even if not to the client themselves (p.262). It is clear, then, that more work could be done to understand how coaching could work with embodiment more generally, but the findings of this research make the case for coaching to work with embodiment in relation to confidence, to help the client to understand the impact of confidence externally on themselves (and therefore as visible to others) even further.

The four super-ordinate themes in Chapter Four of ease and energy; control; clarity; and vulnerability, which have been referred to throughout the Findings chapters, have been drawn together in a circular framework which is set out below in Figure 6. Each super-ordinate theme is summarised by the use of the key words from the findings in the inner circle. Loss of confidence is described in three separate words for each theme, those used most frequently by participants, in the outer circle. There are deliberately porous divisional lines to show the inter-connected nature of each of the four areas in the inner circle, depicting confidence, and between the inner circle and outer circle, depicting loss of confidence. Whilst I have attempted in this study to gain some more clarity on the experiences of such a complex concept as confidence, summarised by this framework, the findings of this study also reiterate the complexity of the concept. This is exemplified in this framework, deliberately configured as a circle as no one area of confidence remains distinct and each area interlinks. For example, the inability to be vulnerable and lack of clarity, described in relation to loss of confidence, both require effort and are described by participants as exhausting. Furthermore, emotional control in relation to confidence is particularly difficult to understand: whilst being in control (of the self and of emotions) denotes confidence in this study, the findings also suggest that the process of controlling the leader's emotions took a great deal of effort and was exhausting and

therefore also denotes loss of confidence. In this chapter, I will focus primarily on vulnerability, emotional control and clarity, weaving the understanding of energy/loss of energy throughout each overarching theme.

Figure 6: A framework of the experiences of confidence and loss of confidence within the context of senior leadership transition



To summarise, this understanding of confidence, elicited from the first-person experiences of senior leaders and coaches, brings an entirely new perspective, and a clarity, to the concept of confidence. Confidence is shown in this study to be more than a general concept comprising related terms. Grounding it in the reality of the specific context of senior leadership transition enabled individual elements to emerge, and this has been possible because it has been explored as the main focus of the study. The specificity in this detailed understanding of confidence is important because it potentially allows us to be able to work with it more productively, both in organisational leadership development and also in coaching. For example, it may help coaches to ensure that their interventions with clients are focused appropriately (Kane, Lewis and Yarker, 2021) rather than, for example, focusing on a definition

of a related concept (such as self-efficacy) or related and often conflated terms such as Impostor Phenomenon or self-esteem.

7.2 Vulnerability and confidence for senior leaders

"Confidence … being able to say 'I don't know the answer to this'." (Coach Donald)

The theme of vulnerability in relation to confidence in this context was significant in the findings, as aspects of it were experienced and described by all of the participants. This finding was not expected, as it did not arise in relation to confidence nor in relation to the challenges of leadership transition in the literature review in Chapter Two; therefore, in this section I will describe it and discuss it in relation to additional literature that has become relevant.

Participants defined confidence in this context as being able to be vulnerable at work, and yet this was seemingly not possible for them, and they felt the need to hide any aspects of vulnerability. They defined vulnerability as being able to: stop acting and pretending e.g., to be the all-knowing, "tough" leader who doesn't need feedback; be honest about self-doubts and loss of confidence rather than putting on a façade; admit to experiences of loneliness; be authentic with emotions without needing to control them or to keep them "*on a level*" as they felt was expected by others.

In the wider literature, definitions of vulnerability seem to consist of two core components: a willingness to be transparent and emotionally exposed to others (Brown, 2012; Lopez, 2018); and elements of risk (of being hurt or attacked) or uncertainty (Brown, 2012; Lopez, 2018, Ito and Bligh, 2016). The element of risk is clearly experienced by some of the participants in this study, for example one participant describes the risk of emotional exposure as something which might "*derail*" her and another refers to the potential repercussions of showing others the "*chink in that armour*" (of not knowing the answer) such that she felt "*exposed, scared, crushed*". In the one exception in this study, one participant did not need to hide her vulnerability because her manager was transparent with her with his own vulnerability, thereby reducing her risk in sharing vulnerability. This raises questions about what organisations can do to create an environment of psychological safety such that leaders can be vulnerable by taking interpersonal risk (Edmondson, 1999; Edmondson and Lei, 2014). The findings of this research suggest that by being able to be more vulnerable, these leaders would have felt more confident.

Vulnerability has been given very little attention in the leadership literature. The portrayal of leaders in the leadership literature is often as superhumans or heroes, with the leader expected to know everything and to be more courageous than anyone else, though it is also

acknowledged that these leaders are rarely able to live up to these expectations (Yukl, 2010). Kets de Vries (1989) noted that leaders are expected to be infallible and even to possess "magical" powers. The leaders in this study felt that they shouldn't show that they didn't know the answers, even though they were new to the role and couldn't be expected to know, and they craved frequent feedback to help them understand how they were doing. Many of the leaders gave examples of self-doubts they experienced at various stages of the transition, however they also suggested that they could not share any of these self-doubts with anyone and the language used frequently referred to the hidden "internal" experience that was kept from others. The senior leaders felt compelled to maintain an external appearance of confidence, as if showing loss of confidence was just not possible nor desirable for a senior leader.

There has been a move in the leadership field towards the notion of post-heroic leadership, which proposes a more collective and less individualistic leadership (Crevani, Lindgren and Packendorff, 2010). This includes not seeing leaders as flawless heroes and allowing for more vulnerability in leadership (Fletcher, 2004; Ancona, Malone, Orlikowski, Senge, 2007). It is defined as allowing for more "empathy, vulnerability, and skills of inquiry and collaboration" (Fletcher, 2004, p.650). However, despite this, there is still relatively little research on vulnerability in leadership.

The findings of this research align with the quest to humanise leadership (Petriglieri and Petriglieri, 2015), with their suggestion of using a more systems psychodynamic approach to organisations. They argue that this would allow more attention to be paid to the changing nature of leader identity, putting more emphasis on leaders' inner conflicts and social contexts and highlighting the emotional underpinnings of leaders' "tensions, contradictions and paradoxes" (Petriglieri and Petriglieri, 2015, p.12). They also suggested that the positivist lens that most leadership studies use shows a "simplistic portrait of leadership that dominates contemporary management" (2015, p.11) and called for the fascination with "heroic" leaders to end, just as this research does. I believe that a good place for humanising leadership to start would be in further qualitative studies of vulnerability and confidence, which have not been explored together to date in any field. Two further aspects of vulnerability deserve more specific attention and will be discussed below: emotional control and loneliness.

7.2.1. Emotional control

"…*this explosion of emotions that I couldn't let out because that is not appropriate in the workplace"* (Irene)

Emotional control in relation to confidence was a prominent theme throughout the Findings chapters and has therefore been included as one of the four areas of the confidence framework created from this study. Whilst it can be positioned as a separate theme, I see it as closely related to vulnerability and highlighting some understudied issues. I therefore discuss this topic as part of the theme of vulnerability in this chapter.

Many of the leaders in this research experienced the need to keep emotions "*on a level*" and suggested that not doing so would undermine their confidence, thereby showing a relationship between emotional stability and confidence. As seen in Chapter Two, in the leadership literature, emotional control is shown to be linked to self-confidence, with the suggestion that self-confidence helps leaders to remain even-tempered and composed, and that this in turn helps to build trust among followers through predictability, particularly important during a crisis (Kirkpatrick and Locke, 1991). This enables the leader to manage conflict, as well as to act reliably, and "enhances others' perceptions of his abilities, while lack of self-control tends to damage trust and commitment" (Axelrod and Marques, 2017, p.5). This understanding of the need for emotional stability is described by the coaches who refer to leader confidence using the language of "*calmness*" and "*evenness of emotionality*". Implicit in this study was the suggestion that not keeping emotions under control might risk showing vulnerability by exposing true emotions and causing a loss of face in front of others. In this sense, the coaches' suggestion of emotional stability, and calmness, in particular, signifying confidence, continues the discourse in the leadership literature, which suggests that emotional control is an important element of effective leadership, requiring a "calm and controlled impression" (Riggio and Reichard, 2008, p.174). Emotional control/stability is in fact seen as one of the key traits of leadership (Riggio and Reichard, 2008; Kirkpatrick and Locke, 1991) and a component of most emotional intelligence theories, used as a measure of the perception of leader effectiveness (Lewis, 2000) and successful leadership (Goleman, 1998).

It seems, then, that the leadership literature proposes emotional control, and confidence that is displayed through such control, as a positive leadership skill. However, the findings from this research suggest that sustaining emotional control, whilst expected of leaders, actually has a cost to the leader in terms of exhaustion as a result of a process of careful control, with exhaustion itself denoting loss of confidence throughout this study. Despite trying to keep control of their emotions, it was not always possible for the leader to do so, and some participants described a leakage of emotions (such as nostrils flaring in anger) which surprised

and frustrated them. This process, of knowing that they were required to keep emotional control and trying to do so but sometimes failing, is shown to be difficult and to impact the leader's confidence. The leadership literature does not recognise this complex process, although the exertion of energy required in displaying appropriate or expected emotions in one's role is acknowledged (Brotheridge and Lee, 2002; Weiss *et al*., 2018) without further attention to the impact on the leader. This also raises the question of whether coaches are complicit in perpetuating the perception of the importance of emotional control for leaders, without regard to the potential cost to the leaders themselves, and suggests that this should be taken into consideration in their coaching work.

This study also surfaces the tension between expected emotional displays and the ease of authenticity as a senior leader and shows a clear relationship between authenticity and confidence. The findings suggest that leaders experienced confidence when they were able to be authentic with their emotions, although this was not frequent as they were pulled more towards the expected displays of emotions, and in meeting these expectations often described a process of acting. In fact, leaders in this study could be seen to be in a process akin to 'emotional labour', the "act of displaying socially desirable emotions" (Brotheridge and Lee, 2002, p.57), with an assumption that leaders need to perform an act by controlling their emotions. It is certainly implicit in the literature and in the language used to describe emotional control as an important element of effective leadership e.g., whereby leaders "*stifle"* the expression of emotional states in order to create a calm and controlled impression and are "*masking* emotions on cue" (Riggio and Reichard, 2008, p.172). An understanding of how authenticity, at least in terms of the emotional congruence, impacts the leader's confidence, adds to the paucity of what we know about the *effect* of authentic leadership *on leaders themselves*, described as being "poorly understood" (Weiss *et al*., 2018, p.309). In this study, the relationship between authenticity and confidence in leaders is clearly present, adding to the small body of leadership literature on authenticity which proposes that confidence comes from self-understanding and self-concept clarity (Gardner *et al*., 2011; Fusco, O'Riordan and Palmer, 2015; Luthans and Avolio, 2003; Avolio *et al*., 2004; Ilies, Morgeson, and Nahrgang, 2005) but does not look further at the relationship between authenticity and confidence.

From this study we understand that at this transition point there seems to be the need to act and to carefully control emotions, which, at the same time threatens the leader's ability to be authentic and to feel confident. This presents a significant paradox for leadership theory and for leaders themselves. It appears that being an authentic leader is good for the leader (Weiss *et al*., 2018; Gardner *et al*., 2011; Gardner, Fischer and Hunt, 2009). It is also good for the follower, an area that is much-researched but beyond the parameters of this discussion. However, in this study the leader is caught in the middle of the desire to be a successful leader

by carefully controlling emotions according to traditional expectations and being authentic with their emotions as it is experienced as easy and natural and gives them confidence. They therefore experience an emotional dissonance (Gardner, Fischer and Hunt, 2009), which comes at a cost to them of effort, exhaustion and loss of confidence. The findings of this study, then, challenge the discourse in the leadership literature around the importance of having emotional control as a leader and instead give a detailed description of the internal conflict and an unresolvable paradox associated with the desire to be authentic whilst feeling compelled to maintain emotional control.

7.2.2 Loneliness as a new senior leader

"*I thought the loneliness would change…in fact I think you feel it much much worse at the top."* (Rosie)

A sub-theme of vulnerability and confidence was that of the loneliness experienced at this transition point. This was also a new finding and did not arise in the literature review (Chapter Two) in relation to confidence nor to the challenges of the transition to senior leadership. In this study, loneliness was described primarily in relation to a feeling of difference to others (in the peer group) and it was this which led to self-doubt and a lack of confidence. Participants questioned whether they would be accepted by the group and described the fear of not belonging. Some of them felt isolated from all angles: from senior colleagues above, from their peer group, and from subordinates (acknowledging that their relationships with juniors had needed to change). Loneliness was described as a lack of close connection with others and a result of a lack of support that the leaders received from peers. Concurring with these findings, in a study using C-suite leaders (Zumaeta, 2019), lack of support was one of the main pressures that led to loneliness, as well as having a greater sense of responsibility and being under the spotlight all the time.

Another aspect of loneliness in this study was that of feeling alone in making big decisions and not being able to turn to others to discuss these, creating a feeling of weight of responsibility that the leaders held onto and which was only alleviated by the sharing the feelings and decisions with the coach. This understanding furthers the findings from a study of leaders in transition to general management where the leaders experienced the burden from being solely responsible for a broader business rather than just being part of a team (Mallaby, Price and Hofmeyr, 2017). Similarly, in a study of loneliness among senior leaders, Wright (2012) argued that loneliness was experienced in relation to the weight of responsibility and the isolation of decision-making.

Cooper and Quick (2003) described the problem of loneliness in senior leadership, and although this was not an empirical study, they noted several points which chime with this research, such as the loneliness arising from the change in the nature of relationships with others as the executive becomes the superior. They also made suggestions to counter loneliness for the senior leader, including executive coaching to "provide sounding boards and offer the critical feedback that an executive's life often lacks, once peers are no longer peers but subordinates" (2003, p. 4). Other suggestions included mentoring (while noting that fewer mentors exist the more senior a leader becomes), external peer support and finding confidants at home, reiterating the few places where the leader can go to alleviate loneliness and the important role that executive coaching provides. Aside of these few studies, the notion of loneliness in senior leadership more broadly, and specifically in relation to this transition point, has been given very little empirical attention in the leadership literature.

This study therefore provides further support for recognising the experiences of loneliness for senior leaders at this transition point and makes a connection between loneliness and the leader's confidence. One very recent coaching study shows how features of connectedness to others (engaging with others, support, and sense of belonging) are important components of self-confidence (Kane, Lewis and Yorker, 2021) but this is not within the context of senior leadership, nor does it give a detailed understanding of how the coaching helps to deal with loneliness. Therefore the findings of this study call for further research to explore loneliness and confidence in senior leadership and what role coaching can play to support leaders.

7.3 The role of organisations in confidence for senior leaders

The leaders in this study came from a range of organisations and sectors, but a common theme that arose was the experience of loss of confidence in connection to what the organisation was *not* providing for these leaders. The role of the organisation in relation to the leader's confidence has seemingly not been previously studied and this allows us to explore another dimension impacting confidence beyond that of it being purely the concern of the individual. Whilst in Chapter Five I also described findings related to the organisational lack of empowerment and the impact on the leader's confidence, I have chosen in this discussion to focus in on the three key organisational areas described in both Chapter Four and Chapter Five which have been shown empirically to be among the most important sources of confidence in sport confidence theory (Vealey, 1986; Vealey and Garner-Holman, 1998). These sources are: preparation, feedback and support. Two of these sources of confidence - support and feedback, along with challenge - have also been identified as the three critical components in the development of leaders (McCauley and Van Velsor; Machida and Schaubroeck, 2011), though not in relation to confidence.

7.3.1 Preparation as a source of confidence

"…but for me the unknown was, was… so… I didn't realise how much I would have needed a bit more information/preparation before the role." (Irene)

As shown in Chapter Four, in relation to the lack of clarity before transition and in the early stage of the transition, the findings of this study show that most of the leaders felt that they were not prepared for the transition and that this lack of preparation impacted their confidence. Participants described a more immediate preparation for the role that was lacking (rather than, for example, preparation over many years through skill and knowledge acquisition). Many of the leaders in this study had asked the organisation for help to prepare, for example by asking for time or handover sessions with their managers or predecessors, but this rarely happened and participants suggested that it was not seen to be important by others in the organisation, even though it was clearly very important for the leader. As a result, the leaders talked about the anxiety that this caused them and the difficulty of the "*unknown*", for which they had no "*template*" or "*manual*". This adds important empirical evidence to a McKinsey (Keller and Meaney, 2018) report which suggests that as many as 83 percent of global leaders feel unprepared for their new roles, though there are seemingly few empirical studies which explore the importance of preparation for transition for the leader's confidence. The hands-off attitude of organisations in the preparation for transition is a finding in a recent doctoral study exploring inhibitors for successful transition (Wiggins, 2019), which suggests that organisations expected the leaders to be able to define their own agendas and direction and how the lack of role clarity was one of the key challenges for leaders. In a study exploring organisational support for senior leaders in transition in South Africa, Terblanche and colleagues found that the lack of organisational support and clarity on what was expected of the newly transitioned senior leaders contributed "disproportionality to the anxiety experienced by participants" and that the leaders felt that the "organisation could have done more to support them and to provide clarity" (Terblanche, Albertyn, and Van Coller-Peter, 2018a, pp.5-8).

As outlined in Chapter Two, the importance of preparation (mental/physical) as a source of confidence has been studied in sport confidence and shown to be the most important of nine sources of self-confidence in athletes (Vealey and Garner-Holman, 1998). However, preparation for leaders in organisations and the relationship with confidence has seemingly not been researched, even if it has been identified as lacking for leaders in the leadership literature (Keller and Meaney, 2018; Wiggins, 2019). Leader self-efficacy has explored *preparatory* self-efficacy as one of the four self-efficacy concepts that are key to leader development, but this is about the task-related focus on "one's efficacy for executing and

completing a task during preparatory situations" (Machida and Schaubroeck, 2011, p. 461) rather than the broader notion of being adequately prepared for the transition to senior leadership. There is clearly a need for more attention to be paid to this topic together with understanding of how organisations can help leaders to prepare more and what kind of preparation would help them to feel more confident. In support of this agenda, this research suggests that the organisation needs to listen to the leader's needs in terms of preparation. The findings also show that there were some key aspects to preparation that would have helped the leader, such as time with the incumbent and more clarity about the role and what is expected of the leader. Based on the findings of this study, it would be premature to suggest that coaching helped the leader to prepare for the transition, or to assess whether this compensated for the lack of preparation from within the organisation, because only half of the leader participants in this study had had coaching prior to the transition. However, the findings clearly suggest that preparation is important for the leader's confidence, and this also needs to be explored further in relation to coaching and the timing of coaching to allow a focus on preparation before the transition.

7.3.2 Feedback as a source of confidence

"Yeah, but interestingly… I've never needed to seek it before, it's always just come to me." (Freya)

As seen in Chapter Two, feedback is seen as a key source of confidence in self-efficacy theory, with feedback creating a high level of self-efficacy in the case of positive messages and successes and having the opposite effect in the case of messages of failure (Bandura, 1977). Assessment or feedback (appraisal, positive encouragement from others) is also seen to influence a leader's self-efficacy (Machida and Schaubroeck, 2011). Feedback is the second most important source of self-confidence for athletes in sport confidence theory (Vealey and Garner-Holman, 1998). In healthcare literature, feedback is shown to be an important antecedent for professional confidence (Holland, Middleton and Uys, 2012). However, in this study, most of the leaders felt that they did not receive enough feedback from the organisation and this was one of the key factors that impacted their confidence – in fact, participants ascribed some of their most significant moments of loss of confidence to receiving no feedback or receiving negative feedback. This finding concurs with the leadership transition literature which suggests that new leaders rarely receive feedback (Hill, 1992; Manderscheid and Ardichvili, 2008; Conger and Fishel, 2007). Instead, in this study, when feedback was given it was more likely to be critical feedback, delivered with little concern for how the leader would receive it, and this greatly impacted the leader's confidence. This study

provides a deeper understanding of the detrimental effect of unconsidered critical feedback, without regular positive feedback, on the leader's confidence.

The findings show that in the context of this transition point, the leaders gain confidence from feedback and also crave feedback. The feedback that leaders sought was more likely to be as simple as informal feedback confirming that they were on the right track, rather than more formal appraisal or 360-degree feedback. This need for feedback is not a surprise given that the complexity of the challenges during leadership transition for C-suite leaders has been found to be greater than in previous transitions (McGill, Clarke and Sheffield, 2019). However, the findings also suggest that organisations make the assumption that regular feedback is not necessary for senior leaders, perhaps compared to earlier points in their career, and that the leaders feel the need to ask for feedback themselves, rather than it being unsolicited. .

It seems, however, that there is a discrepancy around feedback at this level: the leader craves feedback, which is not forthcoming, but they feel that asking for feedback will be seen by others as a sign of weakness and lack of confidence; and yet this also suggests that being able to ask for feedback in fact signifies confidence. The relationship between confidence and the perceived vulnerability in asking for feedback has not been explored in previous research and merits further attention in the leadership literature. It suggests that the organisation could do more to help the leader to be able to feel less vulnerable in seeking feedback. This point has been explored in a conceptualisation of feedback exploring feedback orientation and feedback culture in organisations (London and Smither, 2002), which suggests that organisational practices need to create a feedback culture by enhancing the quality of feedback. This conceptualisation includes recommending training people on how to provide useful feedback (to which I would add that this should include an awareness of how to deliver critical feedback to all levels in the organisation, including to senior leaders) and emphasising the importance of feedback across the organisation, including in-the-moment informal feedback. This study therefore builds on the work of self-efficacy theory, which highlights the importance of feedback as a source of self-efficacy and confidence. Furthermore, it gives a rich understanding of the experiences of the need for feedback for senior leaders within this context and the impact on their confidence of not receiving it, the difficulty in being able to ask for feedback and the perceived weakness in doing so, and the detrimental impact of critical feedback which is more forthcoming at this transition point.

7.3.3. Support as a source of confidence

"we're right behind you…come on if you ever need anything we're here for you, it's a team, we're all in it." (Tess)

Support was found in this study to be an important source of confidence for the leaders. However, many of the leaders felt quite unsupported by the organisation, particularly lacking the support of close senior colleagues, either feeling that they didn't belong or feeling criticised by them. This understanding of the lack of support experienced by senior leaders in transition enriches the body of leadership research, which shows that there is a reduction of available support for senior leaders (Wiggins, 2019; Terblanche, Albertyn, and Van Coller-Peter, 2018a; Wright, 2012; Zumaeta, 2019; Lindorff, 2001). It adds to this literature by defining support as the emotional support of having people "*right behind you*" as well as linking the lack of support to loss of confidence.

As seen in Chapter Two, support as a source of confidence is consistent with self-efficacy theory, described as "verbal persuasion" which seems to encompass both support and feedback/encouragement from others and it is one of the four main sources of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). Building on self-efficacy theory, in sport confidence theory, support is defined as positive feedback and encouragement from coaches, team-mates and friends and it is shown to be one of the top five sources of sport confidence (Vealey, 1986; Vealey and Garner-Holman, 1998). In the healthcare literature, support is shown to be an important antecedent for professional confidence (Holland, Middleton and Uys, 2012). In leader self-efficacy support from "supervisors, peers, significant others, and followers is also crucial to leader development" (Machida and Schaubroeck, 2011, p.465), and it is seen as something which helps to offset the impact of very strong challenges inherent in leader development. However, despite the understanding of the importance of support from others in the self-efficacy process, other than in a recent doctoral thesis where the support of a core group of individuals for a newly transitioned leader was shown to boost confidence (Wiggins, 2019), the relationship between support and confidence is not widely seen in the leadership literature.

Support in this study is understood as emotional rather than structural, i.e., support from people rather than organisational structures. Support can often be seen as something impersonal, for example in a McKinsey report (Martin, 2015) based on a survey of newly transitioned C-suite leaders across the globe, support played a key role in the success of the transition for these leaders, but it was defined as "important resources and information" rather than emotional support (p. 8). Indeed, the lack of emotional support is a key finding of a leadership transition study focusing on supporting new leaders, which suggests that organisations often support leaders through a "clinical" process which includes providing a list of leadership training courses (Terblanche, Albertyn, and Van Coller-Peter, 2018a, p.5). Why organisations are not providing emotional support within the organisation at this transition point is an obvious question and it may be because the psychological challenges of leadership transition are just not understood well enough yet. This understanding might help

organisations to be able to provide simple and low-cost emotional support through close peer groups, a buddy or mentor or enough time with a supportive manager, rather than impersonal costly training courses which might provide essential learning and self-development but not the kind of emotional support that seems to be important for the confidence of these leaders.

In summary, the organisation is shown in this study to have an important role to play in supporting the leader's confidence at this transition point and this allows us to move beyond seeing confidence purely as the concern of the individual. In this section, the discussion has been focused on the importance of the organisation in helping the leader's confidence at this transition point, through: adequate help with preparation ahead of the transition; providing more feedback – particularly regular, affirming feedback; paying attention to how critical feedback is delivered; and ensuring that more attention is paid to providing adequate emotional support to these leaders**.**

7.4 Coaching and working with confidence in senior leadership transition

It is clear from the findings of this study that coaching provided critical support to the leaders at this transition point. The coaching helped the leaders to regain confidence in a number of ways, primarily through the coaching space which enabled working with confidence at a deep psychological level, including: the safe space, allowing the leader to explore and share their experiences of vulnerability; helping the leader to move forward through clarity; helping the leader to gain clarity and ownership of their new leader identity; and through feedback and support. Each of these will be discussed below.

7.4.1 The safe space of coaching

"… momentary kind of reprieve…like I could go into the little trench with her, batten down the hatches and breathe for a few minutes." (Freya)

In the focus group discussion in particular, it was apparent that the coaches worked at a deep psychological level with the leaders and that this required time and space. The coaching space helped this transformational work through access to the deep, personal and sometimes subconscious world of the leader and allowed the coaches to explore how some of the deeper held assumptions and stories, in particular about the leader's identity, impacted confidence. The space required for this level of work aligns with the leadership literature, which suggests that identity work, a key element of the coaching work with confidence at this transition stage, is facilitated by a holding environment (Ibarra *et al.*, 2014), as well as through deep structure work (Snook, Ibarra and Ramo, 2010; Lord and Hall, 2005).

Exploring an aspect of the space of coaching further, it was clear that the "*safe space*" of coaching was critically important in allowing the leader to explore and share, and to alleviate, their experiences of vulnerability. This was created in part by the support of the coach and the notion of having the coach alongside and it was seen to be the only place where the leaders could share their self-doubts, and loss of confidence. The role of coaching in working with vulnerability in senior leadership has not been sufficiently explored in the coaching literature, with the exception of one study which finds that coaching helped newly transitioned leaders to overcome a deep sense of vulnerability (Reynolds, 2011), describing how the reflexive space, though not the safe space, of coaching supports these leaders to lessen their sense of vulnerability. This understanding of the importance of the safe space furthers understanding from coaching studies of leadership transitions which show that the leaders acknowledged the importance of the safe space of coaching to help them to talk openly and honestly (McGill, Clarke and Sheffield, 2019) and to allow them to express anxiety and self-doubt in relation to the intense pressure of high expectations and scrutiny in the new senior role (Gill, 2017).

In this study, the leaders also described how the safe space of coaching allowed them to share the weight of their responsibility in a way which was not possible within the organisation, thereby helping them to reduce the experience of loneliness. The need for psychological safety and "safe havens" away from organisational life is acknowledged in the leadership literature and described as an important condition required for leader identity development work (Ibarra and Petriglieri, 2010, p.16; Snook, Ibarra and Ramo, 2010), though interestingly there is no reference to coaching as one of these potential safe havens.

More broadly in the coaching literature, and particularly in coaching psychology journals, but not related to coaching leaders in transition, the safe space has been described as part of a supportive element of coaching, as: a safe and non-judgmental space which elicits reflection (Ladegard and Gjerde, 2014); as a "safe and supportive environment" allowing the client to discuss fears and anxieties (Wales, 2003 p.280); and as a space for holding or containing client emotions (Passmore, 2010 p.48-62), and as such seen as a critical space allowing the coach to step "into roles neglected by others". The latter aligns with the findings of this research where coaching seems to provide a safe space neglected by the organisation. Such space has also been shown to help clients to develop their resilience through taking time out for reflection and having the headspace, allowing them to be more energised and to feel stronger (Gill, 2017). Providing a safe space for thinking has been found to enable meta-reflection and to help develop conscious thought through vocalisation (Lawton-Smith, 2015).

The International Coaching Federation (ICF) refers to the "ability to create a safe, supportive environment that produces ongoing mutual respect and trust" as one of the coaching

competencies (ICF, 2021), suggesting that creating a safe space for the client is an important element in building the relationship and linking safety with trust. It is perhaps a surprise that, despite the leaders describing the importance of the safe space in coaching, they did not mention trust as an element of this, given the predominance of trust in the coaching literature in relation to the notion of safe space. The relationship between trust and feeling safe enough to show vulnerability can be seen in numerous coaching studies, for example Boyce, Jackson and Neal (2010, p. 918) argued that trust allows the coaching client to be able to be "open, honest and vulnerable" and that mutual trust provides a "safe environment". Trust has been shown to allow the client to "let their guard down and share sensitive information with the coach including aspects of themselves perceived as less than perfect" (Gyllensten and Palmer, 2007, p. 171).

In summary, the findings of this study suggest that the safe space is particularly important for leaders within this context as it allows them to share vulnerability and to be able to regain confidence. Future research could explore this further to understand more about what contributes to creating the safe space for leaders at this transition point, beyond what is understood from this study - the support of the coach and the notion of the coach being alongside.

7.4.2 Finding clarity

"…and it was that stuckness that they really brought. Just, "I just don't know which way to go" (Coach Renée)

In this study, confidence was ascribed to having clarity (and loss of confidence to lack of clarity) and the coaching played a key part in helping the leader to find clarity. The leaders described a lack of clarity about what to do and how to do it, sometimes described as confusion or a feeling of "*stuckness*", in particular early on in the transition. How *coaching* enabled the leaders to regain confidence through providing clarity has not been explored previously and will be discussed below.

There were several ways in which coaching specifically helped to provide clarity, for example through being able to talk things through with the coach, or work out realistic priorities, particularly when some of the leaders felt compelled to try to do everything well and quickly. Some of the leaders described how certain coaching tools were helpful in giving them clarity either about themselves or the situation, such as a role play, a card sort or certain psychometrics. For some of the leaders, the coaching helped them to regain clarity of their sense of purpose and direction. And finally, as will be discussed later in this chapter, the coaching also enabled the leader to gain clarity on their leader identity.

Whilst finding clarity is implicit in many of the coaching techniques and models, in particular with the focus on coaching goals and outcomes, it has not been explored in relation to how this also gives the client confidence. Working with clarity, or helping the client to gain clarity, is also implicit in the competency frameworks for the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC) and the International Coaching Federation (ICF) but the focus is on ensuring *clarity of language* (e.g. the ICF competency suggests that the coach "summarizes, paraphrases, reiterates, and mirrors back what client has said to ensure clarity and understanding" or "invokes inquiry for greater understanding, awareness, and clarity") and on *clarifying goals and outcomes*. Working with clarity is not explicit in either competency framework and, given the understanding from this research of its importance in supporting confidence, at least within the specific context of senior leadership transition, this could potentially be explored further in coaching research and practice. Furthermore, there does not seem to be any research in the coaching literature on working with clarity generally in coaching and this is an area which merits further attention, to help us understand more about how coaches enable clients to gain clarity and how this helps their confidence.

7.4.3 Clarity and ownership of leader identity

"And then once they realised it was up to them to create it …suddenly there was that real excitement and energy burst because they could become the leaders that suited them, not what other people wanted from them" (Coach Renée)

Working with the leader on their new leader identity is shown to be an important part of helping the leader to gain confidence in the transition to senior leadership and it is clear that this requires space, facilitated in particular by the safe space created by the coach, in order to enable work at a deeper psychological level. What the findings of this study show is that it is the clarity and ownership of the new leader identity, in particular, which gives the leader confidence, and it is suggested that both the clarity and ownership of the leader identity are particularly key to the challenges of confidence at this transition point. This brings new understanding to the body of literature on leader identity development which does not consider confidence in any way.

The inevitability of change to identity in leadership transition is not a surprise and has been explored in the leadership literature (Snook, Ibarra and Ramo, 2010; Ashforth and Saks, 1995; Ibarra and Barbalescu, 2010; Watkins, 2009; Hill, 1992). The *process* of leader identity development is shown to be one which is fundamental to the transition to senior leadership (Ashforth, 2001; Ibarra and Barbalescu, 2010; DeRue and Ashford, 2010; Miscenko, Günter and Day, 2017), prompting the individual to re-construct the meaning of their identity (Hall,

2004; Ibarra, 1999; Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003; Miscenko, Günter and Day, 2017) and this study suggests that it is the coaching, in particular, that enables this process. How leader identity work is enabled by executive coaching remains largely unexplored in the coaching literature with some recent exceptions (e.g. Skinner 2020; Bennett 2021) and most studies focus on leader identity work in development programmes (Snook, Ibarra and Ramo, 2010; Lord and Hall, 2005; Miscenko, Günter and Day, 2017). What this study brings in addition is the perspective of the coaches working with leaders on their leader identity and how integral this work was for the leaders at this transition point in connection with enabling confidence. In contrast to what has been seen previously in the leadership literature in terms of the process of leader identity development work spanning a ranges of processes including revision, de-construction, construction, experimentation and internalisation (Ibarra, 1999; Miscenko, Günter and Day, 2017; Skinner, 2020), the process in this study was shown to include the following stages: exploration, integration of "old stories" about the self, and the eventual ownership of the new identity. Each of these stages of the leader identity development process found in this study will be discussed below.

Exploration of the leader identity is an integral part of the identity-based model of leader development for Ibarra and colleagues, although coaching is not discussed as something which is key to facilitating this process (Snook, Ibarra and Ramo, 2010). Exploration of the leader identity in this study involved working with the coach to understand and reject the expectations of others about their leader identity, with the suggestion from the coaches that the leaders had previously passively accepted ideas about their leader identity from others and that, at this stage of seniority, they needed to reject these ideas and to create their own leader identity. This same aspect of "resisting "societal and organisational scripts of who one should be as a leader" is acknowledged in some of the leadership literature (Bennett, 2021 p. 57; Sinclair, 2011 p. 509), although the impact on the leader of this process and the tension this creates is particularly highlighted in this study.

The second part of the leader identity development process included the integration of "old stories" about the self. These were stories which had often been a defining part of their identity and which often implied a sense of not being good enough, which the leader had buried deep but which still affected them. Integration (of new self-concepts) is one of the three key phases that an individual is seen to go through in the leadership transition process (Snook, Ibarra and Ramo, 2010), although in this study it is shown to involve a process of integrating the "old stories" into the new identity rather than keeping them hidden. This process, enabled by coaching, might be seen as a healthy alternative to what Petriglieri and Stein (2012, p. 1223) describe as "toxic environments" in organisations, with leaders denying their "unwanted selves" and, through an unconscious process of projective identification, attacking the

unwanted selves in others rather than themselves and turning “inner conflicts into interpersonal ones”. This is seen as a process of “crafting, experimenting with, and revising identity narratives or stories about the self” (Petriglieri and Stein, 2012, p. 1220), suggesting that individuals may be confronted with “aspects of their history… that they find unpalatable because they threaten, at least unconsciously, the congruence of the leader’s self” (p. 1221). In this study, however, integrating the stories into the new leader identity helped to create a sense of wholeness and congruence for the leader, which helped the leader to feel more confident. This finding of the integration of personal identities and the resulting congruence of identity builds upon our understanding of the importance of having a coherent sense of self after leadership transition (Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010) and of leaders having an identity which is deeply personal and congruent with their life story (Petriglieri and Stein, 2012; Shamir and Eilam, 2005). It also supports the notion of the importance of integration of *personal* identities and the *leader* identity (Ibarra *et al.*, 2014) and reiterates the role of coaching in enabling this process to help to “bring to life their unique identity as a leader” (Skinner, 2020, p. 19). The coaches in this study suggested that this was the first time that, through coaching, the leaders had been able to find clarity and acceptance of their leader identity, a finding similar to those of a recent qualitative study of the experiences of leaders using coaching to enable their leader identity development (Bennett, 2021). In addition, however, this study makes more explicit the ways in which gaining this clarity helped the leader and how it impacted their confidence.

This study uniquely showed that the final part of the leader identity development process in relation to the leader’s confidence was the ownership of the reconstructed leader identity: helping the leader, through coaching, to claim how they want to be and, as such, a proactive creation of identity. Ownership of their leader identity was shown to give the leaders confidence, described through references to energy and movement, signifying confidence throughout this study. It is described as a powerful process for the leader which allows them to be more congruent with themselves and more authentic. The findings also suggest that taking ownership of their identity helps the leaders to have a sense of acceptance about themselves, for example for not being the perfect leader but being able to accept a version that is truer to oneself, despite any shortcomings. The stage of ownership in the leader identity development process, and the confidence that this gives the leader, which is facilitated by the coaching, has not been previously researched in leader identity development research. However, it has been shown to be a key finding in a coaching study where newly transitioned leaders described how coaching enabled them to have greater ownership of their roles and to create a new identity for themselves within the role (Reynolds, 2011), with the suggestion that the coaching thus enabled a greater sense of ease and self-belief but this study does not focus

on ownership of leader identity itself. As such, this study brings important new understanding to a scant body of research (Skinner, 2020; Bennett, 2021) focusing on the role of coaching in facilitating the leader identity development process and, in particular, highlights the role that coaching plays in supporting confidence through enabling greater ownership of the leader identity, and it merits further attention.

7.4.4 Feedback and support

"*well done, look how far you've come!*" (Susie)

"It's really helpful to have somebody there" (Tess)

As already discussed earlier in this chapter, both feedback and support are shown in this study to be significant to the leader's confidence, but in reality the leaders experienced that they did not receive enough feedback nor support from within their organisation. The coaching, however, provided both feedback and support for the leaders. Although the coaches discussed more "formal" uses of feedback in coaching, such as 360-degree feedback within the organisation (McDowall in Passmore, 2012, p. 60), the more prominent discussion around feedback and its role in building confidence was about the more "informal" affirming feedback from the coach. Examples included reminding the leader of what they had achieved or of the coach offering a simple affirming "*you're doing really well*". Use of affirming feedback is indicated as a core coaching competency by the ICF, with the following expectation of the coach, who "celebrates client successes and capabilities for future growth" (ICF, 2021). However, the use of affirming feedback is not detailed further than this. Similarly, in the coaching literature, the use of affirming feedback from the coach in the confidence-building process has been given only brief attention; for example, Jones and Spooner (2006) found that high achievers needed and expected constant positive reinforcement from their coach; in a study by Grant, Curtayne and Burton (2009) the findings pointed to the impact of a 360-degree feedback process on the confidence of one leader; and Popper and Lipshitz (1992) outlined the importance of feedback from the coach in increasing self-efficacy. This study therefore brings further understanding, gained through the first-person perspective, of the significance, in particular, of affirming feedback from the coach and its role in building confidence in coaching within this context, all the more important given that it is felt to be missing from the organisation.

Although in some of the coaching literature (Jones and Spooner, 2006; Hindmarch, 2008) the link between the support of the coach and confidence is indicated, this study describes the nature of such a relationship more clearly as having the coach "*there*" by the side of the leader. Participants describe how it helps them to have the coach there to reduce the experience of

loneliness, in part by sharing the weight of responsibility that they feel and by being able to have someone to talk to. In the EMCC competency framework, the only reference to support is as a component of the competency of "building the relationship" and it is referred to as the requirement for the coach to demonstrate "empathy and genuine support for the client", though no further detail is given about how to show this other than the implicit connection with showing empathy (EMCC, 2020). The understanding of support from this study as being there alongside the client adds a further dimension to the definition of support used in the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL)'s coaching framework as the support of other people who "*cheer from the side lines*" (McCauley and Van Velsor, 2004, p.12). Support was also described by leader and coach participants as reassurance, in particular through a normalising process, for example by reminding the participant that it is normal to make mistakes and to feel like "*a normal human being, not a freak*". This adds empirical evidence to the leadership transition literature which suggests that it is critical for coaches to be able to respond to the distressed manager using normalising responses (Freedman, 2011).

Support and challenge are often mentioned together as important elements in the coaching process (Stokes and Jolly, 2018; Passmore, 2010). Challenge and support are described together in some of the coaching frameworks, for example forming two of the six interventions in Heron's model of six interventions (1976), a conceptual model often used to suggest different coaching styles, and in the CCL's coaching framework challenge and support are included as two of the three core elements that drive leader development (alongside assessment/feedback) (McCauley and Van Velsor, 2004). The use of challenge is undoubtedly important in coaching (Passmore, 2010; Jones and Spooner, 2006) and it is argued to be too often absent (Blakey and Day, 2012). Indeed, in the ICF competency framework, challenge is described as a core competency for coaches: "challenges client's assumptions and perspectives to provoke new ideas and find new possibilities for action" (ICF, 2021). Challenge and feedback seem to be used interchangeably in some of the coaching literature and even in the EMCC competency framework, where challenge is coupled with feedback as a core competency as follows: "[the coach] uses feedback and challenge effectively to increase awareness, insight and responsibility for action" (EMCC, 2020). In this study, the leaders and coaches did show that the use of challenge was helpful in rebuilding confidence, although this was only referenced in relation to the coach's challenge to the leader to seek alternative perspectives to the leader's own often limiting beliefs and self-doubts. This use of challenge to help the client to overcome limiting beliefs by seeking alternative perspectives has previously been shown in coaching studies to help to build confidence (for example Ladegard and Gerde, 2014; Lawton-Smith, 2015; Gill, 2017; Lancer and Eatough, 2018).

However, despite the need for challenge in coaching, as shown in the literature and by the reference to challenge in the core competences across both the ICF and the EMCC, these findings showed that support was far more needed by these leaders in the context of this transition. This adds to previous coaching research which suggests that senior leaders need to re-build confidence and that the level of challenge may need to be reduced with more focus on validation and support (Lawton-Smith, 2015). In a critical review of coaching, Passmore and Fillery-Travis (2011) suggested six key research themes that should be explored in the future, including the balance between challenge and support and they ask whether both need to be present for effective outcomes in coaching. The findings of this study suggest that for coaching leaders in the transition to senior leadership, and particularly in order to support and rebuild leader confidence, the balance in executive coaching needs to tip more towards support than challenge. It would be helpful for the coaching accreditation bodies to take account of this and to make the need for support more explicit in the competency frameworks, alongside challenge.

7.5 Summary

In this chapter, I have discussed four overarching themes that have arisen from the research, starting with an understanding of confidence, which brings some new clarity to a concept previously confined to self-efficacy and broadly defined without the refinement of a specific context. I introduced a framework of the experiences of confidence and loss of confidence, upon which the discussion points were then developed.

The focus in this chapter has been primarily on discussing vulnerability and confidence, arguing that leadership research should consider understanding more about vulnerability at this transition stage. The case was made for understanding and accepting vulnerability in leadership rather than hailing the heroic leadership model. Two further aspects of vulnerability and confidence were discussed, starting with emotional control and highlighting the expectations for leaders to control emotions and to act, rather than to be authentic with their emotions. The discourse in the leadership literature about the importance of emotional stability was challenged by the findings of this research, showing the impact on the confidence of the leader through the maintenance of expected emotional stability. The second aspect of vulnerability and confidence discussed is loneliness, found in this study to be a key factor for leaders at this transition point, and it is shown to be a topic which has not been explored in relation to leader confidence.

Next, I discussed the role of organisations in the confidence of senior leaders in transition, focusing on three key organisational areas found to insufficiently support the leaders through:

preparation, feedback and support. It is suggested that there is more that the organisation can do to prepare the leader for this transition, in particular through more time with the incumbent and helping to provide more clarity about the role. The focus of the discussion turns to feedback in relation to confidence: the leader's need for feedback; the organisational lack of feedback; and the importance to the leader's confidence of how feedback is delivered in the organisation, revealing a discrepancy around the leaders' need for feedback and the fear that asking for it will be seen as a sign of lack of confidence. There follows a focus on the importance of support for the leader's confidence and the lack of support that the leaders experience from their organisations, in particular emotional support.

Finally, I discussed how coaching works with confidence for leaders at this transition point. The importance of the safe space in enabling the leader to share vulnerability and to be able to regain confidence was discussed in relation to the small body of research on the importance of the safe space of coaching more generally, though this has not been explored in detail in relation to the particular need for leaders at this transition point. The study illustrated how coaching supports confidence through helping the leader to gain clarity and ownership of the new leader identity, adding new understanding to leader identity development research which has not previously considered confidence. The importance of helping the leaders to gain clarity through coaching and thus enabling greater confidence was highlighted and the lack of attention to clarity in coaching research and coaching training was addressed. The final aspect of how coaching works with confidence discussed was that of the importance of support and feedback, making the case for the importance of more "informal" affirmative feedback and bringing a clarity to our understanding of what support in coaching means for leaders. It is argued that, despite the frequent call for both challenge and support in coaching, at this transition point the leaders have a more acute need for support.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

In this study, I aimed to develop a multi-perspective understanding of the challenges to confidence commonly experienced by leaders during the transition to senior leadership, as well as to explore how coaching can support the leader with these challenges. In this concluding chapter, I will explain how this question has been answered. In doing so, I will return to the gaps in the literature as outlined in Chapters One and Two to show how this study contributes to addressing those gaps. I will discuss how this research contributes to the fields of psychology, coaching and leadership, as well as suggest implications for coaching practice and organisational leadership development. Limitations of this study will also be considered, together with suggestions for further research. Finally, I will reflect on the process of conducting this study from a personal perspective.

In respect of the research question, I identified three main gaps (as shown in Figure 1 in Chapter Two):

- Lack of empirical research on the impact on the leader of the challenges of leadership transition. No research on leader confidence in relation to transition;
- Lack of attention to confidence in coaching and leadership literature. Definitions of confidence are unclear with a narrow focus mainly on self-efficacy. No first-person studies of the experience of confidence from the point of view of leaders;
- Lack of empirical research in the coaching literature on working with confidence. Research that exists shows confidence (or more commonly self-efficacy) as an outcome of coaching, but studies are mostly quantitative and show confidence/self-efficacy as a measure of effectiveness of coaching rather than as a goal in itself. No research on this topic from the perspectives of leaders and executive coaches.

I have addressed these gaps by conducting a qualitative study which focuses on confidence as the main focus of the study, exploring the experiences of challenges to confidence for leaders in the transition to senior leadership and how coaching supports confidence at this transition point. I chose IPA as the methodology in order to try to elicit individual experiences of this phenomenon and I designed a multi-perspective study to explore the perspectives of both leaders and executive coaches. The findings of this research provide a rich and multi-faceted understanding of the experiences of confidence and loss of confidence for leaders within the context of the transition to senior leadership, across four inter-connected areas: ease and energy; control of emotions; clarity; and vulnerability. This understanding has been made possible because of the clear focus on confidence as the main research question, previously overlooked in studies of related concepts such as self-efficacy which do not give us an understanding of the experience itself. This study also provides empirical understanding of the role of organisations in the confidence of leaders at this transition point, in particular the impact of the lack of feedback, support and preparation for the transition as well as the inability to be able to show vulnerability. The findings provide an empirical multi-perspective understanding of how coaching works with confidence at this transition point. Coaching is shown to play an invaluable role in supporting confidence, in particular through the safe space of coaching; the process of revision and ownership of leader identity; helping the leader to find clarity; and through feedback and support.

8.1 Contribution to theoretical knowledge

The research topic has been positioned throughout this thesis across three fields of knowledge: psychology, leadership and coaching. What this study shows is that confidence is not a neat concept; it doesn't fit into one area of literature, and I believe that this study contributes to the debates in relation to the phenomenon of confidence in all three fields. I will discuss each of these potential contributions below.

8.1.1 Contribution to psychology literature

By focusing on confidence as the main subject of the research, this study provides an important perspective that enriches understanding of confidence and loss of confidence for leaders within the context of senior leadership transition. This description of confidence, within the specific context of senior leadership transition, is more detailed and nuanced than typical descriptions in the psychology literature which are either too broad or identified with the different, but more widely used, concept of self-efficacy.

This study shows confidence to be a concept which is distinct from self-efficacy, though sharing what are considered to be some of the key sources: feedback, support and preparation. Having an understanding of confidence as distinct from self-efficacy might allow future studies to be open to more detailed and nuanced expressions of this phenomenon in other contexts and situations that do not fit the very specific task-focused notion of self-efficacy which to date has dominated research.

The chosen context of this study, the transition to senior leadership, brought to the fore the experiences of loss of confidence, providing a sharper focus on confidence through comparison to its absence in real life situations. Along with a very recent study of self-confidence and coaching, which also shows the dynamics of loss of confidence (Kane, Lewis and Yarker, 2021), this study is one of the first to capture a detailed first-person understanding of both confidence and loss of confidence.

Despite the focus on self-efficacy and its impact on performance in the psychology and sport psychology literature (Bandura, 1977; Stajkovic and Luthans, 1998; Vealey and Garner-Holman, 1998) and the influence of this across the literature, for example in coaching studies (Baron and Morin, 2009), this study does not show a connection between confidence and performance nor how confidence impacted further outcomes.

Furthermore, this study did not find that Impostor Phenomenon was experienced as a significant part of the challenge to confidence. Feelings of fraudulence and the fear of being

found out, which characterise those suffering with Impostor Phenomenon (Clance and Imes, 1978), were not experiences common to these leaders.

8.1.2 Contribution to leadership literature

In relation to research which shows that leadership transition is a challenging time for leaders (Terblanche, Albertyn, and Van Coller-Peter, 2018a; Terblanche, 2019; Watkins, 2003; Wiggins, 2019), this study provides vivid multi-faceted descriptions of the *impact* of those challenges on the leader.

As a result of the above, this study contributes empirical evidence which can add to the debates in the leadership literature on the following topics, as will be outlined in more detail below: vulnerability and confidence for senior leaders; emotional control for senior leaders; and the organisational role in the confidence of leaders at this transition point.

This study gives a first-person understanding of the difficulties of showing vulnerability as a senior leader within the organisation together with the perceived need to hide it and the resulting impact on the leader's confidence. It brings depth to our understanding of vulnerability for senior leaders, challenges the dominance of the notion of the heroic leader and makes a call for organisations to see leaders as human beings who can be vulnerable. Neither vulnerability in senior leadership, at least from the first-person perspective, nor the relationship between vulnerability and confidence have been explored in the leadership literature.

A significant finding of this study is the relationship between confidence and emotional control for senior leaders. It shows emotional control to be a more complex phenomenon than what is understood in the leadership literature (Axelrod and Marques, 2017; Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee, 2001) and challenges emotional control as a positive leadership trait by creating an understanding of the negative impact on the leader and, in particular, on their confidence. It highlights the tension between emotional control and authenticity and calls for leaders to explore the internal conflict between the expectation of the role and being congruent to their emotions, which helps them to feel more confident.

As will also be outlined below in relation to coaching, this study also finds that gaining clarity and ownership of leader identity enables confidence. This brings new understanding to the body of literature on leader identity development which does not consider confidence in any way.

This research provides better understanding of the important role that the organisation has in the confidence of leaders at this transition point and contributes by showing the leader's need

for more help from organisations in preparation for the role, in providing more emotional support and feedback that is regular and delivered with care.

8.1.3 Contribution to coaching literature

This study shows that research on working with confidence in coaching has been neglected in the coaching literature. Focusing directly on confidence and how coaching supports it, this study gives better understanding of the critical role that coaching plays in supporting confidence within this context. It contributes to the coaching literature by providing a rich description of the experiences of the coaching clients (the senior leaders) and the experiences of executive coaches working with leaders at this transition point.

This study contributes empirically to coaching knowledge by exploring the role of coaching in working with vulnerability in senior leadership, a phenomenon largely ignored in the coaching literature. In particular, the research shows the importance of the safe space of coaching when recognising this feeling, allowing the leader to explore, share and alleviate their experiences of vulnerability.

Clarity was a key finding in relation to confidence in this research, and the role of coaching in helping the leader to gain better clarity and to be able to move forward from the feeling of "stuckness" and confusion that they experienced in this transition was a significant part of the process of working with confidence in coaching. This brings new understanding to coaching research and merits further attention.

This study brings important new understanding to a scant body of research on the role of coaching in facilitating the leader identity development process at this transition point and shows how enabling clarity and ownership of the new leader identity gives the leader confidence. Neither the coaching nor leadership fields have thus far considered confidence in leader identity development work.

Finally, this study shows how important support and feedback provided through coaching are to the leader's confidence, particularly so because both are seen to be lacking from within organisations. In this way, this research adds to the scant body of literature on feedback in the confidence-building process in coaching, by showing the importance, in particular, of affirming feedback from the coach, and brings more understanding to the concept of support in coaching. It contests the importance of providing challenge alongside support and argues that, at this transition point, leaders need more support than challenge.

8.2 Implications for practice

My aims in conducting this study were to contribute both to coaching practice and to organisational leadership development. In this section, I will provide a brief overview of the contribution to coaching practice and to organisational leadership development and suggest some implications for practice for both.

8.2.1 Contribution to coaching

I hope that the main beneficiaries of this study will be executive coaches, and the leaders they support, using the empirical evidence of the challenges of confidence during senior leadership transition and of working with confidence in coaching provided through this study. I hope that this research will help coaches to support leaders with confidence at this transition point as effectively as possible, in particular by being able to work with confidence more explicitly.

In particular, I suggest the following to help coaches to work more effectively with confidence within the context of senior leadership transition:

- Focus on creating a safe space for the coaching, such that coaches enable the leader to be able to share vulnerability in a way in which they may not feel able to within the organisation.

- Work with vulnerability in coaching, for example understanding the perceived need for the façade of confidence and the tension of controlling emotions at the expense of authenticity; surfacing self-doubts and encouraging alternative perspectives; exploring loneliness and the need to belong.

- Focus on giving the leader support and being alongside them, as well as discussing what other support the leader can find within the organisation.

- Give regular informal affirming feedback to the leader and discuss whether they are adequately supported by feedback within the organisation.

- Normalise the challenges that the leader is experiencing (drawing on research or the coach's experience of coaching other leaders at this transition point).

- Help the leader to prepare adequately for the transition (if coaching starts before the transition).

- Help the leader to increase clarity through using the coaching space to talk about and reflect on their challenges; exploring 'stuckness' and helping the leader to find direction, clarifying priorities and enabling them to move forward.

- Work with the leader on revising, clarifying and owning their new leader identity.

8.2.2 Contribution to organisational leadership development

This study shows that there is a lot that organisations do not do to fully support senior leaders in transition and that this has a significant impact on their confidence. It raises questions, in particular, about what organisations can do to help senior leaders to be able to acknowledge vulnerability and therefore to feel more confident. One of the key findings of this research is that it is important for organisations to treat the leaders as humans rather than the all-knowing, tough leaders which they feel that they need to be. It could therefore be suggested that it is important for organisations to create an environment of psychological safety in order to support leaders in taking interpersonal risk in expressing their vulnerability in the workplace (Edmondson, 1999; Edmondson and Lei, 2014), in particular by being able to: ask questions and ask for feedback; be honest about self-doubts and loss of confidence rather than putting on a façade; admit to experiences of loneliness; be more authentic with emotions rather than maintaining emotional control.

It is clear from this study that senior leaders in transition feel unsupported at this transition point and that individual executive coaching provided this support; therefore, executive coaching should be considered for senior leaders in transition. In order to address the experience of the lack of preparation, the timing of coaching should be considered to ensure that the leaders are supported with coaching as early as possible before the transition in order to help them to prepare practically and psychologically. Organisations could also help the leader to prepare more for the transition, for example with assigned time with the incumbent, clarity on expectations and role parameters, and time to build relationships with their new peer group, in particular.

The importance of feedback from organisations and within coaching is clearly conveyed by this study. Organisations could therefore consider their feedback orientation and culture, in particular with an awareness of how feedback is delivered at all levels in the organisation and an understanding of the importance of regular, “informal” feedback.

This study also conveys the perceived lack of support for leaders at this transition point from within organisations and the impact of this on their confidence. Organisations could pay more attention to how they support leaders at this transition point, in particular in providing more emotional support.

8.3 Limitations of this research and potential areas for further research

The focus on three areas of experience in this study – the transition to senior leadership, confidence and coaching – meant that there was a lot to explore in the interviews. Whilst the data collected felt sufficient for this study, it occasionally seemed that the focus on coaching at the end of the interview was less than on the first two areas of experience. A study which focuses purely on coaching and confidence, without the boundary of the specific context of senior leadership transition, might elicit an even more detailed focus on how coaching works with confidence.

Although this was a multi-perspective study which included the perspectives of senior leaders and executive coaches, the perspective of those within the organisation who work closely with the senior leaders, such as the most senior stakeholders/line managers, is missing. Future research might include this perspective in order to understand how the confidence of senior leaders in transition is understood and experienced by key stakeholders within the organisation. For example, it would be interesting to understand whether they feel that preparation, support and feedback are sufficiently provided or how they perceive vulnerability in senior leaders at this transition point and the relationship with confidence.

Inevitably when using IPA and a constructivist epistemology within an interpretivist research philosophy, the researcher is closely involved in the research process and brings foreknowledge and assumptions to the process which could be seen as a limitation of the research. I have sought to address this in the following ways: noting and questioning my assumptions and interpretations by keeping a reflexive journal throughout the research process; checking my interpretation with participants during the interviews; asking a doctorate peer to code one of my transcripts in order to question and make explicit my assumptions when analysing data; and through frequent academic supervision with two doctoral supervisors.

This study focused on a small group of senior leaders and executive coaches and the sample size was appropriate to IPA to allow in-depth focus on their individual experiences. In concluding this research there is a temptation to generalise the findings by emphasising the commonality of experiences and proposing suggestions for theory and practice based on these. However, rather than generalisability, I have tried to aim for theoretical transferability, such that the “reader makes links between the analysis in an IPA study, their own personal and professional experience, and the claims in the extant literature” (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009).

Using multi-perspective IPA was a challenge. The interactive nature of the focus group was not always as successful as I had hoped; I initially found that participants were very polite and careful with each other and tended to agree tentatively with each other rather than develop the discussion by going into more detail or by disagreeing. In part, I attributed this to the pandemic-related impact of working virtually through video-conferencing rather than face-to-face, which undoubtedly would have allowed for more natural interaction and flow of discussion. I also put this down to it being a group of high-achieving fellow coaches who did not know each other and who, inevitably, and despite my best intentions to reduce this by working hard to create rapport and equality amongst the group, each came with a sense of anxiety about proving their worth and expertise. However, there were some key moments in the discussion where their understanding and interpretation was able to deepen significantly through building upon each other's experiences and interpretations, in particular around the notion of stuckness; leader identity; the notion of "powerful" in coaching; the emergence of the language and expression of confidence in coaching; and – in particular – their descriptions of confidence in their leader clients upon which the confidence framework in this study was built. An alternative to using the focus group would have been to conduct individual interviews with the coaches. Whilst this may have been simpler from a data analysis point of view and likely to have incurred fewer tensions in terms of attempting to retain IPA's commitment to the individual experiences and paying attention to the shared experiences of the group, I think this approach would have been poorer for the loss of the development of interpretation of experience related to the phenomenon. However, the focus group also added another hermeneutic layer such that I was interpreting the coaches' interpretations of their clients, and it could be argued that this additional layer distanced me from the phenomenon. These might be important considerations for future multi-perspective research.

This study highlights the importance of the relationship between authenticity and confidence, which is only implicit in much of the authentic leadership literature - there is seemingly no research which focuses on confidence and authentic leadership. This is an important topic of concern which merits further research. There is also very little research on vulnerability and leadership, and no research on vulnerability and confidence in leadership, and further research in the leadership field could expand on the findings of this research.

Working with clarity in coaching is implicit in coaching techniques and models, and in the ICF and EMCC competency frameworks, particularly in relation to use of language, but to my knowledge there is no study which explores clarity in relation to confidence in coaching. This seems like an important topic to be explored further in both coaching research and practice.

Whilst this study gives a good understanding of the importance of the safe space of coaching when working with senior leaders in transition, what it does not do is give a clear understanding of *how* coaches create a safe space, and this merits further attention within this context.

8.4 Personal reflections on my learning from the research process

Conducting a research project and writing it up during Covid-19 has not been easy, particularly during the very early stages of the pandemic, as I found it very difficult to have the headspace to be able to think at a deep enough level. As a result, I spent a disproportionate amount of time coding and re-coding the data as a way of postponing writing up the findings which required perhaps the deepest level of thought. I realised when I started writing up that that was where the real analysis took place, through the detailed focus on language and the connections that occurred through the writing process itself. On reflection, I wished that I had been able to start that sooner. Despite the difficulties of conducting this research during a pandemic, I have found solace in immersing myself in this study and have found an increasing fervour in building on different elements of what felt like a complicated and unfamiliar jigsaw puzzle; it has been a very rewarding experience seeing each element of this jigsaw come together bit by bit with the development of my own thinking and the invaluable input of my supervisors and the taught seminars.

As a parallel process to my research topic, I have constantly been aware of my own confidence throughout this process, in particular as I have also been going through my own transition as a novice researcher. I noted in my reflexive journal how in the early stages of this transition I felt totally at sea in an environment that was completely new to me, without knowing what was expected nor having yet found my “identity as a researcher”. I have been aware of how my confidence was bolstered at each encounter with positive feedback during my supervision sessions and knocked when feedback has been rightly more critical. I have also noticed the importance of support to my confidence, not just the support of my supervisors but also of my peer group and the DCAM tutors in our taught seminars. I have experienced the energy that I have felt from the confidence gained through positive feedback, enabling me to write quickly and easily, similar to how participants describe confidence as ease and energy, and through the clarity gained through discussion in supervision.

The process of writing the doctorate and reflecting upon myself as a researcher, in particular aided through regularly writing my reflexive journal, has helped me to be more aware, accepting and overt about my unique interests, motivation and values as a researcher and as a coach. As a result of this, I have felt more confident in new business development situations or at the outset of working with a new client when describing myself and my approach. I have

become aware of the symbiotic relationship between researcher and practitioner and now know that my research experience and continued interest in coaching and leadership research will further inform my coaching practice and vice versa. I am already using my understanding from the findings of this study when working with newly transitioned senior leaders and when speaking with other coaches about coaching at this transition point. In particular, I feel that I am more consciously aware of the leader's potential vulnerability at this transition point and am paying more attention to thinking about how I create a safe space for them and how I support them by staying alongside and providing affirming feedback.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Participant Information Sheet – for Senior Leaders

Research study: Executive Coaching for Loss of Confidence during Senior Leadership Transitions

You are invited to take part in a research study which aims to explore the executive coaching experiences of senior leaders in relation to loss of confidence in senior leadership transition.

Before you decide whether or not to take part it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of this study is to explore the first-person perspective of the loss of confidence – not an unusual experience by senior leaders during a leadership transition. It also aims to investigate the perceptions of senior leaders and executive coaches about how coaching is used to address this loss in confidence.

This research will help us to better understand the phenomenon of confidence loss by leaders that happens in the transition to senior leadership. It is hoped that this understanding will help coaching practice and leadership development in organisations to better support leaders experiencing loss of confidence in the transition to senior leadership.

Why have I been invited to participate?

You are being invited to take part because:

- you are a senior leader either on the senior executive team, a head of a major business unit or service line, or a senior manager operating at one level below the executive team and

- you have recently experienced a leadership transition (in the last 12-18 months), during which time you have been supported by executive coaching and

- you will have experienced, as often happens, some degree of loss of confidence during this transition (which may or may not have been the initial reason for the coaching) and discussions about this will have surfaced in your coaching sessions.

However, please note that this invitation has been sent to all senior leaders who have recently undergone transition to senior leadership and who have had executive coaching during this transition but who have not been specifically identified as having experienced a degree of loss of confidence during this time - only the leaders themselves will be aware of this and will be able to decide whether this applies.

Do I have to take part?

It is entirely up to you to decide whether or not to take part in this research study. If you do decide to take part, you will be able to contact the researcher directly without your organisation's or the referring individual's knowledge of whether you agreed to participate or not. You will be given this *information sheet along with a privacy notice that will explain how the data from your interviews will be collected and used and you will be asked to give your written consent. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time until the data is processed, without giving a reason.*

What will happen if I take part?

You will be asked to take part in 2 x (up to) 1-hour long interviews, one month apart. The interviews will be audio recorded, with your permission, and during the interviews you will be asked to reflect broadly and deeply on your coaching experiences in relation to loss of confidence during leadership transition.

What are the benefits of taking part?

You may find that talking about your experiences of loss of confidence during leadership transition and of executive coaching during this time could be helpful in terms of continuing reflection on the transition and that it might allow you to develop further self-understanding and self-awareness. It is also hoped that the results of the study will help coaching practice and leadership development in organisations.

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?

If you were to experience a negative emotional reaction in recalling your experiences, I would be able to help you identify a number of places of external support such as through your own GP or the support services suggested through organisations such as MIND.

Will what I say in this study be kept anonymous?

As the sample size is small, it may be impossible to guarantee complete anonymity but all efforts will be made towards it. Please note that all information collected about you and your organisation will be disidentified in all workings and in the thesis through pseudonyms and removing all personally identifying elements such as roles or organisations.

Confidentiality, privacy and anonymity will be ensured in the collection, storage and publication of research material. Data generated will be securely stored in devices that are both encrypted, and password protected and will be kept for a period of time in accordance with the University Policy after
completion of the research project.

What should I do if I want to take part?

If you decide to take part, please contact me to arrange an interview, which will be at your convenience in terms of time and location.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The research findings will be described in the doctoral thesis with a shorter version potentially published in an academic journal. You will be able to receive a summary of the findings and I will send this to you upon request.

Who is organising and funding the research?

The study is self-funded as part of a part-time professional doctorate. It is being organised by the researcher: Andrea Kilpatrick: 18025708@brookes.ac.uk or 07804 845025

Who has reviewed the study?

The research has been approved by the University Research Ethics Committee, Oxford Brookes University

Contact for further information:

If you have any concerns about the way in which this study is being, or has been conducted, please contact the Chair of the University Research Ethics Committee on ethics@brookes.ac.uk

You may also contact the researcher's supervisors at the International Centre for Coaching and Mentoring Studies, Oxford Brookes Business School, Oxford Brookes University, Headington Campus, Oxford OX3 0BP:

Professor Tatiana Bachkirova, Professor of Coaching Psychology and Director of the International Centre for Coaching and Mentoring Studies: tbachkirova@brookes.ac.uk

Dr Adrian Myers, Senior Lecturer at the International Centre for Coaching and Mentoring Studies: amyers@brookes.ac.uk

Thank you for taking time to read the information sheet and for your collaboration with this research.

Date: 10/1/20

Appendix B: Indicative questions for doctorate interviews

a) **The transition to a more senior leadership role and how you found it/what might have been challenging about it**
b) **Your confidence and how it might have been impacted during the transition and how you experienced this (particularly in relation to other stages in your career)**
c) **Role of coaching in supporting you during the transition (at what point during the transition did you start coaching; how much did you discuss changes to confidence with your coach; how specifically might the coaching have helped you to rebuild your confidence?)**

a) The transition

Q – tell me about the **leadership transition** you have been through i.e. when/to what/was this significant?

Q - How did you find this transition?

Q- can you tell me about any challenges you found at this transition point? Can you describe how they might have impacted your confidence?

b) How they experienced this confidence change, how that changed during the transition

Q- how did your confidence at this stage compare to other stages in your career? i.e. what was it about this stage in particular?

Q- what does “confidence” at work mean for you? Can you give an example in the past of when you felt most confident at work and how that might compare to how you felt during this transition?

Q – how did your confidence change during the transition/what impact might this have had on you and your behaviours/the way you were? how did you rebuild it?

Q- imposter syndrome is a part of confidence that resonates with some: do you think it is something that you suffered from during this transition/ any more/less than previously?

c) Role of coaching in supporting this

Q- tell me about the coaching during this time. When did you start the coaching (at what point in the transition?)

Q- tell me about the discussions you had with your coach about confidence eg was it explicit from the beginning/was it a remit of the coaching/ did it emerge?

Q-How do you think the coaching/your coach helped you with confidence?

Appendix C: Consent form

OXFORD BROOKES UNIVERSITY

CONSENT FORM

Full title of Project: Executive Coaching for Loss of Confidence during Senior Leadership Transitions

Name, position and contact details of Researcher:

Andrea Kilpatrick email: 18025708@brookes.ac.uk/ mobile:07804 845025

		Please initial box
1.	I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.	☐
2.	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time up until the data is processed without giving reason.	☐
3.	I understand that the interview/focus group will be audio recorded.	☐
4.	I agree to take part in the above study.	☐
5.	I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications.	☐

Name of Participant	Date	Signature
Name of Researcher	Date	Signature

Appendix D: Privacy notice

Privacy notice for research participants

This privacy notice provides information on how Oxford Brookes University collects and uses your personal information when you take part in one of our research projects. Please refer to the research participant information sheet for further details about the study and what information will be collected about you and how it will be used.

Oxford Brookes University (OBU) will usually be the Data Controller of any data that you supply for this research. This means that we are responsible for looking after your information and using it properly. The exception to this is joint research projects where you would be informed on the participant information sheet as to the other partner institution or institutions. This means that they will make the decisions on how your data is used and for what reasons. You can contact the University's Information Management Team on 01865 485420 or email info.sec@brookes.ac.uk.

Why do we need your data?

The purpose of this study is to explore the first-person perspective of the loss of confidence commonly experienced by senior leaders during a leadership transition, as well as the perceptions of senior leaders and executive coaches about how coaching might have helped to address this loss in confidence.

This research will help us to better understand more about confidence loss as experienced by many leaders in the transition to senior leadership. This understanding will help coaching practice and leadership development in organisations to better support leaders experiencing loss of confidence in the transition senior leadership.

OBUs legal basis for collecting this data is:
- You are consenting to providing it to us; and / or,
- Processing is necessary for the performance of a task in the public interest such as research

What type of data will Oxford Brookes University use?
No specific data will be taken, just recordings of the interview/s.

Who will OBU share your data with?
Your recording will be shared with the researcher's supervisory team and with a transcription service which will transcribe the interview. Oxford Brookes Google services will host the data in a secure, password protected drive.

Will OBU transfer my data outside of the UK?
No.

What rights do I have regarding my data that OBU holds?
- You have the right to be informed about what data will be collected and how this will be used
- You have the right of access to your data
- You have the right to correct data if it is wrong
- You have the right to ask for your data to be deleted up to the point that data is being processed
- You have the right to restrict use of the data we hold about you
- You have the right to data portability
- You have the right to object to the university using your data
- You have rights in relation to using your data in automated decision making and profiling.

Where did OBU source my data from?
Directly from the recording that you took part in.

Are there any consequences of not providing the requested data?
There are no consequences of not providing data for this research. It is purely voluntary.

Will there be any automated decision making using my data?
There will be no use of automated decision making in scope of UK Data Protection and Privacy legislation."

How long will OBU keep your data?
In line with Oxford Brookes policies data generated in the course of research must be kept securely in paper or electronic form for a period of time in accordance with the research funder or University policy.

Who can I contact if I have concerns?

In the event of any questions about the research study, please contact the researchers in the first instance (contact details in the study participant information sheet). If you have any concerns about the way in which the study has been conducted, contact the Chair of the University Research Ethics Committee at ethics@brookes.ac.uk. For further details about information security contact the Data Protection Officer at: brookesdpo@brookes.ac.uk or the Information Management team on info.sec@brookes.ac.uk

Appendix E: Advert for senior leader participants

Executive Coaching research study: Executive Coaching for Loss of Confidence During Senior Leadership Transitions

Background: I am a doctoral student at the International Centre for Coaching and Mentoring Studies at Oxford Brookes and am conducting a doctoral project. My research topic is the loss of confidence during the transition to senior leadership and the role of coaching in addressing this. Incredibly, for such an important topic, there seems to be very little research into this area.

Why I would like your help: I am looking to interview 6-8 senior leaders. Participants should be senior leaders who will fit all of the following criteria:

- a senior leader either on the senior executive team, or a head of a major business unit or service line, or a senior manager operating at one level below the executive team;

- have recently experienced a leadership transition (in the last 12-18 months), during which time they will have been supported by executive coaching;

- will have experienced, like many others, some degree of loss of confidence during this transition (which may or may not have been the initial reason for the coaching) and discussions about this will have surfaced in their coaching sessions.

However, please note that this invitation has been sent to you because you have been identified as a senior leader who has recently undergone transition to senior leadership and who has had executive coaching during this transition. You have not been identified as someone who has experienced a degree of loss of confidence during this time and only you will be able to decide this.

What this will involve:

- If you are interested in finding out more, please contact me directly (in order to preserve confidentiality you do not need to tell the person who referred you whether you are interested or not) and I will give you further details;
- I would like to interview you twice, a month or so apart, and the interview will last for up to an hour depending on your availability. Interviews will be audio recorded, with your consent. I know that you are likely to be time poor and I will make the commitment as easy as possible for you by travelling to you and using a confidential office close by.

Why might you do this?:

This is an important and under researched topic and it will allow us to understand more about the experiences of senior leaders in transition and how coaching supports them so that we can better support them in the future. I also hope that by participating you will gain from the further reflection on the transition and that it will allow you to develop further self-understanding and self-awareness, which might help you (or others) with future transitions.

Please contact me if you think you can help further. Thank you for your time.

Kind regards,

Andrea Kilpatrick

18025708@brookes.ac.uk or 07804 845025

Appendix F: Excerpts from reflexive diary to show coding decisions and reflections

Tuesday 2 June 2020

DCAM seminar was helpful and pushed me over into looking at Nvivo, which I shouldn't have been worried about. It's a fantastic tool and far better than bits of paper cut up! Have now started data analysis in earnest: have listened to all transcripts now except final one, checked accuracy of transcript for last time, uploaded to Nvivo then coded. Started with obvious codes as went through first one then added new ones/sub codes all the time. Starting slowly to look at codes and merge them as there are tons (33 plus a load of sub codes within many of these). But it feels like I'm going in the right direction. I'm also going back to field notes taken straight after interview to capture the "joint meaning making" that was live at the time i.e. it felt more live, things that stood immediately out to me, the joint understanding that was probably more clear than now at this distance.

My plan now is to finish 1st round of coding, reassess codes, then save as new project and do 2nd round of coding and then a 3rd round.

I've realised something exciting about interpretation in listening again to the interviews: I realise that, in my quest to make joint meaning and also because of my way of operating as a coach, I am constantly interpreting throughout the interviews themselves by repeating things back to clients to check understanding, summarising, making links and bringing in other interviews to help clarify or to check understanding if similar or not – and this works as sometimes (several times) participants will say yes or give me an alternative understanding from their perspective.

This makes me think about member checking – should I be doing it? How do I do this then? What do I send to the participants e.g. my interpretations? Do I need to, given the above process of constantly checking??

Monday 15th June 2020

Have spent last week coding for the 2nd time, as well as working on methodology. The latter feels really hard, partly because it feels a bit early to be doing this (though absolutely right as it has forced me to understand constructivism, IPA, phenomenology etc and think hard about ontology and epistemology). The latter parts around reflexivity/trustworthiness etc feel hard and I may well leave them now until later in the process. Have just saved the project on Nvivo for 3rd time and am looking hard at what is emerging. It seems to be that the experience of confidence challenges for new leaders are around the following areas:

Achievement/having impact including ability to challenge

Control (staying in control as new leader/losing control)

Identity including authenticity/effort of new identity/ old identity/ difference

Newness and unknown of new role incl new relationships, new skillset

Others/relational incl impact on others/ learning to trust new people/ what others think incl expectations/ need to prove self/ support incl feedback and scrutiny

Then it seems that there are two clear areas alongside this: coaching and how it helps with challenges to confidence (see copy of codes) and also transition itself.

In recoding, I am thinking about internal confidence as this didn't feel right and I was about to delete the node when I read the quotes. It seems to be more about an inner feeling that can't be shared (is this the "reality"? or internal reality?) and think about linking it to vulnerability – this is what can't be shared (presumably for fear of how comes across/ showing weakness etc)

19th June 2020

I'm excited! I've gone from feeling stuck in terms of how to analyse the data and what to do with it (and wrote that to supervisors who I'm seeing next week) to just sitting back and taking time to think about it

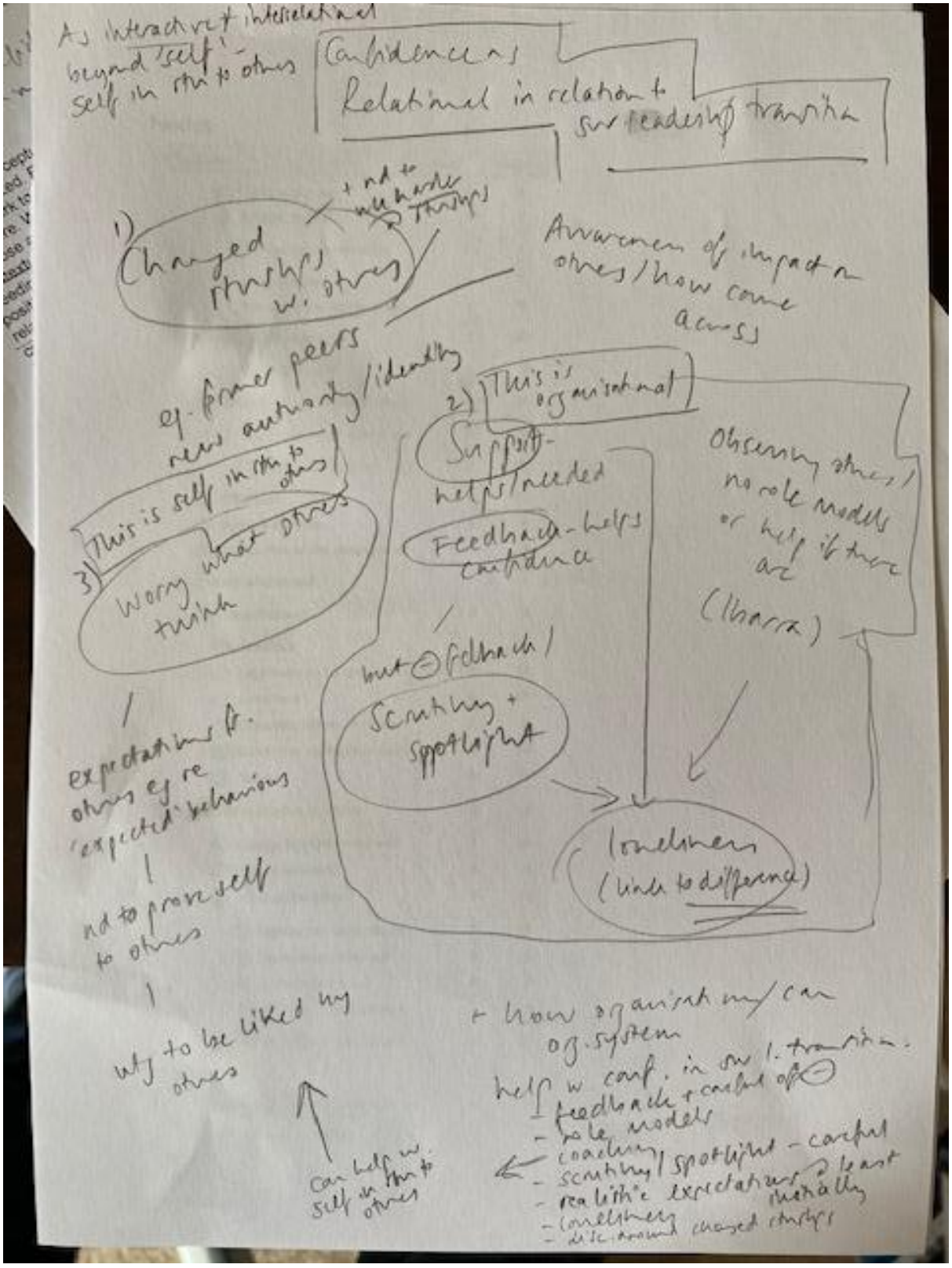
all, whilst researching theories around transition, looking for existing theories around identity and confidence (seemingly little), control and confidence (ditto) and confidence as relational (ditto).

In looking more at relational today I've realised that the nodes could be changed and that some fitted into others so that it looks like:

1) 3 key themes for understanding confidence in transition:

Control; identity; relational

Relational is exciting: it seems to be about 1) self in relation to others (which I think coaching can help most with (and think about self in relation to others and IDENTITY too and how they link – have created link in Nvivo) and 2) Organisational areas ie which the organisation could help with: feedback; scrutiny; expectations of others; observing others or role models; loneliness; support etc etc. See attached picture:



Think about output as recommendations for more organisational support including feedback; role models; care with spotlight and scrutiny or awareness of this; manage expectations in early stages; loneliness – what can they do here?; discussions around changed relationships with others? Or coaching at least can help with latter plus all the self in relation to others stages such as worry what others think; wanting to be liked; need to prove self etc

2) Then **transition and confidence against transition stages** so: achievement/having impact/challenge; pre transition ie competition over role and preparation for role; self-doubt beforehand; surprise being selected; early transition ie all the newness/new skillset/no template etc; multiple interlinking transitions; transition compared to earlier ones

3) **Then coaching and confidence** – all the coaching parts

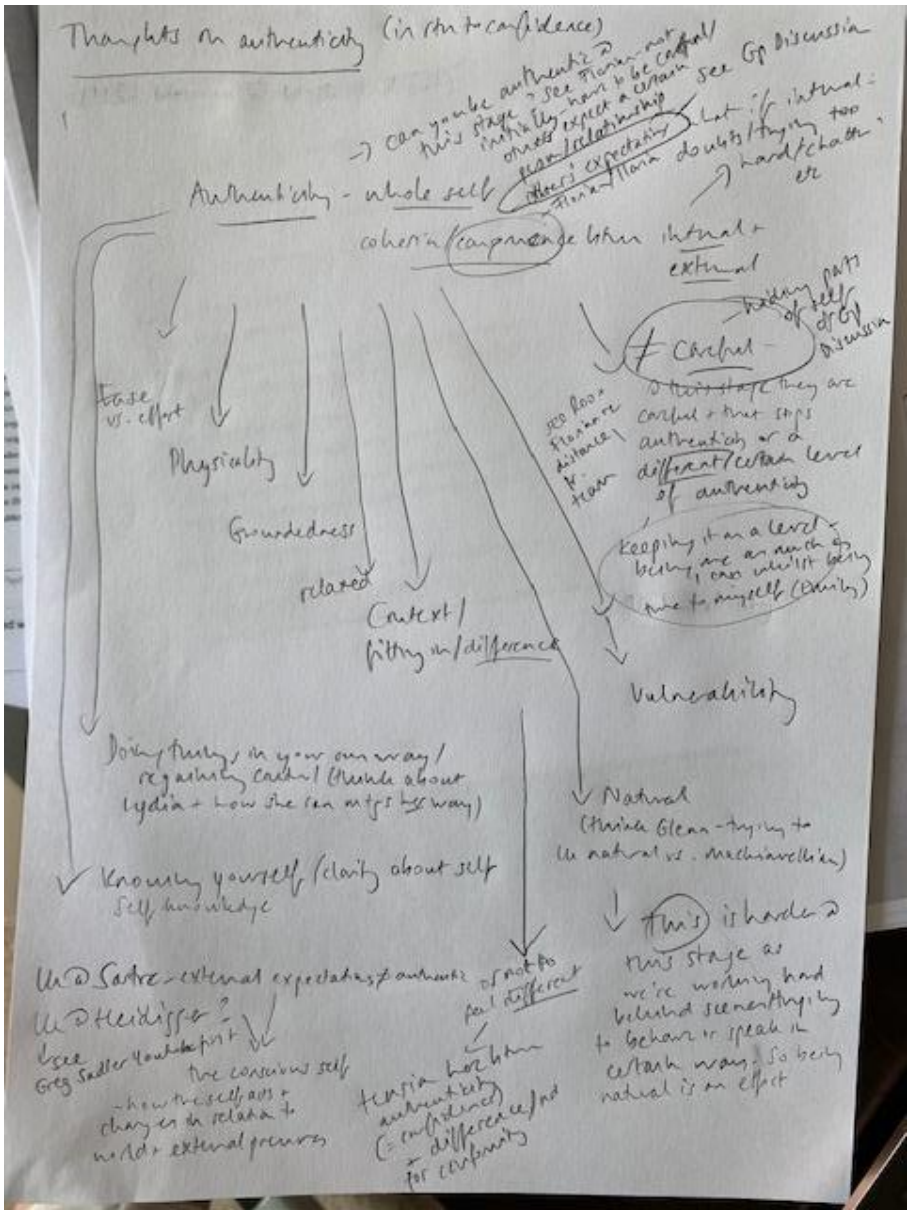
4) Then the **properties of confidence** piece ie over confidence; self-doubt; imposter; expressing it; inner and what can't be shown and link to vulnerability.

Wednesday 24th June 2020

Am recoding again, this time taking each node: authenticity, control, relational plus coaching and transition and definitions. Interestingly, I had thought that identity was the key node which included authenticity but I realise that my interest is more around authenticity – THIS is what comes out when we talk about it when people describe confidence so I think this should be the node, with identity as a sub set of this.

Realise that there was nothing on authenticity/identity in the transcript for participant 1 other than perhaps at the beginning. Why was this? Did I not ask her about identity at all? Ditto for participant 3. Maybe it's less prevalent than I think? Has it just come out more from the group discussion? T in supervision said be careful with authenticity as it is not necessarily about a true self though I said I wasn't assuming it was, that it was coming out as "self knowledge" and acting accordingly, external congruent with internal, calm and ease, vulnerability and being able to show this or not. She said be careful with the label and just stick with what people are saying.

Yesterday I worked with a blank sheet of paper on authenticity and it was helpful to step back. See below diagram/thoughts:



Tuesday 7th July 2020

Am working on recoding. Have so far gone back into authenticity; Others/relational and now control. Some key thoughts:

- I still like the split of individual and organisational for relational, i.e. things that the individual feels or is able to do something about in relation to others and how they might impact or otherwise confidence; and things that the organisation can take more responsibility for being more aware of.
- Have added in trust as a part of new relationships;
- Change in relationship with others: awareness that relationships need to be different; either diff relationships to be formed with former colleagues or developing relationships with people such as Tess talks about (from ones which might have been difficult);
- Working harder or more consciously at relationships: this is where there is evidence of thinking hard about the relationship/interaction – the conscious bit;
- Have added doubt of self in relation to others or because of others (what they say/ in relation to role models who were so good etc)
- Have added wanting connectivity with others but this is the opposite of loneliness…how link?

- Feedback: there are two cases where it's not an issue – Firm P and Firm F so look at these; this is also where positive feedback really helps confidence or where negative feedback or where there is no feedback and new leaders need it; impact of it on confidence; it is shown not as sign of weakness to be asking for it;
- Have changed "legitimacy to be criticised" to "critical or difficult reactions from others" – careful this doesn't look like negative feedback though as it is still around the lack of realisation from others that new senior leaders can take this to heart more/something about people assuming that they can take it/should take more care in early stages;
- Observing others/role models: so important but rarely there or predecessor or handovers rarely there
- Support or lack of support or doubt from others: combined both support and lack of support. Only one that is different is Graham who says he has it internally and at home

Control:

I keep wondering if this is something I am imposing too much on this. Is it about control or loss of control? I'm pretty sure it still is and like the breakdown into of behaviours or the external/ over what you say/ over being prepared. Have collapsed control and loss of control into same thing. Different sides.

I queried whether the authority/empowerment and being in control with these is right to be here and about control but I'm sure it is – lots of good examples of where the leader has been undermined or not felt in control when they thought they would (e.g. Rosie with Board and her role and lack of remit; or Susie with the founders and constant meddling)

Thursday 9th July 2020

Now going back into each transcript against the control codes. I see so much there especially around empowerment/lack of and lack of control there and then the impact of this on confidence (self-doubt/ frustration and holding back). Very interesting to see much more than I had realised in Rosie's transcript as above, but also then thinking through link to confidence. See annotations on Nvivo.

It's made me think about control and delegating and losing control to others: comes up with Rosie; Freya; Graham…and how that can impact confidence

NB with Graham I did a word search and there were 31 instances of the word control! (many mine in response to his). And reflecting on his further, he gave plenty of examples of where he tried to control the coaching at the outset and also controlled our conversation from beginning to end, or tried to…

Monday 13th July 2020

Have moved identity: acting new identity to authenticity: external e.g. pretending, acting, conscious behaviour away from natural. Too many duplicates and I realised that they were the same thing.

Also taken out identity: effort of new identity to authenticity: external -> effort/exhausting/energy sapping…still feels like this overlaps a lot with control and being careful so check that not duplicating but it is a different point as this is around the effort and exhaustion of having to be different externally, not just the need to be careful but the impact on the self of that.

In coding though it makes me question whether identity is the right thing: Susie and Sophia have nothing much around identity/change in identity, more change in style…be careful and really go back into the examples to check whether this is identity

I also realise that there are a few repeated words across files now so I must look into these more:

- "hit the number" (Freya and Rosie, the idea of lack of support from leader but the absolute focus on just hitting the number);
- "comfort zone" (Frederik, Graham?, Freya?)
- "Skill set"
- "not being trained in management/leadership" (Sophia, who else?)

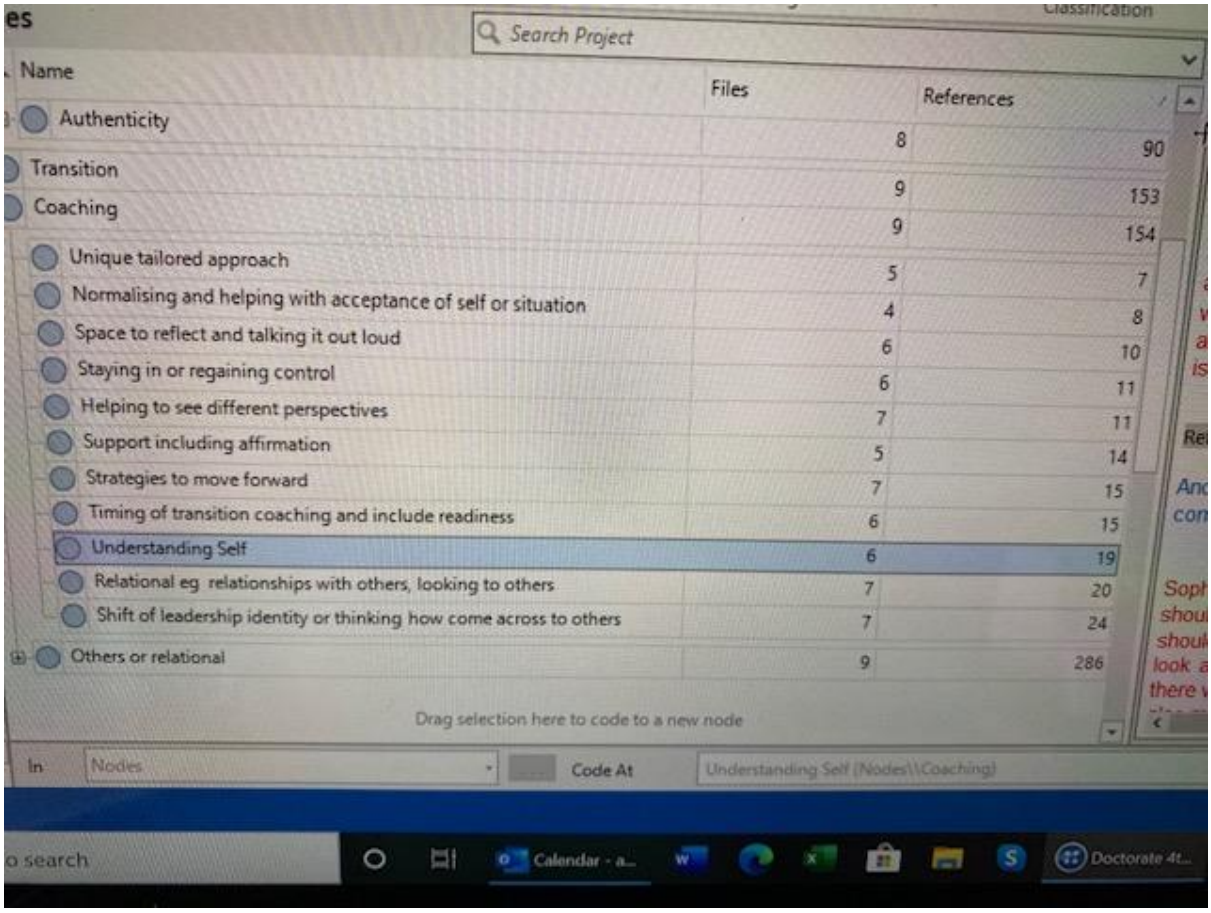
Wednesday 29th July 2020

- Printed out all annotations which has been really helpful in reading back my thoughts as I've been analysing data and allowed me to start to map: leadership identity (realising that it has to be this and NOT identity, too broad and too difficult to go down but I now can look into LEADERSHIP IDENTITY); authenticity and what has come out; yet to do with relational and control but started;
- Have been going back into coding for confidence and now transition
- I realise I'm interested in transition but it's almost like there's a new research project around stages of transition and I need to be careful not to get into it too much – only the bits that impact confidence of relevance here;
- On confidence code, it's more illustrative quotes and anything that helps us understand aspects of confidence (but not what impacts it, these are elsewhere), such as over-confidence (link between lack of and fear of over); anything around imposter; self-doubt or not feeling good enough; ways of managing confidence (there's a fair bit on this) eg self-talk, coaching of course, meditation, normalising etc;
- Now looking at coding for transition and have reduced a little as there was a fair bit of overlap. And I think the key bits coming out will be: what is different about this point compared to earlier transitions; the unknown and new skill set required; and the bit around achievement and having impact and being able to challenge (or not) and this requiring confidence

Thursday 30th July 2020

Worked on coaching node. Easier in some ways as explicit conversations around coaching were fewer and easier to find. I struggle with "support" which I've wrapped into support and affirmation but it's hard to define. It's not just supportive style, it's being there, helping off set loneliness, reminding them of themselves, affirming, etc. all the more important when they're not getting that elsewhere, though no-one says that.

See attached photo for coaching nodes – a lot to do here now to really look into these but I'm very happy that these feel like the main areas coming out:


Search Project
Name
Files
References
Authenticity 8 90
Transition 9 153
Coaching 9 154
Unique tailored approach 5 7
Normalising and helping with acceptance of self or situation 4 8
Space to reflect and talking it out loud 6 10
Staying in or regaining control 6 11
Helping to see different perspectives 7 11
Support including affirmation 5 14
Strategies to move forward 7 15
Timing of transition coaching and include readiness 6 15
Understanding Self 6 19
Relational eg relationships with others, looking to others 7 20
Shift of leadership identity or thinking how come across to others 7 24
Others or relational 9 286
Drag selection here to code to a new node
In
Nodes
Code At
Understanding Self (Nodes\\Coaching)
Calendar - a...
Doctorate 4t...

Appendix G: Sample transcript

PARTICIPANT 7 INTERVIEW

24TH MARCH 2020

I sent through an email to K with a few areas that I was hoping to ask you about and I thought it might be helpful just to give you a sense of some of the things that are coming up. I'm only doing eight interviews, I've interviewed a couple of other lawyers, others in professional services, some others in financial services and what I'm interested in are whether there are themes that come out, but some of this is very individual experience, but there are really interesting themes which I'd be delighted to share with you at a later stage if that's interesting.

Yes it will be.

Thank you. So broadly I'd love to ask you about the transition you've made which I know is pretty recent, confidence and any change to confidence if you've experienced that, and then the coaching experience around it, and we may do section by section or sort of dovetail.

Well, where do you want me to start? I mean, yeah the transition is yes quite recent. I mean officially I stepped into role on the 1st of February but as you know, I think, I have been shadowing [predecessor] for about six months before that, six or eight months. So I felt I had, you know, a fairly good idea of what the job involved but it still nevertheless felt like quite a big deal with it was actually *me*. [predecessor] is still around which *right* now is incredibly helpful because I think if he wasn't at this point I really would be blowing up. Sometimes *that* makes me feel inadequate cos I think "oh I wouldn't be able to cope if [predecessor] wasn't there", but *actually* this is a pretty extraordinary situation and even if he wasn't there I'm sure I would have found a way but I suppose the key thing I'm learning is you're on a team, it's not all on you, and getting other people to help out is really, is well it's really really important and I'm sort of working that. I don't know, is, I've sort of jotted down things that I, sort of areas where I have been very conscious of not being so confident and the trigger things for me, whether that's helpful to talk through.

I would love to hear, maybe before that is there anything more you're able to say around the transition I suppose, what, and these may link to some of the confidence points, but what have you found more challenging and I suppose I have in mind, particularly lawyers, so many lawyers go from expert role or head of department role to then managing partner and so I think *this* transition in particular is so interesting in terms of *why* is it more challenging, *how* have you experienced that?

Well I think you touch on the point, that you're used to, you do the law you do, for me that was disputes, that was disputes in a particular context, often in a family context involving sort of difficult emotional issues, that meant that my, a lot of what I've got, a lot of my skillset is very good for this job because you are dealing with a group of partners who sometimes don't like each other [laughs] and you're sort of, but you're all actually on the same team and so I found what's been really interesting that some of the stuff I've had to deal with which has been around resolving difficult dynamics and things, that people have sort of said, "oh I'm *so* sorry you're having to deal with this" or "this must be awful for you" and darh darh da and actually no it's not I have absolutely no problem with doing that sort of thing. What I found really challenging and where I feel "oh god I'm hopeless at this" is where I'm having to do stuff which it now dawns on me just because that's not what I do so I find the corporate governance stuff *really* challenging. I *hate* it when I've got to give a notice of a partners meeting and I'm having to work out how many days and what do I do and what do I send a notice and a note and a draft resolution and how do we vote and how are we going to do and all of that stuff which is *just* not what I do. And the

other area where I predict that I'm going to find it more challenging is where I'm, well I suppose I've had to do a bit of it, I've had to do a little bit of sort of drafting of deeds and things where, you know, I'm not a transactional lawyer used to sort of you know moving drafts around and thinking and then coming up with wording and, you know, I can write but I, I, that's not what I do either but what I, so it's just worth noticing isn't it that it's…. I'm bringing a whole load of different skills to it because I'm *me*, and, some of those are going, some are great, some are different to [predecessor]'s, some would have been different if it had been a corporate partner that had been made managing partner or if it had been a private client partner, you know, you bring what you bring, and it's been quite kind of, I have had to remind myself of that bit, you know, that I won't be able to do it all but that's because that's not what I do but I do this other stuff.

Yes and "I can't do it all" but that's the unknown, I think some people for me are saying the unknown, the new stuff, is just challenging of course though that may not necessarily impact confidence/ It sounds to me like you're saying more it's just frustrating, I don't really enjoy it, I don't like it but I don't hear you say "I question whether I can *do* it"?

Well, no, it has wobbled me. I definitely have had moments where I've said, "I'm just not sure that I'm right for this", you know, "I'm not sure that I…", but I think I've got over that quite quickly which I've been pleased about, with the help of some coaching as well.

Ok, ok, can we come back to that: I'd love to hear about that. I'm interested in your transition, I wasn't expecting this but the story of the transition for a lot of people is quite important for them and in lots of cases there's just been no preparation, no role model, no even predecessor that's helped them, yours feels quite different because you've had [predecessor], you've shadowed him, you've still got him there. Tell me a little bit more about that, has that helped, I mean it sounds like it's helped you but it's also been….?

It has helped, it has helped, I mean I think the other thing that's helped which is related is just that I've been at [firm] forever, so I know the firm, you know, and know everybody, I know how it works, I've been a head of group so I've been involved in management, I've been involved in recruitment, I've helped out with other teams' recruitment because I sit in the middle of various teams so it it helped me that I'm a long-standing [firm] person and think that's quite nice to be able to fall back on somehow.

That makes sense to me because you're not saying, and some people have said in other businesses, I'd never been on the Exco or whatever it's called in different places, I didn't know how it worked, I didn't know the relationships. You had a lot of that sense.

Yes, well I was on management group but I also of course, but I was *not* on the Partnership Board, I did have a certain amount of inside track onto that via [husband] but also because I've always been close to [predecessor] and I've always gone and stuck my nose in and asked questions and because I had other friends who were on that committee and so yeah so I sort of yeah I feel like I was lucky that I was close to the heart of the business in a variety of ways before coming into the role. I still learned stuff about it that I didn't know but um…

What would you say, and I imagine Coronavirus might be one of these things [both laugh], but what would you say has been the biggest challenges of the transition or one of the biggest challenges so far for you of *this* transition compared to others, other transitions you've made?

Um [silence] Well I mean obviously this virus, I mean it's massive but it's the volume of stuff that you're dealing with in any one day, it's the number of big things, it's the number of people who want a piece of you, it's that sort of moving from one thing to the other and a constant never really having time to draw breath and always feeling that you've got to be *on it* and using up lots of energy because you're kind of

always having to be on show and perform and um... So I think that it's the sheer scale of the job is probably the biggest challenge and I've had to work hard to put gaps in and you know manage the diary, well I've now got a very nice assistant who's helping me with the diary, Karen, who you will have been speaking to and that, I mean if I didn't have her, and I jolly nearly didn't have her because there were people who felt I could probably manage without [I make a face and she laughs], I know, I really really would not be managing. But even with that support and that diary management it has been, it's yeah, the days are sometimes overwhelmingly busy, that's probably the biggest challenge, and it's not just busy with stuff where you could put your head down and do it, you're always having to deliver and not let people down and make a new connection, have that really important chat with that really sort of scary partner who you know you can't and need to impress a bit and you know, it's all quite energy sapping.

I heard someone I interviewed say that it was a big difference for her that before she could just perhaps sometimes sit in a meeting and be there but not be on it in the way you describe so I'm not surprised to hear that, that sense of always having to not just show up but to be fundamental to the meeting, and you said to perform.

And often when you haven't had any time to prepare for it because you've just come from the next meeting which has inevitably overrun and you're you know just sort of constantly, yeah that was hard and I think it is hard. Again that's an area where [predecessor] has been helpful because we sort of agreed beforehand that there were some things that were going to remain his project and while I'm interested and I need to know what's going on, I have been able to say, "you're doing that, right, I'm not going to be on that call cos I don't need to be cos you're there" you know and it's that sort of thing so I've had to be quite assertive about that sort of thing but I least I've had him to take a couple of things off me.

Yes. Yes, yes. You said the word perform just now (yeah), always having to perform, I'm interested in that cos that's coming out quite strongly as well and maybe it's just the early part of the transition while you're finding your feet. Can you tell me any more about that, how you experienced that?

I think you do feel you've got to perform, I think there's a, I mean somebody said to me, "you know, hey the great thing about the first couple of years is it's not your fault, you inherited someone else's crap sort of thing" but actually it doesn't really feel like that, it feels like everybody's looking to you to be someone and make a difference and make it better and stuff, and I do feel that and you know there are some people who I know will have doubted whether I was the right person for the job. There are a couple of people who I know who didn't vote for me (yeah, that's hard) and in those circumstances you feel like you have to sort of always be being better than they expected and that's quite hard. And I'm getting, but I have to say that dealing with this crisis is partly you haven't got time to care and partly people are grateful that you're there and what I've needed to do is quite a lot communication and stuff that I'm good at in written communication so lots of firm-wide briefings and pumping stuff out and reassuring people (good for you), and so I'm getting a lot of warmth from that, people with lots of nice response and feeling that actually this is quite good for me because it's an opportunity where I am just at the helm having to be doing it and people seeing it and they've no idea what chaos is going on elsewhere. But it's sort of, it's, so yeah, it is perform, you do, you are, you're kind of because you feel at any minute somebody might think "oh god what a mistake that was or" you know, so I do feel that sense of perform, I definitely do, I do feel I have to be, I'm trying not to, I'm trying to remind myself that at least I did it, nobody else wanted to do it, at least I'm willing to do it, I have quite a lot of the skills that are good even if I haven't got them all, that everyone makes mistakes, that you won't always get it right, you know just trying to be balanced about it. But you know that there are some people out there who will just judge you for what you're not good at or will just, you know remember the negative or, I don't know, so I'm just..

And do you feel that more, sorry say that again?

I was going to say it's quite a pressure, I suppose.

I was expecting that and I was wondering if you feel that more in this role, which I imagine you must be, this is very different to the transition you made whenever it was to Head of Department.

Yeah I mean that was different, it had, it was different in that it was smaller scale, but you know it was also scary in in a way that this isn't because both of the personalities that I was at that stage having to be a leader of in terms of the other partners in my team and also because of *me*, you know I'm just more robust now and I'm less of a don't know, battered person. It was *really* hard taking over as Head of disputes when I'd had somebody who'd sort of been a vile boss that was now my co, my sort of partner and I was in fact in charge of the department and that was much harder than this actually. So yeah, I mean this is bigger, this is just a bigger job but at least I do it from a point of actually knowing that I'm not *that* bad and I've got a lot of support.

Yes. Yes. Sounds like you've got support. Yes. I was going to ask you a bit more about support cos you mentioned you've got the support of [predecessor], you've got K thank goodness looking after your diary, I can't believe that somebody thought that you could do it on your own, (I know) but it sounds like you feel supported. A lot of people I've interviewed don't feel like they've got a lot of support and back to the coaching that's sort of such a fundamental support for *them*. Tell me a bit more about support and how supported you feel.

Um well, I've been really lucky because I've been around a long time and because of the particular moment that I took over and because I sort of I wanted it for a while before I got it and was able to kind of to be a bit I suppose political about it, that sounds bad but I was conscious of needing a bit of a support network and particularly I had strong relationships with the heads of business services teams or the non-legal teams who I obviously work a lot with, I say, I mean I have strong relationships with most of them, I find [name] quite challenging to work with.

I thought you might say that, yes.

I don't regard her as a support (yes, that's difficult) but that's been quite challenging but I'm getting there and it is what it is, but in that group I have lots of other very very solid support who go out of their way to say, "we're right behind you, we really, come on if you ever need anything we're here for you, it's a team, we're all in it" you know and during this particular crisis that's been really helpful. I also have, I'm very conscious that I have the support of, I suppose a lot of the younger Partners who are looking for something new and something different and to make a change and still feel lots of the kind of [firm] stuff but feel it in a slightly different way from the older Partners, so that's nice and I look to them and I can always feel that there's love in the room sort of thing [laughs] with some people and you just work out and have to remind yourself and people are pretty good, it's a nice firm so people are, particularly during this crisis period, you know just people every now and then will just email and say, "how are you doing, god this must be difficult" and it's a nice place so I have got a lot of support. I think I've also *now* got the support of [name] who's the Senior Partner, who you will know about, but my relationship with her was not particularly easy at the beginning of this and isn't isn't but I think she wasn't sure I was the right person to do it but actually she's pretty supportive now and that's feeling okay so I feel good about that .

Okay, okay, it sounds like it's already been a quite quick transition then to sort of winning a few (yeah) more difficult relationships round (yeah, I think that's right) even if they're still slightly work in progress.

Yes, it's inevitable I guess there's so many people that want… Yeah I mean but I think I'm doing alright at it, I'm doing alright.

Sounds like it, good. Tell me about some of the things you thought about in terms of triggers or moments of wobbles of confidence, I think you put some thoughts down.

Yeah, I think, I mean I was trying to think what was it that, what have there been and I think that one thing that definitely I experienced was a sort of a *brittleness* around anyone questioning me or things, I mean we had a couple of, it was in January, that so actually before I stepped into the role, but a couple of sort of big Partner moments where I reacted in a way in a meeting and then at a conference in a way which I, you know, well [name of senior stakeholder] helpfully told me it was not very good so that was a sort of, she gave me that helpful feedback but she wasn't wrong that I was more brittle than I should have been when being faced with confrontation from somebody else and I took it personally when I didn't really need to. I was fine, I wasn't disastrous but I was very conscious in the early days of the actual transition of stepping into the role, I felt very you know, "give me a chance, give me a chance, I just want it, you'll see, you'll see I can be, you know" and it was sort of so if I felt like anyone was, if someone was expressing their own sort of anxiety about something I would sort of think "oh well that means they don't think I'm going to be any good and everything's going to go wrong because it's me now" and I think I was just feeling fragile about taking this on and would I be any good and…. And I suppose that's something that when I feel, if I feel threatened in that way or insecure in that way it can come out as a, in quite a hostile sort of angry way which isn't actually very helpful, so I'm you know, again, I've had repeats of some of those situations and have been better the next time sort of thing (that's really interesting) so that's okay, I feel like you know, but that's definitely something I noticed, that my own like anxiety and insecurity was making me overreact and take it personally and therefore display emotion in a situation where I probably would have been better off not. (But you've got a whole…) But then I'm me, you know (yeah you're you, yeah) and you know I can only do it my way and I don't know…

But I think that you're describing a bit is the double pressure of suddenly because you are such a senior leader you know that you need to behave appropriately whatever the word is, so actually being brittle or however you came across you sort of knew it wasn't the right response (yeah) but I think in this sort of transition you've got more responsibility to behave impeccably if you like, however you define that, and that's an extra pressure because actually….

Even just behaving normally takes a lot of energy, you know, because you're learning new skills and you're doing and it's like really hard to always stay kind of completely on the level, so it will get easier.

Yeah, that to me is really interesting as well, it's coming out a lot the, for want of a better word, the labour, the emotional labour involved in being a really senior leader. It's not as simple as just showing up like you might do when you're a junior, well maybe you never do cos when you're really junior you're trying really hard as well to be a certain…

You're right but it's about different things, no but I think it is a massive deal, it's a massive deal cos you're holding yourself out as something that …and people want you to be, they need you to be confident and they need you to give them confidence therefore and so it's hard so you don't want to be, you know I am always going to be me and I am a real person and I am a kind of expressive person and I'm a bit heart on sleeve and stuff like that and I can't not be that person but I do need to be, I need to keep it a little bit more on a level somehow.

I want to come back to whether you talked about that in coaching in a second but before I lose it I also wanted to say it's interesting isn't it that, and this isn't a comment about [senior stakeholder] actually but, that [name], or whoever it is, but a senior colleague felt that they could point out an unhelpful behaviour or give you that feedback, and I know her and I would expect unfortunately that she might do that, but it wasn't helpful, I don't think, and it caused a real reaction in you. I've heard others say the same and I just think it's almost, my sense is when you are such a senior leader you're almost a

punchbag for people to say whatever they like unfiltered or that they have a duty to give you that sort of feedback.

Yeah, yeah, yeah, I mean. Yeah, I think that's right. People just think by definition you can and ought to be able to take it. (yes, yes) I mean I try, I, as I say, in this particular instance she wasn't wrong but she could have done it in a more supportive way. (yeah). Yeah, I mean, yeah, I think with that particular relationship there's a lot of jostling going on and I know some of it's coming from a place that that's about her, well what you mostly have to remember in these things it's about them. It's about them. (The other person). You know, it's about them. So that's it. But it's definitely right that you have to accept that it goes with the territory that you're up there, you're up there for people to have a pop at and they will, and they'll also bend your ear about everything, I mean that goes with the time challenge, you know I get copied into *all* kinds of things just because somebody wants (you to know) someone in authority to know the point they're making or some, you know and you just think "really you think I've got time to be bothered with this?!", but they do.

I'm sure you've got more things on your list and we'll come to them but tell me about the coaching and when that started and did you for example in that sort of situation, did you take that sort of feedback into coaching and say "this has happened, can we think it through?" Is that how it might have worked?

Yeah yeah I did. Yeah. Coaching's been enormously helpful to me on a number of occasions in life. I can't remember whether I talked to you before about whether, I mean obviously I have spoken to you before but mostly about [husband] but I had some coaching way back, might even have been as I, no it was before I took over as Head of Disputes and it was around a sort of dynamic with a particular Partner in my team, not actually the one who was more problematic but somebody who I'd always find myself having these ridiculous little fights with and stuff and so anyway I just had some coaching and actually it was just massively helpful just in terms of. So I was a fan and then when I did take over as Head of Disputes I had a little bit more from the same person about that sort of stepping up thing and that was, I don't know, that didn't really, I have to say, that was a sort of transitional coaching, transitional moment coaching which where it was kind of helpful to have someone to talk to but I didn't feel it was as sort of ground breaking in terms of what it did for me at that time but it was quite helpful to have somebody to talk to a bit at that particular moment. But then when I wanted to do this job, it was, I mean it, the person I had coaching from was somebody who was doing a lot of the training on our leadership development course which was put together by [Head of L&D], have you met [name]?

I have, yes, only once. [HR Director] slightly shielded me from her somehow, I'm not sure why.

Yeah, she would. [Head of L&D]'s amazing. (I thought so) So she's put together this incredible what was the Partner Development Program but we actually, in its second incarnation, we have put some of the Business Services Heads on it as well because they're also leaders so we rebranded it, and [name] who is the coach was introduced by [Head of L&D] to the program and was great and [Head of L&D] was one of the people who kind of way back was saying, "you should be the next Managing Partner" and she said, "if you need any help, [coach] will get you there, [coach] will help you". So because I had access to her via the program anyway I just said at one point, "well go on then, can I?", and I must have started to do my individual coaching possibly at the beginning of last year, so early 2019, and maybe kind of March or something like that. So it was just at the time when it was sort of starting to be talked about who was going to be the next one and people were being invited to put their submissions in and things, so she very much kind of, I don't know, helped me with the *whole* process from a point of view of being, it was really helpful because she was kind of inside the firm at that time working with a lot of us [interrupted by phone call] and so you know I wrote something and [coach] looked at it and helped me with my application. We then, as a group of people on that program, got asked to, [Head of L&D]'s wheeze, she managed to get us involved in the Partner Conference which happened in the summer so that we basically constructed how it was going to work with the help of an external person that came in and helped us but we were kind of tasked with running the day, and again that was a really helpful way of getting in front of a lot of people and, I don't know, [coach] helped me with that and I had to do a speech at the beginning of it which again she was just like *there* to help me and just to say, "don't worry,

yes that's good, yes yes that's" and that was, and feeling that…. I suppose what I've mostly found helpful is that my, sort of my instincts about how to be a leader and a manager fit in with prevailing wisdom about these things or at least the way we're being talked to about it and the books we're reading and the articles we're reading and people, the group of people is very mixed in terms of generation of Partners and it was really interesting to be, I sort of grew in confidence within that group which was quite representative of the firm, it wasn't completely representative but it had enough people who I thought "gosh I don't really know you, I'm not sure you're going to see eye to eye with me", or "I do know you and I know you're always a bit spikey and how's that", and somehow though I felt "oh god we've got this common language now and I can do this and these people will back me to do this and they want it too" and it's sort of and I suppose the coaching was just part of that whole experience and since then, since I sort of stepped into, well since I've been running up to stepping into the role, you know, it's been really helpful to have somebody there who is, we've had regular sessions where we talk about, you know we usually focus on *something* but it's something that's about to happen or some big thing that I'm having to deal with, whether it's a conference or it's a something or it's a meeting, or it's a particular. But also she's been somebody who's there on the end of the phone and there on the end of a text, so I can be coming home after a really crap day and just say, "god I'm really doubting whether I've got this", you know, whatever and she's just good at saying the right thing at the right time, and then you have a chat about it and then, yeah she's just, I don't know, good at making me realise it's not usually about something I've done, it's usually about that other person and their neediness, it's you know, and helping accept that it's *bound* to feel difficult and it's *bound* to feel overwhelming and that's okay cos I'm a normal human being, not a freak or someone that's incompetent or….You know, it's having somebody there and increasingly I can do it myself but it's nice to know that there's somebody there who can back you up, sort of thing.

Yes, yes, so it sounds like she's held your hand and more than throughout the process (yeah, yeah) in getting you into managing the Partner Conference, all of that.

And she's helping me think about strategy and she's helping me to think about the way in which we should present that, or I should present that and of course the whole thing is now, you know, god knows what the next six months is going to look like and all the plans I had are going to be up in the air but you know, as I said right at the beginning, there are some silver linings, assuming the business survives, but there are some silver linings to that in terms of development and stuff as well.

Yes, yes. Yeah, very interesting and actually your experience is so, you know, she's there at the end of the phone, you mentioned texting her, for some people that's very much the distance coach, they just meet every month and when they're in there for the hour and a half they've got the full attention of the coach and that's supportive enough but this actually feels, and it feels like what *you* needed is just "if I have a question, if I need something this person who I trust implicitly and who's got good (exactly) judgement is there" so it's actually quite an all-round supportive process.

Yes it is and you're right, it is different from, I'll tell you what it's different from therapy where you know, that awful moment, not that I haven't done much recently, but I have in the past, that awful moment when your hour and a quarter is up and that's just *it* and you might be in a total state but that's it, and obviously when I met with Liz the end of the meeting comes but it never feels you know, I always feel that then the next day she'll be in touch to say, "I hope you're okay", so yeah it's been really, it's been really good.

And the confidence moments that you might discuss, so I know it's not just the moments you discussed cos it's actually in the being as well and maybe being in some meetings or actually her witnessing it, but when you're actually taking something and saying, "I had this moment or something", do you do that and take it to her and say, "can we explore it?" or does she help you think through how/what that might be.

Yes, usually I will say, “I wouldn’t mind talking about this and this happened and can we just talk about that” and she’s usually got some sort of, she’s quite good at drawing a picture or having a little way of thinking about it and just that somehow makes it feel normal.

Yes okay, yeah, that’s really good isn’t it.

Normal and therefore forgivable.

Yes and therefore you don’t beat yourself up about it being a personal failure or whatever it might be. (yeah, yeah). Thank you that’s really interesting.

Yes it’s been good. Yeah. I mean just looking at my, the other things which I suppose I found difficult are the, yeah that sort of the elder statesman in the Partnership, I found that challenging and I think that’s something I’ve got and I think this is something quite personal to me that I need to sort of regularly try and find ways of getting over that I’ve got this like slight sort of, “I’m a small person and the people that are older than me they’re very important and I need a pat on the head from them and that really means a lot”, you know, and I don’t know really exactly what that’s about. I think…but it is *definitely* there that I don’t, I will defer, you know, I’ll defer to the person who’s more senior than me even though they’re not, (yeah and now they’re not) and that’s partly just because I’m not a sort of ta dah, you know, let me be the loudest voice in the room person but also because it just feels right somehow but even though, even if I think they’re an idiot I find it quite challenging to be, I don’t know, I’m more threatened I think by those old men with grey hair and I need to, there aren’t that many of them anymore but it’s quite, it’s quite….

If you could do it differently or if in time you could imagine you’re in a different place with that, how would you be with them, how would you like to be that you’re feeling you’re not at the moment?

I just want to be equal; I want to be in a, I want to feel relaxed around them so that I believe that they actually think I’m good enough. I tend to make this assumption that they won’t… or that my way won’t be their way and therefore they’ll never get it and therefore it won’t be, I don’t know, it’s really hard to describe but I’m also much better with women than men (ok), I find it much easier so that’s interesting too, I’m not really sure what that’s about [laughs]

Well I think sometimes and in coaching it would be [I feel safe] okay feeling safe and just knowing the kinds of people that make you feel safe that naturally, I think that part of this transition is “how do I now, I have to now, I can’t just feel safe, I have to push myself”. It’s interesting, I’m coaching a Chief Exec, Acting actually, he’s only 40, young guy of a big insurance company, and they haven’t confirmed his role and it’s been a year and a half so it’s a tricky sort of unclear situation but he’s coping pretty well. But he’s young, he looks quite young, he’s very sort of boyish looking and he’s found it really hard to deal with the grey hairs and has gravitas.

It's gravitas, it’s gravitas that he feels he lacks.

Yes exactly, and he’s been told this as well which is hard so…. But for him there’s something, and I think in all of us that runs deep you know, he grew up with a mother who was always saying respect your elders, you know, the statesman thing, you should respect hierarchy and I think in a way that’s sort of there, it runs deep and it’s holding him back and now’s the time when he’s got to do something about it but it’s very difficult.

My thing is a little bit around, a little bit child, sort of wanting not to please exactly, I don't think that's it, it's sort of wanting, needing, needing to feel, don't know, valued by, I suppose it is sort of parental, needing to feel you get the pat on the head or the something, something, it is, it definitely goes quite deep.

And I'm interested in, you said a minute ago something like "and I worry that they don't think I'm good enough or I'm going to be right" or something like that, so the assumption you make, which may or may not be right, of them actually not thinking you're good enough, so it sounds to me that that question is there.

Bit young, yes somebody, yes [senior partner] reported it to me, she didn't mean to, she thought it was a compliment, but that somebody had said that to her, "gosh [participant name]'s a bit young to… isn't she?", and actually that was really, I read that as "yeah you just don't think I've got gravitas, that's really annoying". Yeah I don't know but I'm getting it, I'm getting it, slowly but surely, I'll be alright.

So in all of this there's that moment of, I haven't got the gravitas and I bow too much to these guys, and then knowing actually deep down that you will get there, you've got to work on it somehow (yeah) and maybe even take it to coaching and think it through but you will get there but it's part of that transition isn't it.

Yeah, yeah, that's exactly right.

And the imposter syndrome, I mean the word that comes up a lot when people look at my research topic and they say, "oh wow is that about imposter syndrome?" and I say, "actually not necessarily no, it might come up" but is it that not good enough thing, is that there for you?

It *kind* of is, or it *kind* of has been, and one of the things, just to sort of look at it in a different way is actually one of the things that you work out when you get more senior in an organisation is that nobody else really knows what they're doing much either, so that kind of counters imposter syndrome, you know what I mean, you're sort of, you're just like everybody else and they're all, it's like being a parent, you're kind of making it up as you go along (making it up as you go along) and so I definitely have times obviously because I'm a normal person with some humility where I don't feel that I'm good enough or at least I might not be the best or I might better if I was a bit better at something or, but I don't think I would *right now* describe it as feeling like an imposter cos I just think well who else, you know, nobody else is doing it, why not me, you know?

I love that, and I love when you described earlier this awful crisis that we're in actually is allowing you, if there's any good in it, is allowing you to find your stride to do, at this unprecedented time, to do, to lead in a way to be that no one's ever had to do cos it's not existed.

Yeah exactly and so it just shows some of the things that I can do, and yesterday was a bad day and I, you know, I woke up and felt scared and felt quite quiet for the morning cos I was quite scared about everything and just a bit daunted by it all and not feeling that I had any control over it and that made me go in, you know I was a bit, and I'm scared about not being able to be in the office because I don't really work at home, I don't usually do that, I don't *like* working at home and I also get, when I'm in it I'm fine you know, so I go…. I can have days like that then I feel a bit flat and actually I get into the office and interact with some people and then I'm great you know, then sort of not having that here is going to be quite weird although you find you have it on the phone so it's alright but yeah, at the end of the day you know, I was pretty low about it and just felt I hadn't been very effective and hadn't been sort of you know, wasn't really…so it's not all great but then if you look back you think I did do that and I did achieve that and actually tomorrow's another day and you know, we're all sharing the load and some of it's difficult and some of it you know, so I guess I'm just…I'm….what I'm pleased is that I seem to be able

to bounce myself back from those things and I think that is a lot about, it is a lot about the coaching, it's a lot about coaching, it's a lot about all the reading I've done, it's a lot about I've been doing meditating (good for you), since the New Year, sort of through Christmas and the New Year almost every day, I mean I have some gaps but you know it's 10 minutes but it might have made a difference. So yes, I'm feeling okay about how it feels but that's not to say that I'm always like "yay I've got this!" cos, you know….

Yes, and that's really helpful, what I'm finding, I think when I started thinking about this idea years ago I sort of assumed that in a new leadership role the beginning, whatever, however long that lasted, was a period of loss of confidence, of low confidence, and eventually you get into your stride and it's kind of there on in sky high confidence, now I know that can't be right.

But it isn't.

Yeah, so describe to me how it's…. Yeah it doesn't seem like that at all.

Yeah, it just, well, I think it sort of, there's definitely a bit of a step up, you do, yes definitely cos you're learning stuff aren't you. You're learning, oh I haven't done that before and now I can, now I know that, but within each day, to me anyway, there'll be sort of moments where it's argh you know, but it's just. So it's not a linear thing (yeah) but I think you can help, yeah I mean, I think I think that if you're doing your work around the back of it on yourself (yes) and being, taking that time I suppose to think about your reactions, think about who you are, think about how you do it, think about why, that bit can be quite, that gives you a sort of slow so that even if the day is a bit and therefore you have a funny reaction, you kind of can trust that you've got something, I don't know, I'm not describing it very well but.

Well I was going to say the word bedrock (yeah probably) kind of came into mind, so there's a bedrock, a core of the work you're doing around yourself.

Something like that, but there's a sort of, when I feel, as I said I think earlier, I'm able to bounce myself back, I can usually, I'll have the moment but I usually now can pretty quickly know what I should be saying to myself, and that doesn't mean that I don't then sometimes access the person who I know will say it to me as well. Do you know what I mean, sometimes you do need a third party, a second party whatever, to say "no you're doing really well" or "actually I thought it came across *fine*" or whatever, you know, but it…

But you've got enough core within yourself.

More on my own, yeah on my own, I kind of I know, I know what, how I can dig myself out of those low feelings.

That's really interesting. Listen I'm conscious of time, we should wrap up soon. I'm asking everybody, and I'd love to hear your thoughts on this, if you can think of when you were at your sort of most confident, whether it's recently, whether it's a while ago, how would you describe that? Someone sang a song to me the other day, how would you say? [laughs]

I'm not going to do that!

No don't worry! How would you say?

Well I think that there are risks around that, I, you feel, I mean I feel high but I think for me that's quite a, that can be quite a scary place to ….cos I get, partly because I can get very manic like that, I mean I don't think I am in any way manic but you know what I mean, I can get more and so it makes me feel sometimes a bit out of control if I feel too "up". But also because I have a huge kind of, in, a thing, my upbringing is very much that you don't shout about yourself and you don't, find it quite difficult to say "yeah I smashed it" because that's asking for trouble sort of thing.

OK, so there's a caution around if you're feeling too confident almost.

Yeah, I don't like over-confidence probably in other people because that's the way I'm wired and have been brought up sort of thing and so I don't like the idea that I might be coming across in a way which is too confident but I'm trying, yeah, I'm trying to say "I feel good, I enjoyed that, yeah I like it, yeah I'm interested, it's challenging but it's interesting", you know trying to say all the positive things about it so I don't know whether I answered your question really.

Yeah, no it's interesting, there's the control bit there. So controlled confidence if we were to say and reframe it, for you so not right up there that's a bit scary and a bit too much trumpeting, if there's a controlled feeling of confidence like at the end of a day and you think "that was a really good day or I did well", how might…

And I've had them you know, at the end of my first three weeks in this job I, well at the end of the first week, I texted [husband] and said, "I *really* love my new job" as I left the office, and I felt that again the following Friday, another week under my belt, "I've done it, I'm okay, I can do this". I felt it again on the third week and then on the fourth week I think was when we got into this Coronavirus nightmare, I can't remember [laughs] but, and then it felt a little bit more like "oh god, oh god, oh god this is what I'm going to now have to deal with". But you know at the end of last week it was a really, I was supposed to be on holiday (yes, of course), a) we had to cancel our holiday, b) we then did go away for all of a night, or two nights, but I worked just constantly, and I literally just didn't have a holiday so you know despite that at the end of the week it was like I suppose there was a sort of feeling of yeah satisfaction, right I did it, I'm still here, I made it, we did it, we achieved some stuff, it's the weekend, I can relax, you know, and you get up and start again and I think possibly sometimes that's why Mondays are quite hard cos it feels like you've got that hill to climb again somehow or it's all still and you can't reach any point of sort of resolution which I know it's not as if the virus stops on Fridays and everyone can go out there, but there's something about the working…. I like the end of the day, I'm already thinking today, oh hang on so I've got a call at four o'clock then actually I've worked pretty solidly all day I can probably knock, even though there's a *mountain* of things to be done, you can sort of justify (stopping) well I've done my bit today (good for you, that is good to hear) and that's quite a lovely feeling, but..

Yeah, yeah, I can see how that's also tied to confidence, that feeling of "I've done it, I've done enough, I've justified stopping, I've done it" (yeah) yeah.

Yeah which I think sounds a bit negative isn't it but it's kind of good I think if you feel you can give yourself a reward.

A reward, a pause.

I feel guilty about that too sometimes because there is always so much to do and you feel you should be everywhere and should be on it, you should be performing and you should be all of that and I really want people to see that I'm doing all this stuff, but I've just got to not cos otherwise I'll burn out.

You do, yeah. Listen you've given me so much time, is there anything else that you had on your list that you thought helpful for me to hear that we haven't talked about?

I don't think so. Nervousness about making decisions, I think that's something that I'm used to doing stuff in a collaborative way and I was quite nervous that you know people would be asking me to make a decision and they do sometimes and I do find that quite hard.

When you can't be as collaborative because.,,?

You want to check, or when I want to talk, toss it around with somebody but actually this person is asking me to make a call on something and I'm not *sure* whether it might be right and I haven't really been in this situation before and I *might* say the thing that involves the wrong thing happening and I won't know and that's one of the challenges around [senior stakeholder] is cos she rings me up and bombards me with questions and asks me to give an and I sort of go "well I.." and it makes me hostile cos I say, "well I don't know because you've just rung me up and asked me and I haven't thought about it" but it's that sort of, it's that sort of being on the spot and not, but you know, but mostly you can do it being in collaboration with other people and say, "do you know what I'm not sure, I'll go and talk to somebody else about it or …".

So the being able to say "I'm not sure" I think is really important, not a sign of lack of confidence.

Yeah, you learn that as a lawyer, you can get to an age and stage where you can say to the client, "Do you know what, I'm going to check" or "I'm not sure, my instinct is" or whatever (yeah). I suppose somehow I, because I'm not in my comfort zone now I've felt less able to say it as a result of lack of confidence but I'm getting there and I'm sort of, and also better that than making the wrong decision.

Yes for sure. Another lawyer said to me the other day in an interview, actually for him confidence was when he felt able to say, confident enough, to be able to say I don't know or help or….

Without thinking that that's going to make you look small and sort of rubbish cos yeah, yeah, why should you know everything, you don't?!

Well Tess thank you so very much, I really appreciate it. I appreciate your honesty, your time, your thoughtfulness, amazingly so, thank you.

Appendix H: Outline of 2nd coding and 5th coding on Nvivo

Doctorate thesis - 2nd coding 3 June 2020

Nodes

Name	Description
Ability to challenge or make systemic changes	Having the confidence to challenge
Achieving or achievement or having done it before	gives confidence
Measurable impact	
Performance	
Authenticity	
Authentic and natural	
Clarity about self	
Relaxed and calm	
Physical manifestation	
Sense of ease	
Vulnerability or ability to say I don't know	
Coaching CHECK WHETHER THESE ARE RELATED TO CONFIDENCE OR GENERALLY TO COACHING	
Acceptance (see if will keep - look for others)	
Affirmation or coach remembering or drawing on information ie depth of personal or longstanding relationship	

Name	Description
Support	
Allowing to be open or let guard down or show vulnerability	
Coping with loneliness	
DIfferent perspectives or approaches	
Managing relationships with others	
Normalising	
Redefining or rebuilding leadership identity or thinking how come across to others	Some of this is also learning new skills or link specifically to leadership skills? eg participant 4 influencing skills
Space to reflect	
Talking it out loud to help move forward	
Staying in control	
Strategies to move forward	eg helping manage derailers/difficult situations
Encouragement	
Prioritisation	
Timing of transition coaching and include readiness	
Understanding Self	
Unique tailored approach	

Name	Description
Confidence and aspects of it	
Clarity of direction	
Clarity of purpose	
Expressing it or showing it (whether acted or not)	
Imposter	
Internal confidence	
Over confidence	
Quotes to use for defining and articulating confidence	
Self-doubt or not feeling good enough	
Control	
Decision making (having confidence to back own judgement)	
Loss of control as new senior leader	
Loss of former expertise	
New authority or taking ownership	including of self or identity
Staying in control as new senior leader	
Staying in control by being careful over what you say	
Staying in control by being prepared	

Name	Description
Staying in control over behaviour or external	
Identity	
Creating new identity and leadership	
Authenticity and being ok with who you are	
Difference	Feeling of difference as a leader (link to loneliness)
Effort of new identity incl labour or care or thought needed	
Acting new identity	
Multiple identities	
Old identity or old narratives and stories that defined them until now	
Newness and unknown	
New relationships	
New skillset or way of working required	And often with no training or warningHaving the right skillset gives confidence (and the opposite - see pilot's example of after MBA when didn't have them) Include time management in this (think participant 3 and 7?)
No template or idea of how to go about it or stuckness	
Unknown territory	eg relationships, expectations,
Others or relational	
Change in relationship with others	

Name	Description
Difficult relationships	
Impact on others	
Role model	
Trusting others	
What others think	then relationship with others/difficult relationships/ change in relationships/ expectations from others/ fear of not being liked/ need to prove
Expectation from others and link to pressure too	
Expectations from self	
Fear of not being liked	
Need to prove self	
Working harder or more consciously at relationships	
Support	
Feedback	
Legitimacy to be criticised	More propensity to be criticised as senior leader? more visible?
Loneliness	
Scrutiny or spotlight or being on show	
Transition	
Competition over role	
Duration or shape of and timing of challenges to confidence during transition	

Name	Description
Multiple interlinking and ongoing transitions	impacting the leader's transition: it's not as simple as just one transition
Preparation for transition	NB including handover or predecessor
Self-doubt before transition	
Surprise over being selected or asked	
Transition compared to earlier transitions	

Doctorate thesis – 5th coding December 2020

Nodes

Name	Description
Challenges to confidence of leadership transition	
Achieving (having impact) and challenging the system	gives confidence
Ability to challenge or make systemic changes	To have the confidence to do so
Achieving, performance, having impact	as a way of aiding confidence
Authority, empowerment vs not having authority, empowerment as a senior leader	including of self or identity
Being in control of decisions (having confidence to back	including decisions about self and how they want to be (see gp discussion)

Name	Description
own judgement) vs not being in control	
Being in control as a new senior leader vs loss of control and how this feels	
Being careful over what you say and effort of such	
Consciously controlling behaviour and emotions or staying on a level	What you show or don't show/ what you hide/ what you are conscious and think through before showing
Moving out of comfort zone and new skill set required	And often with no training or warningHaving the right skillset gives confidence (and the opposite - see pilot's example of after MBA when didn't have them) Include time management in this (think participant 3 and 7?) And break this down further into new skills/ knowledge/ expected to be expert quickly etc?
Unknown territory - no template or idea of how to go about it or stuckness	
Not being prepared	Tess is the exception...
Coaching	
Helping to see different perspectives	including use of 360
Normalising and helping with acceptance of self or situation	
Relational eg relationships with others, looking to others	
Shift of leadership identity or thinking how come across to others	Some of this is also learning new skills or link specifically to leadership skills? eg participant 4 influencing skills

Name	Description
Space to reflect and talking it out loud	
Staying in or regaining control	
Strategies to move forward	eg often through questioning from coach, just through discussion, helping manage derailers/difficult situations including encouragement and prioritisation and also to manage specific situations, also tools
Support including affirmation	Support through being there/ affirmation/ being able to open up/ reminding them of things and also drawing on information ie depth of longstanding relationship or knowing about them
Timing of transition coaching and include readiness	
Understanding Self	including psychological support of coaching, working on what they're not saying - see examples from gp discussion/ working at a deeper level
Unique tailored approach	
Confidence and aspects of it	NB this node is NOT about confidence and what helps with confidence (or doesn't) during this transition: it is purely about any aspect of confidence at this time that is to do with the concept as either stated by them or questioned by me so: the idea of over confidence and some people worrying about that; imposter (which doesn't really hold up but interesting to hear what people say); expressing confidence or showing it; self-doubt; ways of managing wobbles of confidence and quotes to use to define
Imposter	
Over confidence	
Quotes to use for defining and articulating confidence	NB including shape of confidence and thoughts on timing etc
Physical manifestation	
Self-doubt or not feeling good enough	
Self-doubt before transition	

Name	Description
Ways of managing confidence eg through self talk, bouncing back or own ways or coaching or support	
Confidence as relational	
Organisational aspects of relational	Areas that the organisation could support more (rather than just the individual eg through coaching)
Critical or difficult reactions from others	More legitimacy to be criticised? more propensity to be criticised as senior leader? more visible? expectation from others that you should take it?
Feedback	
Need for feedback	
Negative feedback which doesn't help confidence	
Positive affirming feedback which helps confidence	
Observing others or predecessor or role model	Fewer at this level? Much needed to show direction/ inspire/motivate
Scrutiny or spotlight or being on show	
Support or lack of support or doubt from others	
Loneliness or rename to not belonging	
Self in relation to others	

Name	Description
Difference	Feeling of difference as a leader (link to loneliness)
Influencing others or impact on others	
New relationships or change in relationship with others	
Trust either others in new leader or new leader in others (or not)	Link to confidence - when know them or when there is trust, there is more confidence eg to challenge
Wanting connectivity (link to loneliness)	Include wanting to be liked
What others think	or fear of what others think. what others think - this is sometimes different from what the leader thinks. then relationship with others/difficult relationships/ change in relationships/ expectations from others/ fear of not being liked/ need to prove
Doubt of self in relation to others or because of others	
Expectations from self	
Expectations or pressure from others or how perceived by others	
Need to prove self or make impression	
Working harder or more consciously	

Name	Description
at relationship or interaction	
Identity as a senior leader and confidence	
Authenticity	Acceptance that you can be more yourself/ being more fully yourself/ not trying to be something else
External e.g. pretending, acting and conscious change to behaviour away from natural	Including effort and being careful
Effort, exhaustion, energy sapping, and being careful	incl exhaustion
Inner or internal that can't be shown	Think more about this. here it is coming out as something that is there, is felt but is consciously hidden from others or is different to how you are coming across externally: think of Irene or Rosie or Freya all feeling they have to hide things or can't show this. Link to vulnerability Or the internal work that isn't shown such as internal purpose. Link to external too and what can be shown or consciously managed.
Relaxed, calm, sense of ease, natural	including clarity of purpose and direction etc
Self knowledge or awareness	
Vulnerability or ability to say I don't know or to show what is being felt	
Change in leadership identity or awareness of need to change or refusal to create new identity or to conform	Leadership identity and requirements vs. general identity - steer away from this but think about leadership identity or identity changes required as senior leader

Name	Description
Multiple identities or hats	
Old identity or old narratives and stories that defined them until now	
Transition (not to use for doctorate but in future)	
Early part of transition	
Initial confidence	
Multiple interlinking and ongoing transitions	impacting the leader's transition: it's not as simple as just one transition
Pre transition	
Competition over role	
Surprise over being selected or asked	
Transition compared to earlier transitions	

Appendix I: Indicative questions for focus group discussion with coaches

Please could you reflect on coaching senior leader clients during the transition to senior leadership across the following areas:

a) The transition to a senior leadership role

(NB I am defining this as: *the transition to a new senior role requiring new skills with a high level of responsibility and visibility, positioning them on the senior executive team, or as a head of a major business unit or service line, or a senior manager/director operating at a level below the executive team in a larger organisation*)

i) what did they present as challenging in particular about this transition?
ii) how did you work on this in coaching?

b) Challenges to their confidence:

i) how might their confidence have been challenged and why in particular at this time vs. other transitions?
ii) how did they raise this in the coaching (e.g. was it from the outset/did their line manager discuss it/did it emerge/were they or you aware of it)?
iii) what impact did this have on them (e.g. well-being/self-doubting/their actions or behaviours/decision making/performance etc)?
iv) how specifically did you help them in the coaching with this?

c) Timing of coaching during leadership transitions: can you give an example of the optimal timing of coaching for one of your leaders in transition (e.g. before the transition/ during/ after) and why?

Other questions to consider:

- What does being confident/having confidence look like to you when you see it in your clients?
- How did you know when you as coach had helped them with confidence?
- What was going on in *your* head when you were coaching in those moments of challenges to confidence?