Executive Coaching Outcomes: An investigation into leadership development using five dyadic case studies illustrating the impact of executive coaching

Fenella Mary Herries Trevillion

Oxford, UK

Abstract

Revenue spent on coaching globally is significant, yet data is lacking on the specific leadership behaviours it develops. This study focuses on the debate about coaching efficacy, the components of executive coaching and the leadership behaviours developed through it. The research context is a cross-government, blended, leadership programme. Using qualitative research and case studies of coachee/manager dyads, questions on who defines the coaching agenda, the coaching consequences and success due to coaching, are addressed. A notable finding questions the need for a coaching contract. Further research is invited to investigate transformational impacts of coaching at the deep emotional level.

Keywords: Executive coaching, outcomes, success criteria, case study, government

Introduction

The past two years have seen seismic political shifts in Britain, Europe and America. The impact has been a sense of dissonance and lack of confidence amongst leaders about how best to behave in a world where the paradigm has shifted.

This pace of change was predicted by some organisations. One, at the heart of government the British Government Communications Service (GCS), had seen that change was essential in how it conducts its business. Its Government Communications Plan 'World Class Communications' published in 2015 followed this realisation. This plan noted several challenges, including the visible lack of future leaders in its service. It proposed that strong leadership capabilities in the government communications workforce should be displayed at all levels thereby ensuring that future leaders come through the organisation. To address this, the GCS commissioned an early talent leadership programme using coaching as a key component of development.

The purpose of this study is to identify the behaviour changes as possible outcomes of the executive coaching used in that development programme.

The 2016 ICF Global Coaching Study (Pricewaterhouse Coopers, 2016) which gathers data from 137 countries, notes that the total annual revenue from coaching in 2015 was USD 2.3 billion (2016, p.10). Of those coached, 60% were executives; this suggests a prominent level of revenue being spent globally on coaching a high number of executives.

With the period of "Intensification of fiscal contraction (2013-15)" (Ortis and Cummins 2013, p40) there was considerable scrutiny in all sectors on expenditure, especially those arising from non-frontline services. Leaders require evidence on the impact of coaching to give them greater leverage when arguing for funds to resource it.

The programme manager leading the development programme in this study was committed to including coaching as an aspect of the blended, hub and spoke programme model. Given the context of this scrutiny, they chose to gather data on the efficacy of the coaching, once the programme was underway. This data indicated that the coaching was successful yet there was a lack of granular evidence of the actual change it brought to the programme attendees.

This study's investigator was a coach on that programme and requested by the programme manager to examine the impact of coaching on programme participants with a specific emphasis on the behaviour change developed through the process. The examination includes coaching success factors and any further issues regarding coaching that arose through the study.

The study starts with a literature review, drawing attention to various definitions of executive coaching, (the membership organisation Association for Coaching (2017), Jones et al (2016), de Haan et al (2013), Grant et al (2009), Bluckert (2005) and Stern (2004)), coaching benefits and the debates arising from this topic. It then examines the studies on coaching as part of a development programme and notes gaps in the subject area revealing the emergence of opportunities for new research to take place.

There follows the description of the design, the methodology, the findings and analysis. The conclusion addresses the implications for theory and practice, further work and the significance of the work in terms of extending knowledge in the coaching field. The concluding section includes a call for further investigation in to the transformational benefits of coaching at a deep internal level.

Literature Review

The definitions of executive coaching are examined followed by a review of the benefits of coaching, leading to examining the levels of benefit of coaching and suggests this might align with the level at which coaching comes in. The examination on efficacy extends to studies on coaching as part of blended development programmes and exposes a dearth of research on coaching outcomes data from perspectives other than the coach and the coachee. This provided an opportunity for a unique contribution to the field from a study using a different perspective through the inclusion of self and observed reports by the coachee and their manager on the impact and ensuing change engendered through coaching.

The examination of definitions of executive coaching reveals that they are many and varied, showing some coherence, some variations and some overlaps in the terms used by authors in the field. There is coherence on the view that coaching is a one-to-one, non-hierarchical trusted relationship between a person in an organisation (a coachee) and a coach (Jones et al, 2016; Grant et al, 2009; de Haan et al, 2013; Stern, 2004). A common characteristic of the relationship was that it is underpinned by a three or four-way contract between the coachee, the coach, their manager and sometimes another representative of the organisation. This clarified relationships and identified the coaching outcomes (Sherman and Frees, 2004; Hay, 2007; Turner and Hawkins, 2016); the rationale given is the contract exploits the "productive tensions" (Sherman and Frees 2004, p.86) between stakeholders and clarifies responsibilities (Hay 2007) thus increasing its effectiveness. The variance that

occurred in the above studies was in the coachee's level in the organisation and whether the benefits were to the coachee and/or to the organisation.

A further difference occurs in the overlapping use of the terms coaching, executive coaching and business coaching. For instance, Bluckert (2005) in his study on critical factors in executive coaching predominately used the term coaching and not executive coaching. Similarly, the 6th Ridler Report, Mann (2016) review on coaching in organisations, used the word coaching throughout the document, although it did differentiate between Professional Executive Coaching (PEC) and line managers who adopt a coaching style within organisations.

Another theme was the inclusion of personal and or business development topics within coaching. The membership organisation Association for Coaching (2017), Jones et al (2016), de Haan et al (2013), Grant et al (2009) and Stern (2004) all define executive coaching as working on organizational or business-related outcomes as well as personal ones, business coaching definitions emerge as different. The Association for Coaching's definition sees it as supporting the individual "to achieve improved business performance and operational effectiveness" (Association for Coaching, 2017). Bluckert's (2006) view chimes with this whilst his definition of executive coaching focused on the coach (rather than the outcome), and saw them as "behaviourally trained practitioners working with a distinctive methodology" (2006, p. 2).

The common components and the variations in the components of executive coaching are illustrated in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1: The Components of Executive Coaching
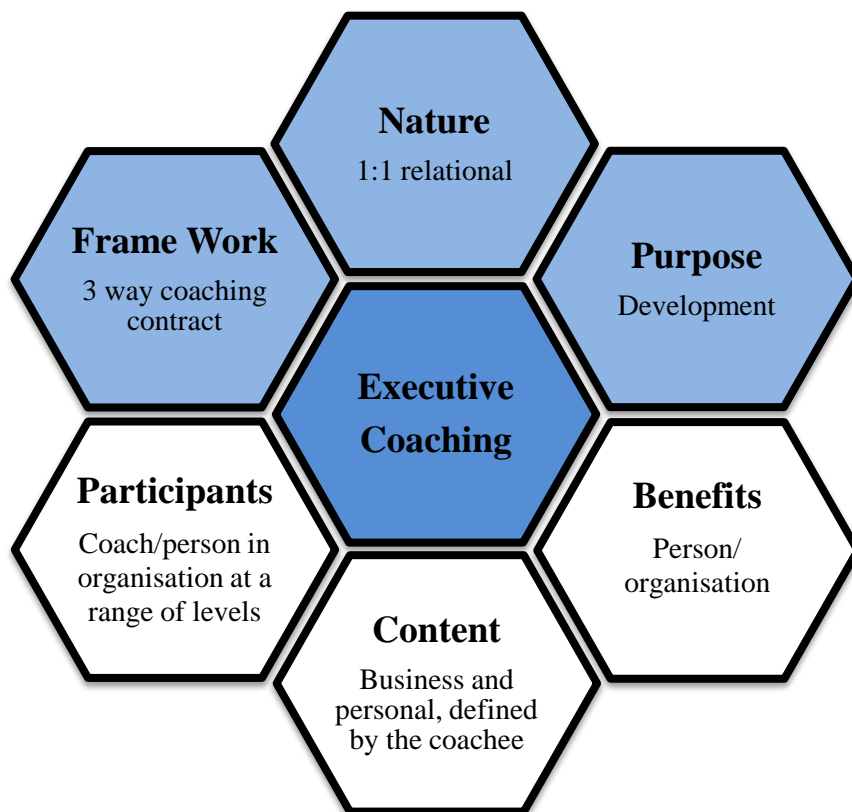
Legend: ⬡ Common components defined in executive coaching

⬡ Components where there was a range of views

Coaching Benefits

De Haan et al (2013) saw executive coaching as a "form of leadership development" (p. 41) that "results in a high occurrence of relevant, actionable, and timely outcomes for clients" (p. 41). In contrast Jones et al (2016) saw it as coachees achieving their own objectives. In an earlier study, Olivero et al (1997) noted coaching as being successful in increasing productivity.

The intention of the current study is to identify behaviours, defined as "actions, activities, and processes initiated in response to stimuli which are either internal or external" (Psychology Dictionary 2017) that changed through coaching. The development programme guide for the early talent programme, the subject of this study, the key skills and behaviours identified to be successful, were derived from 11 dimensions of potential, identified at a Communications Director's workshop (programme manager, personal communication, 3/08/2016). These showed a mixture of internal and externally facing capabilities, for instance: "adaptability", "resilience" and "interpersonal skills" and "relationship building".

It is notable that the literature studies reviewed, generally focus on internal abilities rather than external behaviour as coaching benefits, illustrated well in Figure 2 below in Armstrong et al's (2007) "Integrated Coaching Framework" (2007, p. 5) used by the Institute of Executive Coaching and Leadership (IECL). See Figure 2 below.

Self-efficacy, seen in Figure 2 as an intrapersonal benefit, was described by Bandura (2012) as "a constituent of intrapersonal influences, (that…) people have a hand in shaping events during the course their lives take" (2012, p. 11). Self-efficacy, noted by Baron and Morin (2010) is named in many studies as being a coaching benefit. In their qualitative study on leadership development, they compared learning that took place in classrooms, through action learning sets and through coaching and found that "executive coaching was positively associated with self-efficacy (2010, p. 30).

Other benefits, such as self-confidence, were seen by Stankov et al (2012) as a cognitive ability. They described it as a trait that relates to a certain response by one individual to another that "indicates the certainty about the accuracy of [their] own answers" (2012, p. 747). Similarly, strategic ability seen as a leadership skill, was identified as a coaching benefit (Kombarakaran et al, 2008).

Through drawing out the definitions of the internal factors and behaviours defined in the studies on coaching efficacy, it emerged that these broadly align with Armstrong et al's (2007) three levelled framework in Figure 2, where the deepest level (intrapersonal), is affective in nature, the second level (interpersonal), skills based and the highest being instrumental or results based.

Further examination of the coaching levels of intervention show several models to be similar. Hardingham (2004) described psychological levels used to build rapport; Bossons et al (2015) used "logical levels" (2015, p. 160) and noted that we "organise our experience in to hierarchical structures" (2015, p. 160). Dilts (1999) pointed to changes that take place at a deeper level, radiate to all the levels above it, implying that the behaviour change is more transformational (defined as "marked change in form, nature or appearance of" Soanes and Stephenson (2005, p1873)) if the work with the client takes place at a deeper level. McDermott (2016) in their work on neuro-linguistic programming and coaching, similarly noted logical levels as a model which identifies the level at which coachee's use of specific language to talk about an issue gives an opportunity to coaches to choose which level to engage with the coachee on their issue.

Figure 2: Adapted from the IECL "Integrated Coaching Framework" (2007, p. 5)

Coaching Resources	Coaching Outcomes (Benefits)	Qualities of the Coaching Relationship
Context →	**Instrumental** Performance Orientation Prioritisation Strategic Approach	**Understanding the business context** ←
Coach →	**Interpersonal** Assertiveness Increased Self Confidence Emotional and Social Literacy	**Learning Framework** Action Planning/Challenge and stretch ← **Safe Place** ← **Powerful Questions** ←
Coachee →	**Intrapersonal** Self-Efficacy Self-Awareness Agency	**Strengths Based** **Approach** ←

These ideas are brought together in Figure 3 illustrating the level at which coachees might be coached to achieve specific benefits. The six levels broadly relate to the three in Armstrong et al's (2007) framework yet give more level complexity.

Figure 3: Levels at which people experience the world.
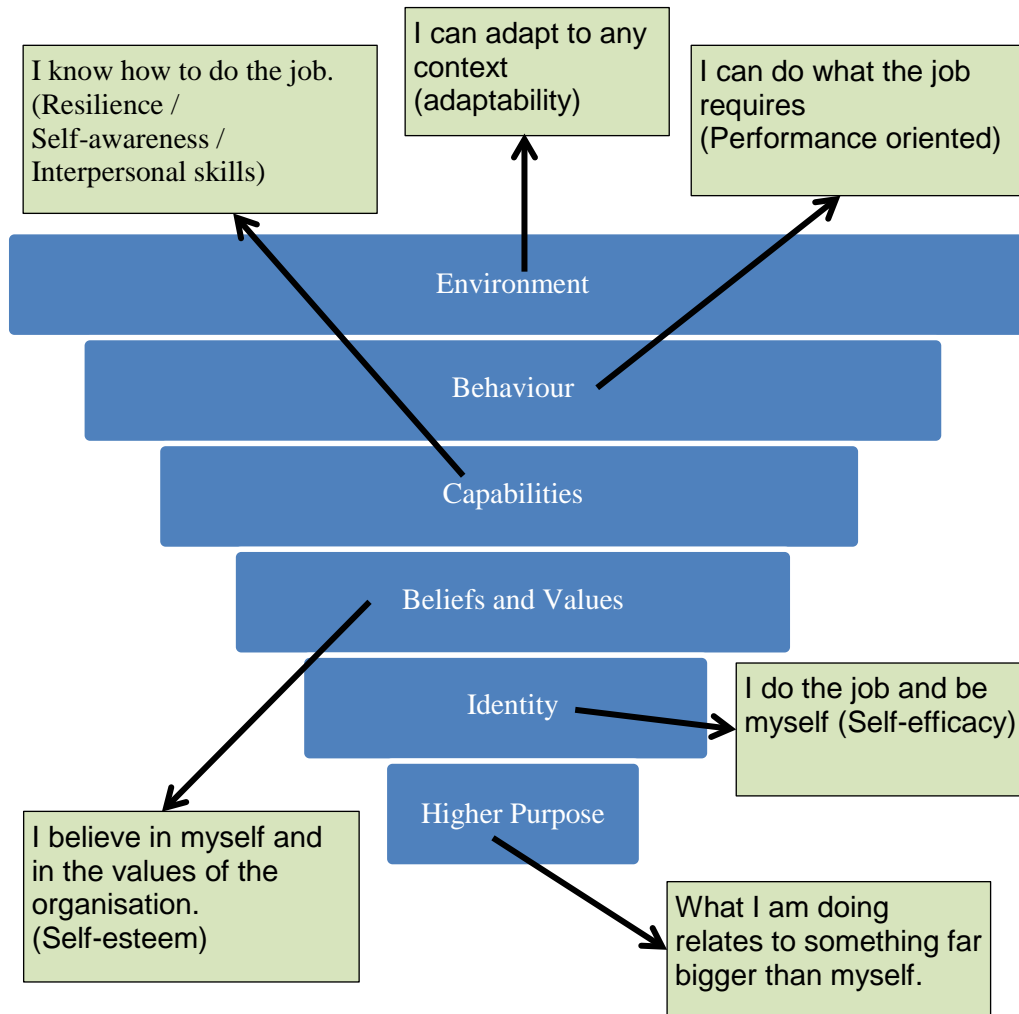
Coaching, a Constituent of a Development Programme

Coaching and training examined by Lawton-Smith and Cox (2007) saw it as a learning continuum when considering the need for coaching as a tool alongside classroom based and action set learning. They suggest "true coaching can only happen when there is no obvious or single answer to the coachee issue [and is about] complementing training" (2007, p. 4).

With regards to studies on coaching combined with training, the literature revealed that these are few, with varied approaches. A pattern emerged in the studies where data from coachees and coaches was used to examine for coaching efficacy. This exposes that efficacy of coaching was seen predominately through the same lens, thus giving very similar perspectives.

The investigator in this research used this opportunity to extend the field of learning and examine behaviours from different perspectives, namely those defined subjectively by the coachees and those objectively observed by their managers.

The Investigation

Here the objectives of the investigation leading to the research questions are defined. The second section details the investigation design and methodology followed by the data collection and preparation.

Research Objectives and Questions

As noted above, the investigation context was a cross-government blended leadership development programme for early talent in the government communications service. Building on the programme manager's initial findings of executive coaching experienced by the coachees as successful, greater detail was required on the change in the coachees that it evoked.

In the review of current thinking, six components of executive coaching emerged. This included the common component of a coaching contract between the coach, the coachee and the manager agreeing its purpose and areas of focus. The researcher's interest in this issue was raised on two counts when they joined the programme as a coach. Firstly, as a previous leader in public services where being accountable for how staff used their time was paramount; this was often dealt with by agreeing the purpose of coaching sessions through a three-way meeting that included the manager. Secondly, their course learning led them to understand that three-way contracting was a cornerstone of executive coaching. They were therefore curious about this issue on discovering that it was not the norm amongst the coaches on the programme to underpin their coaching relationship with a three-way contract between the coachee, the coach and manager. Seeking clarity therefore, on the absence of a coaching contract might lead to greater understanding of the necessary components for effective executive coaching.

Less coherence was found in the current thinking was whether the focus of the coaching should solely be business, or could it include personal issues? Did this influence coaching effectiveness?

Another issue revealed in the literature was whether coaching effectiveness was related to the internal level at which coaching took place, as illustrated in Figure 3 above. The final issue was a paucity in research on coaching as part of a multifaceted development process and, of the studies documented, the data sources were entirely via the coachee and the coach.

The objectives of the research were:

1. To examine how the focus of the coaching was arrived at.
2. To establish the areas of behaviour seen to require development through coaching and what change had been observed as reported by the coachee and by their current or recent manager.
3. To seek the view of the coachees and their current or recent manager as to whether the change was due to coaching and if so, why.
4. To seek views from the field on the success factors for coaching.

This led to four core research questions:

1. How were the coachee's behaviours identified for development through executive coaching? Who was involved?
2. What coachee behaviours have changed since starting coaching?
3. How do the coachees and their managers know there was change in the coachee's behaviour?

4. Does the coachee and/or manager identify the change in the coachee's behaviour as being due to coaching? If so, why?

Research Design and Methodology

The researcher's background was in public service management and, as mentioned, was a coach on the programme at the centre of this study. Whilst they chose not to include their own coachees in the study, they were aware of applying their knowledge and experience in the field and recognised the specific lens they brought to the research process.

The researcher took the role of interpreter (Strake 1995). In the study, they used the epistemological approach of relativist and constructionist as described by Strake (1995). This allowed recognition by the researcher of their perspective enabling them to use a flexible style in data capture. They used a qualitative research methodology and adopted an exploratory design.

Limitations to the Investigation

Whilst the researcher recognised their possible bias, other limitations of the research due to the context, were apparent. There was no opportunity to have a control group or to generate base line data. Of the data generated, the construct validity was reduced through reliance on the memory of interviewees on pre-coaching behaviour.

A further limitation was the small number of coachees on the programme with the pool being further reduced by the availability of managers to interview. An additional constraint was time availability for the interviews. Added to this, whilst access to naturally occurring data was open, it was limited and yielded a small amount of data relating to the coachee's behaviour.

Research Design

Considering the above limitations, the investigator's design options were limited. It required "an approach that: excluded a control, where contemporary material with multiple sources of data were accessible, that enabled the use of generated data where mixed methods of analysis could be used" (Trevillion 2017). The option of using multiple case studies did offer a methodology and design that documents live phenomenon where the "responses and effect on (…) participants are compared in order to draw conclusions" (Hair, Money, Samouel, and Page, 2007, p289). Further, the occurrences of coaching behaviour as experienced or seen by the coachee and their manager in a live context, fitted well with Rose et al (2015) and Yin's (2009) view of the features of case studies. The investigator therefore adopted a design consisting of five coachee and manager dyadic case studies, within a context, where generated and naturally occurring data was available. The steps taken relating to this are illustrated in Diagram 1.

Diagram 1: Steps in a multiple coach/manager case study research design
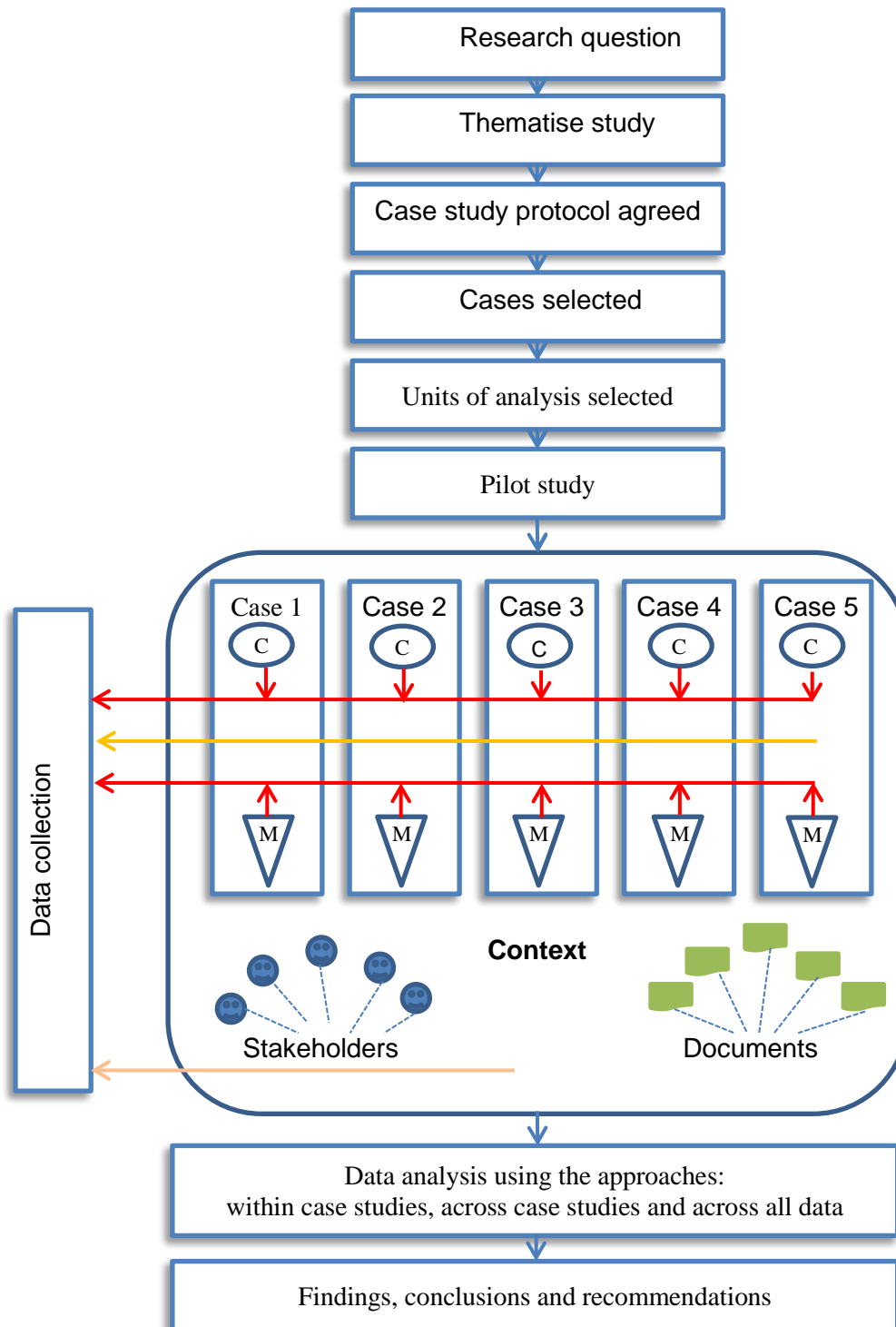
Legend: C represents Coachee, M represents Manager

Data Management

After the case study protocol agreement and implementation, data was generated through six interviews with coachees, six with managers and five with stakeholders with an output of 681 minutes of recorded interviews consisting of a total of 78,728 words. The naturally

occurring data was drawn from eleven documents consisting of participants' applications to the programme, the leadership development guide and leadership development evaluations.

The data was coded labelled through the use of the interviewee's words. During the inductive phase the code numbers expanded, and patterns emerged around the research questions, these were cross checked against the definitions of behaviour in the literature review, aggregated and reduced from 289 on the data accounting sheet to 56 codes. The codes were grouped at a high level under the process of application to the first session of coaching, before and after coaching and, factors identified explaining the success of coaching. Following this, the data were analysed.

Findings and Analysis

Following the findings for each research question there is a discussion on the implications and points to further investigation in the research field that might usefully be pursued.

Question 1

How were the coachee's behaviours identified for development through executive coaching? Who was involved?

As seen in the section on objectives, this question was included to determine whether a three-way coaching contract was in place which identified the coaching agenda and, if not in place, who determined the coaching agenda? Thirdly, did the agenda setter influence the coaching outcome? Having a greater understanding of the nature of the coaching arrangements might relate to whether the coaching met the definition of executive or business coaching.

Miles and Huberman (1994) highlight the complexity of causality with it often not being linear; in this study determining causality was further complicated by reliance on retrospection with three potential variables revealed through the different data sources namely, people, events and documents. Despite this complexity "they consider qualitative analysis to be a very powerful method of assessing causality" (1994, p147).

Data from the stakeholders showed that the behaviours named in the development programme guide were outcomes to be achieved by the whole programme, not specifically by coaching. It emerged through the data that an executive coaching condition as identified through the programme, was that the coachee decides on the areas of focus during coaching. This was validated by a stakeholder (the programme manager) who said, "we were really quite driven [with leaving it up to the coachee to decide] and we would not be pushed on it". The investigation showed that the coachee was the key influence on the choice of behaviours and focus, worked on in coaching, they decided on the agenda for coaching. Please see Diagram 2 which illustrates this. It is of note that in question 4 the findings reveal, as illustrated in graphic 3 that one of the factors of success as defined by coachees in all cases was that it was "my agenda", this gives validity to this finding thus triangulating it.

Diagram 2: The potential influences on the behaviours that might be worked on in coaching over time
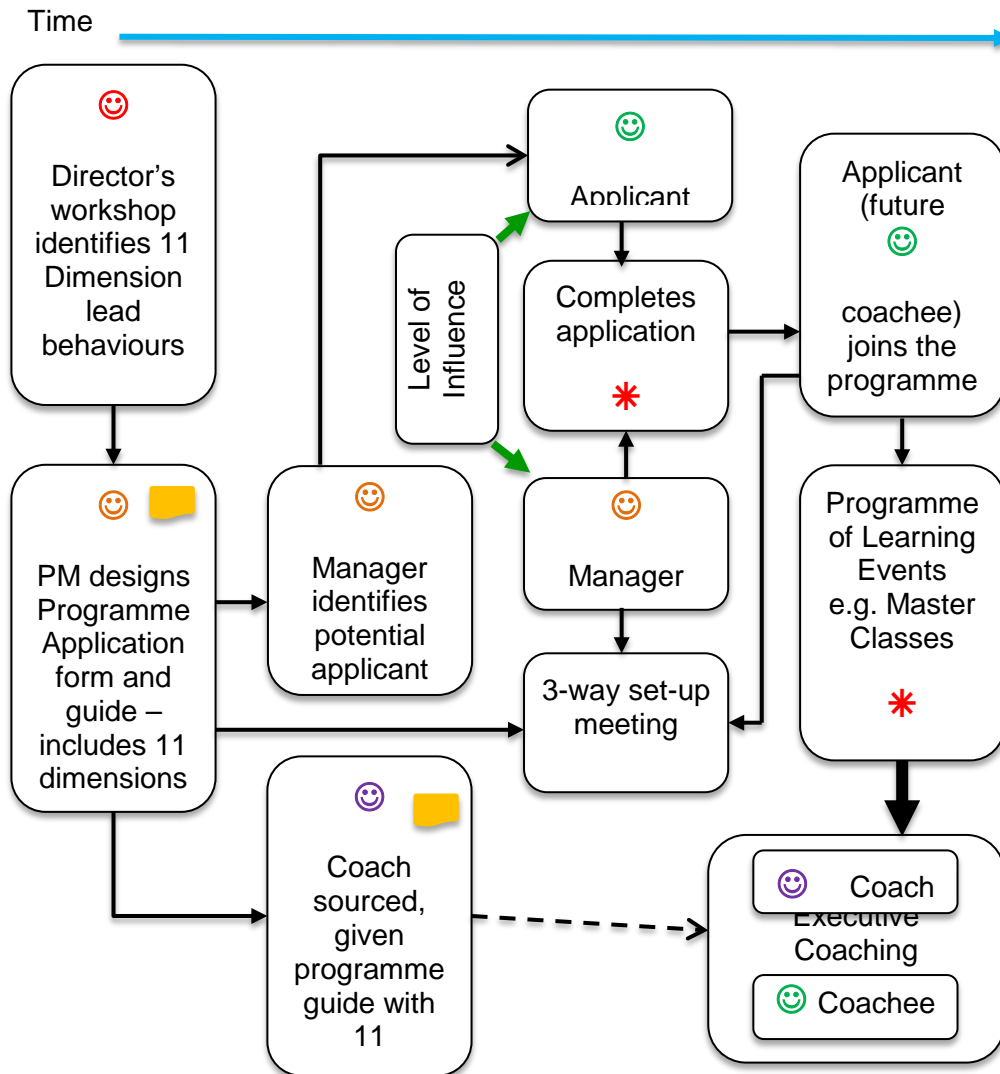
Legend

✳   Events of potential influence

🟧   Documents of potential influence

➡   Level of influence that was suggested to be high

- - - - -   Level of influence described as intentionally low (defined in the data)

☺   Colour coding for a person of potential influence is: red for the original programme lead, blue for manager, green for coachee, purple for coach.

PM   The Programme Manager, identified as stakeholder 2 in the data and text.

Further examination of the data brought detail to the relationship between the coachee, the manager and the development programme manager. In all five cases the coachees, their manager and the programme manager did have a three-way meeting before the start of the programme. This meeting was used to discuss the programme expectations but not the agenda for the coaching. Other contact between the coachee, their manager and the programme manager consisted of updating those involved on the programme and requests for feedback on any issues related to it. There was no data however, on feedback regarding the coaching other than the questionnaire on coaching mentioned above.

Data on contact between the coaches and the managers showed a significant confounding finding, namely that in all cases there were no contacts between the coaches, the coachee's managers and the coachees. The generated data did not follow the trend that emerged in the literature review that highlighted the importance of the three-way contract between the manager, the coachee and the coach which includes an agreement on the coaching goal.

The findings firstly, show that the coachee was the key influence in determining the agenda for coaching, added to this, the data shows that it was intentional that the coachee define the agenda and not the organisation, and by inference, that the coaching focus could be personal and, or relate to how the coachee behaves within the organisation. The implication of this is that it relates positively to the definition of executive coaching in the literature review as illustrated in the components in Figure 1 and does not align with how business coaching is defined. This suggests causality between the stakeholder's influence on the coaching set up with the outcome that coachee defined the focus of the coaching work.

Secondly, as noted above, there was no evidence of three-way contracts between the coach, the coachee and the coachee's manager being in place, a finding that lacked coherence with the literature review. This is discussed further in the overall analysis.
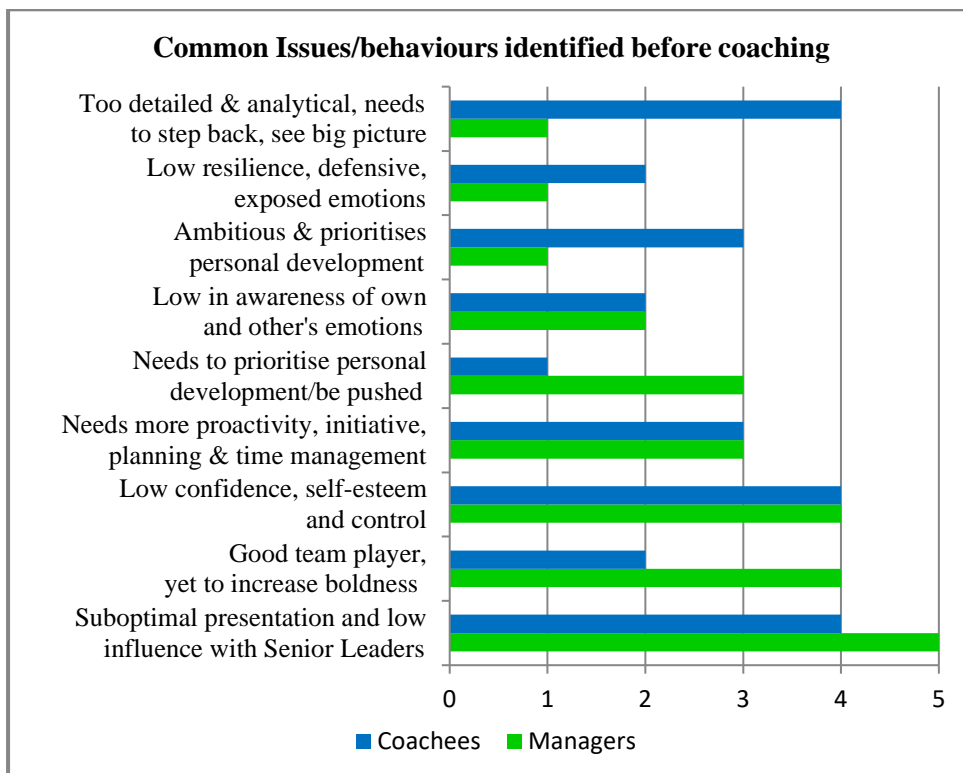
Question 2

What coachee behaviours have changed since starting executive coaching?

This question examines the coachee's change in behaviour as seen by the coachee's manager and self-reported by the coachee following coaching. The naturally occurring data on this question exposed very little in the way of base line data or reported changes; however, the generated data shows common behaviours identified by managers and coachees before coaching, and the outcomes after coaching. These are displayed in such a way that it also simultaneously shows the behaviours and commonality through the within, and across case data comparisons. The commonality within case is notable and shows a coherence of view on the behaviours as outcomes of coaching. The issues and outcomes are illustrated in Graphic 1 and Graphic 2 below.

Graphic 1: Common issues identified by coachees (self-reported) and by their managers (about the coachee's behaviour) before coaching, across five cases studies.

Common Issues/behaviours identified before coaching

Categories (top to bottom):
- Too detailed & analytical, needs to step back, see big picture
- Low resilience, defensive, exposed emotions
- Ambitious & prioritises personal development
- Low in awareness of own and other's emotions
- Needs to prioritise personal development/be pushed
- Needs more proactivity, initiative, planning & time management
- Low confidence, self-esteem and control
- Good team player, yet to increase boldness
- Suboptimal presentation and low influence with Senior Leaders

Legend: ■ Coachees ■ Managers

Graphic 2: Common Outcomes identified after coaching by all the coachees (self-reported) and their managers (on the coachee's behaviour) across five case studies.

Common Issues/behaviours identified after coaching

Categories (top to bottom):
- Pithy, powerful, timely presentation with Senior Leaders
- High Impact with presence: influencing and inspiring
- Positive outlook, growth mind set
- Self - efficacy
- Aware of values/feelings/ motivations
- Adding value, delegating and working through others
- Growing resilience, learning from events/feedback
- Taking time to reflect
- Good prep, time management & prioritising

Legend: ■ Coachees ■ Managers

On comparing these graphics, the variance of issues between coachee and manager is much greater in Graphic 1 than Graphic 2. The lower range of variance in outcome behaviours is noted in Graphic 2. The data shows the lower level of triangulation across the cases in Graphic 1 which is increased in Graphic 2. Whilst the investigator recognises the number of reportees is small, it indicates a strong finding in the level of within case agreement of common outcomes identified after coaching. Across case agreement regarding coaching outcomes is less strong with two cases out of five showing agreement between coachees and managers on the common outcomes found.

Taking an overview of the findings, of the 9 outcomes identified, all show two within case agreement on the outcomes. That is, both the coachee and the manager identified the same outcome for the coachee.

It is notable however, that the most common issue identified by managers was "suboptimal presentation and low influence and low influence with senior managers". The second most common outcome found in all cases was "self-efficacy". The latter showing a coherence with Baron and Morin's (2010) observation in the literature review, that it is shown to be a benefit of coaching in a number of studies.

Furthermore, the literature review touches on the levels at which people experience the world and the level at which change take place. Figure 3 illustrates that self-efficacy is located at the deep level of identity; similarly, the intrapersonal benefit of growth mind set, found to be an outcome noted in all five cases by the coachees and the managers, is also at a deep level of experience. Dilts (1999) suggests that changes which take place at the deeper levels radiate through all other levels, indicating that these are more transformational. This finding suggests that improved self-efficacy, increased positive outlook and growth mind set might be transformational changes. That these coaching outcomes have been transformational is additionally found in the data in question 4; here the coachees in all five cases indicated that the coaches "dug deep" and in four of the five cases the coachees used the term "sustained beyond the period of coaching". Whilst this does suggest some triangulation of the finding that in all of the cases the coachees developed positive mind sets and in four of the five cases the coachees increased self-efficacy was experienced or observed, causation is only suggested, an issue which is further developed below.

In three cases (60% of the interviewees) there was within, and across case coherence on the findings of coaching growing resilience, learning from feedback and taking time to reflect are all leadership behaviours as identified in the literature review.

Question 3

How do the coachees and their managers know there was change in the coachee's behaviour?

This is answered in conjunction with question 4.

Question 4

Does the coachee and/or manager identify the change in the coachee's behaviour as being due to coaching?

These questions look at coaching consequences and change causation. Taking one specific outcome, where the coachee displayed "pithy powerful timely presentation with leaders" it is notable that there was within case agreement on this as a finding, in four case studies. A description of the sequence of this change is shown below through following an example of this as an instance.

The coachee in Case Study 1 identified wanting to improve their presentation in front of senior leaders where they could interject at the appropriate time and give the correct guidance in a succinct way. The manager's view was that presenting in a "pithy powerful" way in front of senior leaders (in this instance, the Minister) was a key leadership behaviour. They gave the example of this prior to coaching where the coachee did not show this during a crucial meeting; here the coachee knew the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of a contracted agency was not giving accurate information and "railroaded the minister"; instead of interjecting, the coachee "was left speechless" and said nothing.

Following a series of sessions of executive coaching the coachee reported coaching as:

> *diving down, dissecting the challenge and facing the blockers … This has [changed me] into now being able to articulate my advice more effectively and control my body language.*

Their manager gave an example of the coachee's behaviour after the coaching:

> *At a similar meeting with the minister a year on, another contracted agency CEO was behind on plans and gave half-truths. The coachee pointed out how they were selling short the gravity of the problem, this interjection changed the whole direction of the meeting … It was great to see.*

Similar examples described in Trevillion (2017), drawn from three other cases show data from the coachees and managers on behaviour before and after coaching, illustrating change in the coachee.

Findings on causation were not as definitive. The coachees in all cases were "definite" that the coaching caused the change, yet, of the managers, in two cases they said that it was "definitely the coaching", one said it was "possible" and two managers were of the view that it was "inconclusive". In summary, of the ten people, asked about the causation of change in the behaviour of the coachees, seven stated it was "definitely the coaching". This is suggestive of causation although not definitive.

Further investigation on why the interviewees thought it was the coaching that caused the change is shown in Graphic 3. It charts the success factors as seen by the coachees and Figure 4 shows the aggregated views from all the data on the conditions that enabled coaching success. As mentioned above it is noteworthy that all coachees stated the coaching "dug deep". Digging deep, as mentioned above suggests coaching taking place and being more transformational. This is supported further by the finding that in four cases, coachees noted sustained change after coaching. Added to this, three coachees noted that coaching created a "conceptual shift" in them. One coachee commented:

> *Coaching has been one of the success stories of the programme … what (it …) can offer has been quite a revelation. There is a more immediate action plan but at a more subliminal level there is the constant widening of your perspective as a leader … it's a period of osmosis on the bigger fundamental themes.*

Another comment by a coachee being: "From when I joined, I've definitely made huge changes (…) I have had feedback that from 18 months ago until now I have completely changed"

Overall findings on the factors of success, as seen in Graphic 3 below, show commonality in all five cases on three factors, both within and across the cases and on four factors, both within and across five cases. This is strongly suggestive of the success of the coaching as seen by both the coachee and managers. This was supported by the narrative above. Figure

4 shows the aggregated findings from the generated data on the conditions that were met to enable coaching success, this is indicative of a causal relationship between the success of coaching and wider overarching conditions.

Graphic 3: Factors of success as defined by coachees

Factors of Success for the Coachees

Figure 4: Conditions met to enable change through coaching
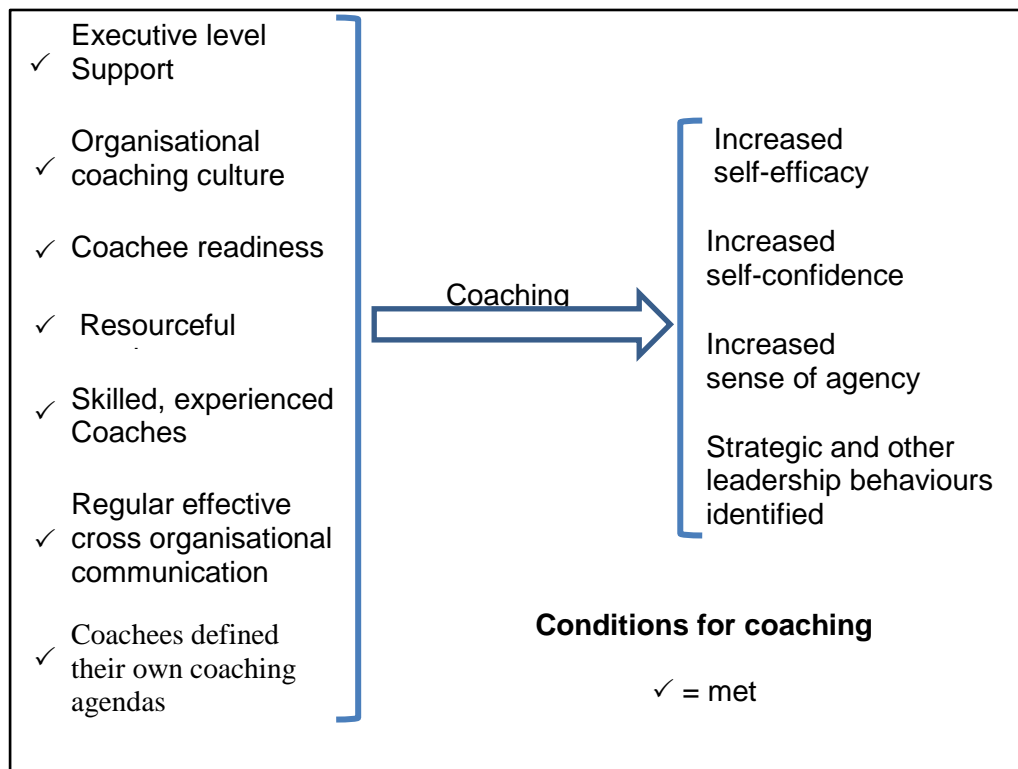
In summary, the analysis of these finding has been varied, however, triangulation was possible in question 1, thus strengthening validity. They reveal nine different leadership behaviours identified as outcomes, four being coachee self-reports, confirmed by their managers and the same four behaviours common across all five cases.

The finding on the absence of a coaching contract, in contrast to the presence of a contract described in the literature as a common characteristic of executive coaching, was strong and a confounding finding. This is an interesting contribution to the discussion on the necessary components of executive coaching. Sherman and Frees, 2004; Hay, 2007; Turner and Hawkins, 2016 all suggest the purpose of the coaching contract being to clarify relationships and identify the coaching outcomes. The findings in question 1 point to relationships being clarified through the three-way agreements made between the coachee, their manager and the programme manager, supported by the follow up communication between these three people thus fulfilling the first purpose identified instead. With regard to the focus of the work in coaching, the findings affirm that the coachee, in all cases, decided on this. Even though only one of these two components of executive coaching were in place, there was no evidence that the effectiveness of coaching was compromised. The mode of coaching fits with the definition of executive coaching, the key component being that the focus of the work can be business related and/or personal.

The researcher recognised two main limitations in the findings; the small amount of naturally occurring data, not usual in case studies and, the similarity of the case studies. Despite this, the cases show coherence of findings on the outcomes defined by the coachees and some coherence in agreement with the coachees by their managers.

Turning to the level of coaching (the coachees identifying in all cases that the coaching "dug deep"), it is of note that, in the literature review discussion on the level at which coaching takes place, suggests that the more internal the level, the greater transformational effect the coaching has; studies on this apparently strong causal relationship were few. This study does add to the debate however its limitations, highlighted by the investigator, point to this being an area that might benefit from further study. A longitudinal, more in depth investigation including a focus on the nature of the coaching endeavour, at best with a control group, would add to the field of knowledge of executive coaching process and its outcomes.

Discussion and Conclusion

This investigation uses five dyadic case studies, to identify the impact of executive coaching. It examines aggregated generated data gathered through interviews focusing on four questions, of coachees, their managers and stakeholders within the coaching context, and naturally occurring data from documents. Findings on the impact of coaching on the coachees and the leadership behaviours developed through coaching were highlighted. Factors of success as identified by the coachees and conditions that were met to enable coaching emerged through the investigation.

The use of dyadic case studies was unusual, yet appropriate in the environment of this investigation. The generated data source was rich and revealed unintended findings, thus extending the body of knowledge available to the field of coaching particularly in the debate on the nature and necessary components of executive coaching. This study illustrates the beneficial use of the case study design and by including the coachee and their manager enabled the combination of self-reports and observed reports on leadership behaviour, which in many instances showed coherence.

Although the investigation only included a small number people needing to acquire leadership shills to equip them for the future, it identified a number of leadership behaviours described by the coachees and their managers, likely to have been gained by the coachees, through coaching. In the context of this study, the organisation's intention was to invest early in their talent before they develop behaviour patterns that compromise their leadership and, to enable them to develop leadership behaviours at an early stage to take through the organisation; this examination on the impact of executive coaching, in particular, suggests that this was successful and therefore it positively contributes to practice in the field of executive coaching.

Further research in the area of the level at which the coachee and the coach work might enable a greater understanding of the intended coaching outcome and the type of coaching to use, be it business or executive, to achieve it. This study touched lightly on this relationship, a more in depth longitudinal investigation in to this area might well be of benefit to the field.

Despite this investigation being contextualised in the field of government operating in a global setting, the findings are transferable to large organisations in all sectors. Added to this, it points to the transformational nature of executive coaching at a deep level; this is of significance. Whilst the study does have limitations, its significance lies in identifying leadership behaviours developed as an impact of executive coaching.

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Author Information

Fenella Trevillion is an executive coach and facilitator with 20 years of leadership
experience. She has worked in leadership positions in large, complex, public service
organisations. In addition, she has held positions in the charity sector and more recently in
health and social care commissioning. She coaches people in the public, private and third
sectors.s