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The effect of coaching on the transfer and sustainability of learning: coaching for leaders, a collaborative action research study

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Abstract

Coaching generally remains under-researched and in particular the transfer and sustainability of learning from coaching is extremely sparse in the field of empirical research and theoretical development. This qualitative research was conducted with four leaders from UK voluntary sector organisations, namely Advance, Mencap and Rethink. Within a social constructivist and interpretivist paradigm, this longitudinal study explored the findings of three action research cycles for a period of just over one year. An original approach to collaborative action research methodology was developed and utilised, combining the dual role of coach/researcher, the role of the leaders being coached as collaborative action researchers, research diaries data, and data from feedback provider sessions. The data emerging from the research diaries and the feedback provider sessions was analysed using a thematic analysis approach, with categories and themes identified which either help or hinder the transfer and sustainability of learning from the coaching sessions to outside that experience. The ethical challenges of this newly developed approach to collaborative action research were also identified and analysed.

The emergent Collaborative Action Coaching for Leaders model comprises six categories made up of thirty-three themes: Client Centred Process (eight themes), Enabling/Facilitating Learning (six), Session Content (two), Active Learning (five), Coaching Relationship (eight), and Reflective Learning (four). The study found that the transfer and sustainability of learning outside the coaching experience is encouraged by the coach and the client having both individual and shared responsibilities. The coach has responsibility for tailoring the coaching to each individual client and for enabling and facilitating learning; the client has responsibility for the content of the coaching sessions and for active learning; and both the coach and the client have shared responsibility for the coaching relationship and reflective learning. Within the approach there are factors which both help and hinder the transfer and sustainability of learning, although the data is heavily weighted towards the factors which help. It is clear from the emerging data across the three action research cycles, that it is the combination of all six categories (and the thirty-three themes) which over time enable the transfer and sustainability of learning; there does not appear to be any weighting of a specific category or theme.

There are two main findings from the study: coaching can help the transfer and sustainability of learning; and both the coach and the client have individual and shared responsibilities in the transfer and sustainability of learning from the coaching sessions to outside that experience. The Collaborative Action Coaching for Leaders model contributes to the coaching profession, providing an evidence-based coaching model for coaches to explore through use in their professional work with leaders in organisations. The study findings add to the theoretical knowledge of coaching and inform future coaching research into the transfer and sustainability of learning from the coaching experience.

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Chapter 1
Introduction

Since 1990, the human resource development (HRD) profession has seen a gradual evolution of training, development and learning (Harrison, 2009; Torrington, Hall and Taylor, 2007) with an increased emphasis on learning based activities such as job shadowing and coaching which can contribute to an organisation's development (Hamlin, Ellinger and Beattie, 2009). As the profession has moved more towards learning and development as a rationale for not just delivering training courses, the use of coaching has grown in popularity in organisations. At the same time, there has been a move towards more structured evaluation of training (Kirkpatrick, 1983; Holton, Bates and Ruona, 2000) which has put pressure on the HRD profession to apply evidence based learning and development methodology in order to help organisations achieve their goals, including financial targets.

The current trend is for organisations to attempt to assess return on investment in learning and development, including coaching, although in my experience this appears to be less prevalent in the UK voluntary sector. However, the radical national government budget changes of 2010 mean that learning and development budgets in organisations are suffering drastic cuts which are likely to impact both on the volume of coaching delivered and how coaching is delivered, with an even greater emphasis on return on investment in coaching.

If organisations are going to invest scarce resources in the most expensive end of the learning and development market, such as one-to-one coaching for leaders, the commissioners of those coaching services will need evidence that such an investment can produce desired results. Desired results could be interpreted as evidence of learning from the coaching experience, this learning being transferred back into the workplace and then sustained over time. This research explores specifically the effect of coaching on the transfer and sustainability of learning and is, therefore, not only highly relevant at this point in economic history, but also important at all times of financial constraints.

1.1 Research Context

Leadership development generally has grown in importance and often this focuses on providing both support for learning and also support for how to survive in challenging environments. Organisational coaching has therefore become an important strategy for corporate leadership development and change (Bennett and Bush, 2009). In their 2011 annual learning and talent development survey, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development found that 86% of organisations use coaching, and this is consistent across the different sectors. The survey also found that organisations with more than 250 employees are more likely to use coaching, as well

as conduct evaluation of learning; and "coaching by external practitioners is the most commonly reported effective learning method for leaders" (CIPD, 2011, p.8). Yet it appears that the coaching of leaders remains an under-researched topic. The practice seems to be moving forward without a firm underpinning of academic research to inform its development and implementation.

This longitudinal study is focused on one-to-one coaching for leaders; it is a collaborative action research study of the effect of coaching on the transfer and sustainability of learning outside the coaching experience. A coaching model generated from the study will inform future coaching theory, practice and research. The research question is, therefore, what helps/hinders the transfer and sustainability of learning in coaching for leaders? Transfer and sustainability of learning was explored for a period of one year and is set in the context of leadership in the UK voluntary sector.

The decision to carry out the study within the voluntary sector is based on the fact that leaders in the UK voluntary sector, as outlined by Pedersen and Hartley (2008), work in an increasingly competitive environment which is subjected to robust internal and external scrutiny; thereby providing a rich context for the study of transfer and sustainability of learning. Chew and Osborne (2009, p.1) suggest that there is "new evidence that charities have begun to position themselves strategically in response to both internal organizational factors and external environmental influences". There is pressure for leaders to be more 'business-like' in their approach as well as behave in accordance with a set of organisational values which may seem contradictory to their historical values. This new operating environment is creating a tension (Harris, 2000; Pedersen and Hartley, 2008) and, in my experience, UK voluntary sector organisations are seeing different leadership styles and cultures developing as a result.

Harris (2000) does not really cover how these challenges will be met by leaders in the UK voluntary sector although Etherington, in his interview with Harris, does state that "there is much more training than there was, which has helped" (2000, p.323). Although there is no reference to coaching in the article, Etherington does mention the provision of "self-help" (2000, p.323) but it is not clear what this refers to specifically, it could refer to a form of self-coaching or it could mean practical tools for the job. On the other hand, Pedersen and Hartley (2008) state that inter-organisational partnerships, including learning, have been encouraged within a context of what many governments have described as modernisation and improvement of public services. Since the article was written, a new coalition government came into power who has been advocating more collaborative working, a new terminology for partnerships. Pedersen and Hartley (2008, p.336) suggest that "teaching and learning have to address new challenges if programmes for public service leaders and managers are to be enabling". Their stance is that post graduate programmes "should take as their starting point this duality and complexity of

evolving government regimes" (Pedersen and Hartley, 2008, p.335). They recommend that "the framing of the questions becomes as important as the imparting of knowledge and skills, and where understanding the dynamics of change are as important as addressing stability" (2008, p.335). Even though they do not specifically mention any learning methodology in this regard (apart from qualification based programmes), in my experience coaching is a question-based methodology which is often seen as helpful in facilitating change for leaders.

Within the body of HRD literature relating specifically to leadership coaching in the voluntary sector, there are some passing references to coaching (Brown, 2007; Soltani, Van Der Meer and Williams, 2005). However, coaching does not feature significantly in their research on board development practices and HR Management/Total Quality Management respectively. Some authors have experience of working in the voluntary sector (for example, Dr Jonathan Passmore) but this context does not feature specifically in their research work.

Beattie's (2006) study is pertinent as it specifically researched the role of voluntary sector managers in supporting workplace learning, although it focused on the role of the line manager as coach as opposed to an external coach. However, coaching was found to be one of the "facilitating behaviours" (2006, p.108) for workplace learning in the study. In the wider world of public services, in the USA, Sauerberg and Prunty (1999) reviewed the practice of executive coaching for physicians. They conclude that "executive coaching is a new, unique, and useful tool for physicians to utilize in meeting the physician leadership demands of the millennium" (1999, p.25). However, their research appears to be more experiential than empirical-based. In addition, Alleyne and Jumaa (2007) utilise executive co-coaching as part of their action research in nursing. They explain that "executive co-coaching uses evidence-based management and leadership interventions in addition to perceiving the client as a whole person with the sole aim of promoting and enhancing effective processes for learning, leading and living" (2007, p.234).

Leaders in the UK voluntary sector are operating in an increasingly complex environment with a severe reduction in resources. Research-based evidence for investing in coaching to help leaders cope with this complexity is of significant importance, and this research contributes to the evidence base by exploring how such an investment contributes to the application of learning back in the workplace. However, a case could be made that this research is of significance whatever the current trends in the learning and development profession and whatever the budgetary constraints in organisations, particularly in the UK voluntary sector where charitable funds are being utilised. The utilisation of charitable funds for one-to-one coaching places an ethical responsibility on the organisation and the coach to ensure that the investment of time and money in the coaching experience results in something valuable for the leader being coached. In this study, value is placed on the transfer and sustainability of

learning from the coaching experience which is of interest to coaches who are keen to ensure that their professional input is adding value for clients whatever the organisational context or sector. If learning does not transfer or sustain outside the coaching experience, any benefit to the client is only in the moment they are being coached with no developmental element being applied back in the workplace. It could be argued that this severely limits the value of the coaching experience and makes it an 'expensive conversation'.

In order to answer the research question, the particular research objectives are:

1   To explore and identify various factors in the coaching process and relationship that arise from a longitudinal study, and which help or hinder transfer and sustainability of learning

2   To develop a coaching model which helps leaders to transfer and sustain learning from coaching sessions to outside that experience

For the purposes of the research, *transfer of learning* is defined as the leader transferring learning from the coaching sessions to outside the coaching experience. For example, if a client wanted to improve performance at board meetings, various methods of improvement would be discussed during the coaching session and the learning from that discussion would be taken by the client and used during a board meeting. *Sustainability of learning* is defined as learning sustained during the nine or ten months of the coaching and for three to four months after the coaching sessions have been completed. Using the same example, there would be evidence that the client was continuing to apply the learning in successive board meetings, with changes possibly being made through practise and further discussion in the coaching sessions. *Coaching Experience* is defined as the setting or conditions in which the coaching activity happens (in this study these are face-to-face, two-hour sessions); *Coaching Process* is defined as the journey of the coach and the client during the coaching experience; and *Coaching Relationship* is the interaction between the coach and the client being coached.

There have been several definitions of transfer of learning used over the years. Ruona *et al.* (2002, p.220) prefer the expression "transfer system" in which "transfer involves the application, generalisability and maintenance of new knowledge and skills". It is notable that this statement includes the word "maintenance" which implies some form of sustainability of learning. Although, Smith, Oosten and Boyatzis (2009, p.148) espouse that sustainability is "that the changed state endures for a relatively long period of time".

In the coaching literature there are two key definitional phrases used for coaching leaders: leadership coaching and executive coaching. The latter usually refers to the most senior

leaders in an organisation's hierarchy although in this study there is no such hierarchical intent in the phrase *coaching leaders*.

This longitudinal study is concerned with adding to the existing work on evidence based coaching as well as aiming to develop a model for coaching leaders. Evidence based coaching is a term used by Cavanagh, Grant and Kemp (2005, p.7) who assert that "An evidence-based approach to coaching can make the difference between the often overhyped coaching that tends to be adapted from personal development and motivational programs and professional coaching that draws on solid theory and research". With regard to developing a model, Drake (2009, p.4) promotes a model of "Four domains of knowledge for coaching mastery" which includes as one of these domains "Foundational Knowledge: Theories, models, and guidelines based on research and scholarship from the basic and applied sciences that inform choices in coaching". The study, as well as contributing to *Foundational Knowledge*, proposes a fifth domain, the knowledge of ethical practice.

1.2   Professional Interest and Involvement

Bourner, Bowden and Laing (2000, p.219), reporting on a survey of professional doctorates in a range of subjects in English universities, concluded "if the traditional PhD is intended to develop professional researchers, then the professional doctorate appears to be designed to develop researching professionals." As a researching professional conducting a professional doctorate, I have been interested in action research since taking my Master's Degree in the late 1990s and have conducted both academic and organisational-based action research projects. Preparing for this research reaffirmed my philosophical belief that knowledge can be created by making meanings out of experience. However, sharing these experiences through the collaborative action research process appears to have created a more in-depth research environment, different from my previous research experiences, which felt more quantitative in their approach.

My professional interest in the question is twofold: as a professional coach and as a professional researcher. As a professional coach, my primary interest is centred on the importance of evidence-based practice or practice which is founded on robust research, either academic or organisational. As a professional researcher, my interest has been founded on the integration of experience and academic inquiry and this research demonstrates this integration through the research of coaching experience both from the perspective of the participants as well as the coach/researcher.

My other professional interests focus more on the practical implementation of coaching as a learning and development methodology, *ie* a process to help people learn. Through intense and in-depth research into my own coaching practice in this study, a practical model of coaching

emerges, and through the collaborative action research process with clients this practical model in terms of transfer and sustainability of learning is evaluated.

I am also interested in the benefits to the coaching profession as a whole. This study is a unique and courageous attempt to subject coaching practice to profound scrutiny. It is unique as it is based on my own coaching practice and courageous because the collaborative action researchers subject themselves to in-depth analysis during the research process. By putting ourselves under the microscope, we are providing an original contribution to coaching research and the theoretical knowledge base for the coaching profession as a whole.

1.3   Literature Underpinning this Study

Prior to the 1990s, coaching literature was predominantly in the sporting profession and the majority was non-academic research based work. Tim Gallwey began writing in the 1970s a series of books outlining a new methodology of coaching for the development of personal and professional excellence called *The Inner Game.* Gallwey (2000) went on to write about "The Inner Game of Work". It could be said that his work, even though its early focus was on sport, founded the current movement of business coaching, life coaching and executive coaching.

Since the 1990s, coaching has developed as a professional discipline with more prevalent use in organisations, particularly with employees in leadership positions. Whitmore (2002), who has a sporting background himself, popularised the *GROW* model which is used for performance coaching and was highly influential in the development of coaching programmes in organisations. By the time Cox, Bachkirova and Clutterbuck (2010, p.1) published their coaching handbook there was a growing recognition that "coaching is an applied field of practice that has its intellectual roots in a range of disciplines: social psychology; learning theory; theories of human and organizational development; and existential and phenomenological philosophy, to name just a few."

There are three key areas of literature applying to this study: transfer of learning; sustainability of learning; and coaching for leaders which includes applicable literature on coaching process and relationship. The literature on the transfer of learning in the workplace is mainly focused on how learning is transferred from training and development programmes which sometimes involve coaching to assist with that transfer of learning but the majority do not include any coaching interventions. A seminal work relative to this study is Olivero, Bane and Kopelman (1997) which provides something more specific in examining executive coaching as a transfer of training tool, although they focus specifically on productivity as an outcome. The more recent work of Holton, Bates and Ruona (2000) and their *Learning Transfer System Inventory* reflects the current debate on the transfer of learning from training programmes with an emphasis on a

transfer system as opposed to a transfer climate. With regard to coaching and transfer of learning, there is no seminal work although the recent work on *coaching transfer* (Stewart *et al.*, 2008b) appears to relate to the seminal work on the transfer of learning and training programmes.

Sustainability of learning literature is not prevalent which may be because researching sustainability requires longitudinal studies of which there is generally much less in the world of published research. Seminal work is provided by Wasylyshyn (2003) and Wasylyshyn, Gronsky and Haas (2006) who have briefly examined coaching and sustainability of learning, alongside other areas of research, with the focus on coaching outcomes. Smith, Oosten and Boyatzis (2009) provide the most current applicable work for this study on their research into *coaching and sustained desired change* which appears to have more of a focus on learning and development.

The coaching for leaders' literature cannot agree on a generic definition of executive or leadership coaching although the concept of learning and change is consistent. However, this is unsurprising in a field of work which by its very nature is extremely diverse, as both the coaches and the leaders have diverse professional and organisational backgrounds, and professional development. In addition, coaching is still struggling to develop as a discrete profession whilst a range of professions remain interested in both coaching and coaching research. This diversity of definitions appears to cluster into definitions which specify coaching approaches or more general definitions of the overall approach of coaching leaders as provided in the following two examples from the literature.

Peltier (2001, p.xv) states that executive coaching provides "one-to-one services to top level leaders in an organisation, on the principle that positive changes can be leveraged to filter down and enhance the entire organisation". With this definition, Peltier, a Professor of Psychology and an executive coach, highlights both the hierarchical position of the leader in the organisation as well as the responsibility to ensure that learning is not just for their benefit but also for the benefit of the whole organisation. The term *executive* may be encouraging a definition of 'top level leaders' whereas *leaders* may allow more definition flexibility, *ie* leaders who are not necessarily at the top of the organisation.

Ennis *et al.* (2003, p.20) offer an additional general definition for executive coaching:

> "an experiential, individualized, leadership development process that builds a
> leader's capability to achieve short-term and long-term organisational goals. It is
> conducted through one-to-one interactions, driven by data from multiple
> perspectives, and based on mutual trust and respect. The organisation, an

> executive, and the executive coach work in partnership to achieve maximum
> learning and impact."

They do not include any issue of hierarchy in their definition and appear to be using *executive* and *leader* interchangeably. Also, they introduce the coaching relationship into the definition by referring to mutual trust and respect, as well as introducing the concept of tripartite working: the executive, the coach and the organisation. Both definitions bring in the one-to-one aspect of coaching for leaders and both refer to change occurring as a result of coaching. Whilst these definitions do not appear to emanate from primary academic research, the Ennis *et al.* (2003) definition seems more applicable to this study, not only because of the wider definition of leaders but also the focus on learning.

The coaching for leaders' literature is dominated by research into coaching process and relationship. The literature on process mainly focuses on structured process (Stern, 2004; Natale and Diamante, 2005), with no seminal work surfacing from the review. With regard to coaching relationship, the literature has been fairly dominated by the psychology profession, for example, the work of Gyllensten and Palmer (2007) focusing on the responsibility of the person being coached, but Natale and Diamante (2005) have added the concept of the coach and the client being in partnership or collaborating.

Coaching literature has developed significantly since the 1990s with an increase in academic research from a range of fields of research, for example, psychology, education, and HRD. As the number of independent coaching providers increases and commissioners of coaching become more sophisticated in specifying and purchasing coaching to meet organisational needs, professional coaches will need to ensure that they draw on evidence-based work not only in how they market their services but also in how their services are delivered.

1.4   Research Design and Methodology

An epistemological and ontological position of social constructivism has been adopted in this experiential based research study, in that meanings are constructed as humans engage with the world they are interpreting and that the generation of knowledge is both social and inductive (Crotty,1998; Creswell, 2009); underpinned by my philosophical belief that meanings are created out of experience.

The key experience in this study is the experience by the clients of my coaching practice. As the object of the research, my values and beliefs form an important part of the study. Whilst I have a history of being influenced by quantitative methodology both in my education and my working life, I have remained unconvinced that knowledge can only be created by utilising what is sometimes described as scientific research methodology. The study is entirely experiential

based for all the collaborative researchers. Therefore a paradigm of social constructivism which recognises both the subjectivity and objectivity of experience-based research seems most appropriate; as well as an interpretivist approach in which individual perception is valued through interpretative analysis.

The focus of the research is what helps or hinders the transfer and sustainability of learning by the clients from their coaching experience. With an emphasis on action (the coaching) and change (learning from that experience), there is primarily one suitable research method and that is action research. The study is a "living theory" form of action research in that it is grounded in the ontological 'I' of the researcher and uses a "living logic" of experiences in the moment (McNiff and Whitehead 2006, p.41). As collaborative researchers, the four clients and I (as coach) could be described as participant observers in the research process; participant observation which is overt, non-standardised and involves some reflexivity (Willig, 2008). Although, the clients have more of a participation role than an observer role in the research process, their observer role is more self-observation whilst my role is a mixture of both self-observation and observing the clients.

The action research process follows Bassey's (1998, pp.93-108) eight stages of enquiry, using the slightly modified version outlined by Robson (2002, p.218). Action research became popular in the teaching world which is where the Bassey stages of enquiry were utilised and that learning environment is complementary to coaching research, particularly research focused on the transfer and sustainability of learning. This study acknowledges the previous experience of the researcher with an initial coaching framework which is the starting point for the action research. The model of collaborative action research used is tailored to this study and makes a new contribution to the research methodology. The initial coaching framework, the accessed literature and the feedback from the action research cycles all inform the coaching model generated from the coaching sessions and the action research cycles.

I have been an independent coach since 2007, mainly coaching leaders and human resource (HR) specialists in the voluntary sector on a one-to-one basis. Prior to that, I coached superiors, peers and direct reports in various senior HR roles for over twenty years in the private, public and voluntary sectors. The initial coaching framework in Chapter 4 emanated from both theory and practice and has recently been self-evaluated and assessed in 2009 as part of a coaching accreditation process run by the International Centre for Coaching and Leadership Development at Oxford Brookes University Business School. This framework was not designed to enable the transfer and sustainability of learning as it was designed with no reference to this study and emerged entirely from the learning from my coaching practice. However, I had received anecdotal feedback from clients not involved in the research process that learning had been transferred and sustained. This research provides an opportunity to explore that claim through practice and reflection.

During the collaborative action research design phase, two areas of interest were highlighted: the ethical challenges of collaborative action research, and feedback provider sessions as a data collection method. These interests develop into an original contribution to research methodology with a newly designed approach to collaborative action research as well as a model for dealing with the ethical challenges in such research, as detailed in Chapter 3.

Jones, Torres and Arminio (2006, p.3) suggest that "Researchers often err in deciding upon a research question prematurely", whilst Salmon (2003, p.25) suggests that "it is a rare researcher who thinks through an epistemological position before choosing a method. Such positions are more often *post hoc* rationalisations of what has been done." Both of these positions imply a rational process of decision-making about research questions and design, albeit in a different order. My experience suggests that there is also an element of emotional decision-making, particularly at the early stages. I believe that researching my own coaching practice came from my love for learning which was the initial emotional response followed by a more rational response of sensibly exploring coaching for leaders as this is the primary basis of my coaching business. The aspects of transfer and sustainability of learning emanated from my desire to investigate individual learning (emotional response) as well as to build on my prior research into organisational learning (rational response). From a combination of emotional and rational decision-making came my research aims and objectives, outlined above.

Beliefs are such an integral part of oneself it is hard to apply a linear timescale to the emergence of such beliefs. I am clear, however, that my values and beliefs steered me towards being the object of the research in order to improve my practice as a coach, and towards working collaboratively in the research process to enrich the data collected.

1.5 Clients and the Collaborative Action Research Process

The clients are collaborative action researchers in this study and are therefore important not only to the research process but also to the coaching model which emerges from the research. Access to their UK based voluntary sector organisations was obtained through my professional networks. Consent was given by the voluntary sector organisations and individual leaders were selected by their organisation. Individuals were able to withdraw from either the coaching process or the research process or both at any time. The selection of the clients was on a voluntary, self-selection basis, suitable for a qualitative research study.

The organisations participating in the research agreed to pay me for the coaching sessions with a reduction of 17% in the overall cost in return for their participation. I agreed also to publicise the names of the organisations in my thesis, in any published papers and whenever I present on

my research. There was no sponsorship of the research and no payment for the research process sessions which were in addition to the coaching sessions.

 I coached the clients for six two-hour sessions in total, over two action research cycles. The coaching sessions took place in two blocks of three sessions with each block representing one action research cycle. Including time for data collection, the coaching relationship lasted in total for approximately nine months, and was followed by a two or three-month gap after which I returned to collect more data from the clients over a two-month period. The research relationship lasted for just over one year.

Throughout the three action research cycles the four clients and I kept research diaries. I utilised the work of Robson (2002) and Willig (2008) on research diaries to help with the design of this research tool. Each of the three data collection processes consisted of: hard copies of the research diaries; feedback provider sessions for each of the clients; and a session in which research diaries were shared between me and each individual participating leader. The feedback provider sessions were designed utilising the Rogers' (2008, pp.199-203) *Real Time Coaching Model.*

In addition, for public scrutiny purposes, there were two different critical analysis groups in which peer coaching professionals who had had no involvement with this research, critically analysed the emergent themes and coaching model from action research cycles one and two. These critical analysis groups were developed from the concept of a validation group put forward by McNiff and Whitehead (2006).

Following the third and final action research cycle, there was also a group session with the clients held on a similar basis to the feedback provider sessions and led by me. The purpose of the session was twofold: to present the coaching model from the research; and to collect any additional data on sustainability of learning. The session was held about one year and two months after the coaching sessions began.

As a qualitative study, this research is "inductively building from particulars to general themes" (Cresswell, 2009, p.45). Action research has no particular data analysis method attached to it. I considered both grounded theory and thematic analysis for the data analysis process emanating from the action research. I decided upon thematic analysis for its flexibility as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), as discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

1.6   Guide to the Thesis Chapters

Chapter 2: Literature Review. The chapter outlines the key literature topics, the seminal writers in these fields and important or recent research applicable to this study's aims and objectives.

Chapter 3: Methodology. The methodology chapter begins with an explanation of my ontological and epistemological position. It also reviews the development of action research and collaborative action research in particular and the justification for using this methodology. The two areas of interest which came to light in the research design phase, *ie* the ethical challenges of collaborative action research and the use of feedback provider sessions as a data collection method, are both dealt with in detail in the chapter.

Chapter 4: Initial Coaching Framework for the First Collaborative Action Research Cycle. The initial coaching framework is the starting point for the coaching element of the action research process. The chapter explains the development of this model and its grounding in theory and practice.

Chapters 5 to 7 each detail a Collaborative Action Research Cycle in chronological order. They include the detail about the data collected during each action research iteration, the results of the data analysis at each stage and the emergent findings after each cycle. Included in these chapters is how the literature informs the coaching model generated by this research.

Chapter 8: Discussion and Conclusion. The chapter primarily includes a discussion of the generated coaching model and any related conclusions. In addition, conclusions are drawn about the emergent issues of the ethical challenges of collaborative action research and using feedback provider sessions as a data collection method.

1.7   Summary of Chapter

The chapter has outlined both the professional and theoretical context of this study and introduced the research design, including the clients who are collaborating in the action research. The reason for conducting this research is threefold: 1) to add to the theoretical knowledge of evidence-based coaching; 2) to contribute to the coaching profession through the provision of an evidence based coaching model for coaches to explore through use in their work with leaders in organisations; and 3) to inform future coaching research into evidence-based practice.

This research is utilising the experience of the collaborative researchers as a basis for the emerging original knowledge. By engaging UK voluntary sector leaders in a coaching relationship over a number of months, this study specifically explores how the clients may or may not transfer their learning from the coaching sessions to outside that experience, as well as how their learning may or may not be sustained not only during the period of the coaching relationship but also for four or five months beyond that relationship.

Chapter 2
Literature Review

The focus of this study is the transfer and sustainability of learning from the coaching experience which is bounded in place and time, to outside that experience which is not bounded in either space or time. The coaching in this research is one-to-one, external, stand-alone (*ie* not linked to a training programme), and for leaders in a business environment; a topic which has been the target of little research with seminal work referenced by researchers over time, difficult to identify. There exists more general literature (particularly on transfer of learning, and coaching for leaders) which has been included in this review because of its applicability to the research question. However, areas of little or no applicability to this study have not been included even though some minor literature was found during the search process - for example, literature concerned with team or group coaching, organisational learning, and sports coaching. However, literature which includes internal coaches, line managers as coaches and peer coaching is reviewed where there is a link to the transfer and/or sustainability of learning.

How people learn is an important part of the context for the study, even though it is not specifically being researched. Whilst early conditioning theorists (Skinner, 1954 and Estes, 1959) believed that behavioural reinforcement was significant in the learning process, this lends itself more to repetitive tasks and does not take into account the ability of adults to think and store knowledge for future use, which would seem to make it less applicable to the sustainability of learning through coaching. However, cognitive learning theory (Piaget, 1970) appears more applicable to learning through coaching, particularly when using psychometric tools in the coaching process; for example, Myers Briggs Type Indicators (Myers, 1962). It seems that the key difference between behavioural and cognitive learning theories is the internalisation of the learning. It could be argued that it is this internalisation which helps transfer and sustainability of learning from coaching, especially as Piaget (1970) identified that first we have an experience, then we seek to understand why and how, then we either use the information or store it away for future use. Whilst behavioural and cognitive learning theories form part of what could be described as the standard paradigm of learning, in more recent years learning research has focused on the interaction between a person and the environment, *ie* how people learn from what is happening around them, from experience and the study is mainly focused on such experiential learning (Kolb, 1984), specifically learning within and outside the coaching experience.

Knowles, Holton and Swanson (2005, p.204), in their assessment of how people learn, state that "Any facilitator of adult learning will tell you that adult learners are not as homogenous as the andragogical model implies. Research has shown that there are many differences among learners that interact with the core adult learning principles to shape adults' learning

behaviours." The study reviews individual learning in a one-to-one coaching environment with individual difference at the core which could discourage a homogenous approach. Law, Ireland and Hussain (2007, p.49) set out various "factors that underpin the learning process as relevant for coaching and mentoring" which include "discourse meaning" and they refer to the work of Mezirow (1990, 2000) whose *transformative learning* theory includes challenging assumptions and beliefs. The discourse in the study is one-to-one and coaching could be regarded as a process for challenging individual assumptions and beliefs. Therefore, the context for the study seems to veer more towards experiential learning (Kolb, 1984) and the work of Mezirow (1990, 2000),

Using the Hart (1998) suggestion of using the research aims and objectives as a format, the chapter initially reviews the literature in relation to the primary focus of this study: the transfer of learning and the sustainability of learning. The chapter then considers coaching for leaders which includes literature on the coaching process and the coaching relationship. The literature reviewed is either research-based or experience-based which is specified. Whilst the empirical research is of more academic value to this study, it is recognised also that the experience based work holds practitioner value. The chapter will demonstrate where there are gaps in the literature, particularly in the field of coaching and the transfer and sustainability of learning.

2.1   Transfer of Learning

There are three categories in this initial section: coaching; training programmes including coaching; and training programmes without coaching. Whilst these are all formal learning methods, this study is concerned with the stand-alone one-to-one coaching relationship and therefore coaching category is dealt with first as it is the most applicable, even though it is the most sparse. Each category draws on both business and educational environments.

2.1.2 Coaching and transfer of learning

The items in this section have three features in common: 1) they are almost all empirical research studies, with two of them using action research methodology which is important for this study; 2) they are researching the standalone one-to-one coaching experience; and 3) the authors state that coaching concerns learning and explore that learning in their research. In addition, their research either takes place in the business or educational fields and most of them have external coaches in their study.

Styhre and Josephson (2007) and Allan (2007) are two action research studies with Allan taking on the role of both coach and researcher. Both studies appear to be *Practical* (Carr and Kemmis, 1986) in that they are both seeking to change or improve group understanding and

practices within an existing system unlike this study which is *Technical*, *ie* researching change or improvement in the researcher's own understanding and practice. Action research appears to be an effective research methodology for coaching and transfer of learning with both studies able to identify changes/improvements. Both these studies involve leaders, one in a business environment and the other in an educational environment who experience a coaching programme as part of the research process.

Styhre and Josephson (2007, p.1295) found that for their site managers in the private sector construction industry the "coaching programme developed skills for reflecting on their work life situation, improved their communication, and became better equipped for seeing a broader range of perspectives in their work". In addition, there was a sense from the research that coaching may help develop leadership skills. Even though Allan's (2007) study took place in a completely different environment (a secondary school), he also found that coaching had a positive impact. He found that the benefits included "enhanced personal effectiveness and the ability to work smarter and not harder" (2007, p.19). His participants included two managers whom he coached. Both of these studies were interested in how learning had been applied back in the workplace but neither researched what specifically in the coaching process and relationship enabled this to take place.

Hannah's (2004) research is a case study in the UK rail industry and is different from Styhre and Josephson (2007) and Allan (2007) in that she uses a team of internal coaches in her study as opposed to external coaches. Hannah's (2004) study is also different because she uses NVQ competences to assess the impact of coaching on training transfer as part of improving intermediate skills in the workplace which is an apparent similarity to the Holton, Bates and Ruona (2000) transfer system approach which is reviewed below in the training programmes section of the chapter. Hannah's (2004, p.42) conclusion is that "coaching had a significant effect on developing employee competence, although it appears that there was a significant contributing factor", which was identified as a "specifications manual" (2004, p.42). Overall, she asserted "I believe this case study showed beyond doubt that coaching can improve individual and organisational performance" (2004, p.44). Hannah (2004) strongly suggests that the use of a competency-based tool is useful in assessing the impact of coaching (which does not specifically mean learning). However, it could be argued that this is because the NVQ tool is designed for the purpose of work-based assessment and the focus of her research is performance in the workplace. Hannah (2004) is very clear that her research focus is work performance and consistent with this is the inclusion of an NVQ tool used in the research process. Therefore, whilst there are differences in research process, this study is similar to Styhre and Josephson (2007) and Allan (2007), in that it is not interested in identifying the elements of the coaching which enabled improved performance.

There is also a study on executive coaching and whether or not personality influences coaching success (Stewart *et al.*, 2008a, p.39), which found that "despite being significant, the magnitude of the observed correlations between personality and coaching success were relatively low". This suggests that other factors play a greater role than personality in *coaching transfer* and the article quotes the work of Stewart *et al.* (2008b) and their developing model of *coaching transfer*. Stewart *et al.'s* (2008b) quantitative based research is aiming to develop a "framework [which] could inform the development of a generic measure of positive coaching transfer" and certainly goes some way towards that. The study results "revealed coachees, coaches and organisational stakeholders believed coaching outcomes comprised of intra-personal development, personal and performance outcomes" (2006, p.87). They define "positive coaching transfer" as "the sustained application of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and other qualities acquired during coaching into the workplace" (2008, p.88) which implies that they are researching the application of a range of qualities as opposed to transfer of learning factors. In addition, their use of the word sustained appears to be in respect of qualities that are sustained from the coaching experience into the workplace as opposed to sustained over time beyond the initial transfer of those qualities. Also, whilst Stewart *et al.* (2008b) refer to learning in their article on *coaching transfer,* it is only referred to in the literature and not in the results of their research which implies more of an interest in a return on investment in coaching rather than in the learning process. Stewart and Palmer's (2009) article on "Capitalizing on coaching investment: enhancing coaching transfer" confirms their interest.

Stewart *et al.* (2008b, p.87) concluded that "The findings indicate there is value in coaching research examining the complex interplay of factors beyond the coachee-coach relationship." The study suggests that "the conditions for positive transfer appear to depend on coachee motivation, manager and to a lesser extent peer psychosocial support, and organisational factors" (2008b, p.107). The study also suggests that "coaching transfer appears to be associated with motivation, psychosocial and situational factors" (2008b, p.107). Whilst various study limitations are quoted by Stewart *et al.* (2008b, p.107), the findings bear several similarities with the training transfer work referred to in section 2.1.3 of this chapter. Therefore, this study provides some important findings for the transfer of learning from coaching to outside that experience, although, as with the other research in this section, there is very little on the coaching process itself and how that impacts on the transfer of learning which might explain the similarities with the literature on transfer of training.

In addition to these research studies, there are two applicable books for this study. The first one is Law, Ireland and Hussain (2007) which explores more generally coaching and learning. The book claims to be the first to bring together the intersection of the psychology of coaching, mentoring and learning. The authors present a strong argument that coaches should not assume that learning will naturally take place as a result of the coaching experience which

strongly resonates with the research question for this study – what helps/hinders the transfer and sustainability of learning in coaching for leaders? They believe that active engagement in learning by the coach is the only way that learning will occur and strongly advise coaches to embrace the psychology of learning in their coaching work. They identified "the factors that underpin the learning process as relevant for coaching and mentoring: barriers, change, culture, discourse meaning, purpose and impact. Here, discourse means open and objective dialogue, challenging biased/distorted beliefs and assumptions ..." (2007, p.49)

Law, Ireland and Hussain (2007, p.53) define the learning process as having three areas:

- "Input: what is needed for the process of learning to occur?
- Means: how does it occur?
- Outcome: what changes take place?"

However, they "do not advocate that a more scientific approach leads to a very programmed and narrow approach. [They] know that coaching and mentoring works well, as it is one of the few developmental approaches that is not over formalised and therefore offers wide possibilities for learning" (Law, Ireland and Hussain, 2007, p.55). In reviewing a range of techniques and tools, they come to the conclusion that "common ground exists among different coaching approaches; they are a collaborative intervention between coaches/mentors and coaches/mentees" (2007, p.142) which is similar to the *common factors* espoused by both Tallman and Bohart (1999) and De Haan (2008).

Law, Ireland and Hussain (2007, p.143) also "call for coaches/mentors to share frameworks, techniques and insights with the coachee/mentee so that the process is transparent and that positions in the relationship are not fixed" (2007, pp.144-188), and they provide some practical exercises and case studies for coaches/mentors to learn from and utilise. Whilst most of their book is based on a collective set of research experiences as well as practitioner experience, Law, Ireland and Hussain (2007) offer interesting perspectives for further research in the world of coaching, mentoring and learning. Law, Ireland and Hussain (2007) seem less focused specifically on return on investment measures and more on the benefits of learning from the coaching and mentoring experience, which could help organisations assess the value of their investment.

The second book is in the field of education and transfer of learning. Haskell (2001) suggests that transfer of learning:

> "is our use of past learning when learning something new and the application of that learning to both similar and new situations. At first glance, it's very simple. Transfer of learning, however, is the very foundation of learning, thinking, and problem solving. Despite the importance of transfer of learning, research findings over the past nine decades clearly show that as individuals, and as educational institutions, we have failed to achieve transfer of learning on any significant level" (2001, p.xiii).

Haskell's (2001) work espouses a theory of transfer of learning in the context of teaching in an educational environment and it appears generally accepted that instructional based teaching methods are not successful in learning transfer. In addition, language used in teaching is important as well as support provided in the teaching environment. A view which appears to support the theoretical possibility of being able to transfer learning from the coaching experience as coaching is not traditionally an instruction based learning method and is aiming to provide a supportive learning environment for clients.

As the research-based literature is very recent and limited in number, it is too early to identify seminal writers in the field of coaching and transfer of learning, but the studies reviewed in this section of the chapter are a strong base from which future research can develop; although the emphasis in the literature appears to be organisationally driven towards return on investment, as opposed to transfer of learning. This might explain a significant gap in the literature which does not specifically research how the transfer of learning takes place in the coaching process itself and therefore this question remains unanswered. The next section of the chapter considers the transfer of learning in training programmes which include coaching.

2.1.3 Training programmes including coaching

Blume *et al.* (2010) indicate in their *Meta Analytic Review* that even through there is growing evidence and investment in the positive results of training, more research is needed into the factors which influence what is described in the literature as the *transfer of training*. They suggest that their review shows that the community of coaching psychologists are not embracing the work on *training transfer* and are viewing the transfer of learning from coaching as a separate research topic. The literature appears to confirm their view, although they do not mention the work of Stewart *et al.* (2008b) and Law, Ireland and Hussain (2007) reviewed above.

Olivero, Bane and Kopelman (1997) specifically research executive coaching in the public sector and this is a seminal text in this field, cited numerous times by other authors including Stewart *et al.* (2008b) in their work on *coaching transfer* outlined above. By the late 1990s, one-to-one executive coaching had been growing in popularity in organisations. Olivero, Bane and Kopelman (1997) conducted action research on executive coaching as a transfer of training tool, based in the public sector in England. The executive coaching in their research was included as part of a leadership development programme, specifically with the aim of assisting with the transfer of learning from that programme. The participants were asked to feed back and present on their experience as part of the programme. Olivero, Bane and Kopelman (1997) found that by adding in the coaching, productivity was increased by almost four times which they describe as "dramatic" (1997, p.466).

Olivero, Bane and Kopelman (1997, p.461) confirm the historical position that:

> "there is considerable evidence that a critical factor influencing transfer of training is the extent to which the trainee receives the opportunity for practice and constructive feedback. One-on-one executive coaching can provide this opportunity ... Through coaching, trainees have a safe, personalized environment in which practice and feedback can take place."

In their research results they regarded all aspects of the coaching process to be important: "goal-setting, collaborative problem solving, practice, feedback, supervisory involvement, evaluation of end-results and public presentation" although they believe that the two critical factors are "goal-setting" and "public presentation" (Olivero, Bane and Kopelman, 1997, p.466). While they are fairly critical of their own research process with concerns expressed about the validity of the data, their work remains an important academic research contribution to the literature on coaching and the transfer of learning.

A new researcher, Spencer (2011) has studied the transfer of training using coaching as a tool for that transfer. Her study suggests that "the combination of training and coaching has significant potential" (2011, p.14). She reviews the work of Holton, Bates and Ruona (2000) and concludes that "the LTSI [*Learning Transfer System Inventory*] model may be inadequate to consider coaching's contribution to training transfer" (2011, p.4) which is also recognised in the work of Stewart *et al.* (2008b).

Burke and Hutchins (2008) propose a model of transfer in their *Study of Best Practices in Training Transfer.* Coaching is cited as one of the transfer variables in their model and the findings "suggest that interventions for bolstering training transfer are best carried out in the work context and design and delivery phase, take place after training or during, and involve trainers and supervisors" (2008, p.107). They quote the seminal work of Baldwin and Ford

(1988) (see section 2.1.4 below) identifying clear similarities in major transfer influences. The coaching referred to in this study could either be provided externally or internally by peers.

The work of Baron and Morin (2010) is similar to the Burke and Hutchins' (2008) work in that coaching is part of a training programme. However, they bring the element of self-efficacy into their research into an executive training programme. They found that:

> "after controlling for pre-training self-efficacy and other training methods, the number of coaching sessions has a positive and significant relationship with post-training self-efficacy. Results also show that utility judgment, affective organizational commitment, and work-environment support have each a positive and significant relationship with post-training self-efficacy" (2010, p.18).

Whilst their study is primarily about self-efficacy rather than transfer of learning, it shows similar results to other similar studies, specifically that:

> "an organization that wishes to improve its return on investment with regard to executive coaching should consider the development situation from a systematic point of view, that is, taking into consideration not only the design (e.g. coaching activity), but also various individual (e.g. affective commitment) and situational (e.g. perceived support) variables. These variables could affect the transfer of training or the degree to which the managers apply what they have learned during the development program to their work" (2010, p.33),

which bears a relationship with the Holton, Bates and Ruona (2000) research on a *transfer system*. Olivero, Bane and Kopelman (1997) provided the seminal work for this topic and for coaching and transfer of learning more generally.

Overall, the research in this area appears to be driven by a business need to understand the impact that coaching is having back in the workplace which somehow then justifies the investment that has been made in the individuals being coached. This focus on hard evidence to support the decision for future investment in coaching appears to be couched in how people perform when they are back in the workplace, *ie* its application, rather than on the specific learning which has taken place. The research is consistently finding that the addition of coaching into a training programme enhances the transfer of learning from that training programme back into the workplace. However, they do not focus on the factors in the coaching itself which help the transfer of learning, the literature lends itself more to the process of learning rather than its application. The next section reviews the transfer of learning from training programmes without coaching.

2.1.4 Training programmes without coaching

As the literature moves further away from the focus of this study, so it increases significantly in volume. Similar to the section above, the interest in this topic appears to have been created by a desire in the business world for assessing the return on their investment in training programmes in terms of the learning transferred back into the workplace. There is separate literature which looks more at the productivity and financial returns on investment which is not applicable to this study. Despite the volume of research the topic of transfer of learning from training programmes continues to be fraught with difficulty with researchers unable to come up with one consistently agreed research-based solution but the research continues.

Historically, the work of Kirkpatrick (1983) and his four-level evaluation model which is both widely criticised academically and widely utilised by HRD practitioners, includes an element of transfer of learning. In his model, this specifically relates primarily to the transfer of learning from the course design and content. With their research, Baldwin and Ford (1988) introduced new concepts of transfer of learning from training programmes (sometimes shortened to *transfer of training* in the literature), including the importance of both the organisational environment in which the learner operates and the motivation and capability of the learner. As the research developed, an additional concept of the timing of the transfer of learning, *ie* how close the transfer takes place to the experience of the training programme, began to feature which developed into what is called a *transfer climate*.

At a time when very little empirical or theoretical research had been completed on the conditions required for managers to apply the learning they acquire on courses, Huczynski and Lewis (1980) found in their empirical research that the initial sponsoring and continued support of the line manager for the training were important factors in the transfer process. They also identified some inhibiting factors and related facilitating factors, for example "overload of work", "boss open to suggestions" and "high rate of changes", "boss allows use of own methods" (1980, p.235). However, this is underpinned by the manager attending the training contributing to the decision to attend the training in the first place, *ie* there is at least an element of the manager choosing to attend the training. Their research was conducted on a classroom-based management studies programme at Glasgow University.

Holton, Bates and Ruona (2000) in their research came to the conclusion that it is more than a transfer climate but a transfer of learning system and they created the *Learning Transfer System Inventory* for organisations to use. Ruona *et al.* (2002, p.218) explored the relationship between "learner utility reactions" and "predictors of learning transfer". They use the *Learner Transfer System Inventory* developed by Holton, Bates and Ruona (2000) in their research. Their study "supports the position that reaction measures have limited use in evaluating the

outcomes of training and development" (2002, p.216) and they "do not seem to contribute greatly to predicting transfer of learning" (2002, p.227). Their research also contributes to the understanding of the transfer of learning process and the contribution that utility reactions make to the motivation to transfer learning. However, their research states that they are unable to assess the impact of utility reactions on learning and that they are unlikely to have any impact on transfer of learning to on the job application. The research was conducted across a wide range of organisations in both the private and public sectors.

Belling, James and Ladkin's (2004) research is focused on barriers and facilitators of transfer of learning and is a longitudinal study conducted in a range of organisations at different points of attendance on management development programmes. They found twenty-six barriers and seventeen facilitators of transfer of learning. Similar to the Huczinsky and Lewis (1980) work, the barriers included a lack of managerial support but also included other organisational context issues, for example the lack of opportunity to learn; the organisational structure; and cultural issues such as organisational politics. The implication of these studies is that both barriers and facilitators of transfer of learning exist in training programmes with Belling, James and Ladkin (2004) weighting barriers more heavily. However, learning from stand-alone one-to-one coaching may reduce the barriers because of the ability to tailor the sessions to the individual learner.

In addition to research on transfer of learning from corporate training programmes, there is also some research on transfer of learning from management education programmes. Longenecker's (2004, p.4) study explores "the issue of how to best maximize the transfer of learning and retention". Haskins and Clawson (2006, p.850) also researched the transfer of learning from management education and found "about 30 mechanisms for facilitating the transfer of EE [executive education] program participants' learning back to their workplace are discussed along with an organizing framework intended to focus EE program instructors' attention on the key protagonists and the timing of the facilitating mechanisms."

Whilst all of the research is not focused on coaching, it presents some valuable findings for consideration in this study. For example, transfer of learning from course design and content could be translated to coaching design and content as they are both formal learning methods. In addition, the organisational environment for the learners and their motivation and ability to learn is just as important in coaching as it is in training programmes. However, the work of Holton, Bates and Ruona (2000) and the *Learning Transfer System Inventory* is a specific system for training programmes and is, therefore, difficult to transfer to the coaching experience.

2.1.5 Summary

Whilst there is a clear gap in the literature for transfer of learning in standalone one-to-one external coaching for leaders, there are several key studies researching the transfer of learning from formal learning environments to outside of those environments. Also, whilst there is some literature on the coaching relationship and the person being coached in respect of transfer of learning, there is also a clear gap in the literature regarding what actually happens in the coaching process in respect of transfer of learning.

However, the drivers of this literature appear to be very different to the drivers and focus of this study. A key driver for the transfer of learning literature appears to be proving a return on investment which seems to be politically motivated rather than values driven. In an attempt to prove to the business world that coaching has a good return on investment, the focus is on application of learning and performance as opposed to what facilitates the learning and enables the transfer of learning back into the workplace.

2.2   Sustainability of Learning

Whilst the apparent driver for the research on coaching and sustainability of learning is the investment in coaching (similar to transfer of learning) and the search for coaching outcomes, it differs to the work on return on investment which tends to have more of a focus on evaluation with regard to organisational performance, specifically financial return and productivity (Walker-Fraser, 2011). Therefore, the work on return on investment has similarities to the evolution of the transfer of learning research outlined above, with a move from evaluation of course content and design, to evaluation of impact back in the workplace. However, it is the element of sustainability that is of particular applicability to this study. The literature on sustainability of learning is generally less prevalent than the transfer of learning but, in contrast to the work on coaching and transfer of learning, there is some specific work on how stand-alone one-to-one coaching is delivered in respect of sustainability of learning (Smith, Oosten and Boyatzis, 2009).

There are two categories in this section: coaching and sustainability of learning; and successful coaching for leaders which does not specifically focus on either transfer or sustainability of learning.

2.2.1 Coaching and Sustainability of Learning

It is difficult to find a common definition of sustainable learning outside the environmental world of sustainable development. However, in the recent seminal work of Wasylyshyn (2003),

Wasylyshyn, Gronsky and Haas (2006), and Smith, Oosten and Boyatzis (2009) there is a link between sustainable learning and behaviour change and there is the element of sustained learning over time in their work. Wasylyshyn (2003, p.106) asserts that "behaviour change and learning, two knowledge domains of psychology, are key indications of successful coaching". Smith, Oosten and Boyatzis (2009) also describe a more sustained psychological change in individuals as a result of coaching in their work on *Coaching for Sustained Desired Change*. Whilst their work is not specifically researching learning, it could just be seen as a semantic difference between learning and change, particularly if you take an experiential learning perspective which means that different behaviour results from the learning experience which is change by any other name.

Both of these studies raise the issue of whether psychologists are likely to make the best coaches in respect of sustained learning and change from the coaching experience. Wasylyshyn (2003, p.98) argues that:

> "as psychologists, maintaining stringent ethical standards regarding confidentiality, managing psychometric or other data, and managing the boundaries of relationships are second nature. These are important facets of how psychologists can distinguish themselves from other coaches whose work is not guided by a professional code of ethical practice."

Whilst this argument is less valid in 2011 with ethical practice work now developed in the professional associations for coaching, it remains valid in that coaching is not a developed profession in the same way as psychology. However, her research found that "the top three personal characteristics of an effective executive coach were (a) the ability to form a strong "connection" with the executive (86%), (b) professionalism (82%), and (c) use of a clear and sound coaching methodology (35%)" (2003, p.98), and none of these appear to require a psychology qualification or background. In addition, these findings are not specifically related to sustainability of learning but the range of research objectives which include this area.

In contrast, Smith, Oosten and Boyatzis (2009) argue that "one's specific background is not as important as their demonstration of the competencies necessary to make a genuine connection with the individual being coached and to facilitate their process of self-directed learning and growth" (2009, p.166). In addition, they have examined the "specific skills necessary to effectively coach individuals for sustained desired change" (2009, p.165). They suggest that:

> "when coaching someone for sustained desired change, a coach should be a
> critical catalyst to ensure that the person being coached does not get stuck in the
> pull of one attractor, but instead is able to move somewhat smoothly back and
> forth. The coach, through observations, support, and timing of interventions, helps

a person manage their way between the two attractors ... the effective coach relies on his/her sensitivity, mindfulness and emotional intelligence to manage the balance and uphold compassion in the relationship" (2009, pp.166-168).

As well as presenting data in respect of coach competencies, Smith, Oosten and Boyatzis (2009) also present a guide to "Coaching for Sustained Desired Change" (2009, p.167) which illustrates how the coaching is delivered. They provide key questions under three headings in their guide: "Preparation", "Coaching Discussion" and "Post Coaching Discussion" (2009, p.167) to help the coach assess the process, content and relationship. On the other hand, Wasylyshyn (2003) and Wasylyshyn, Gronsky and Haas (2006), focus more on the outcomes of the coaching and how organisations can assess potential return on investment in coaching.

The work of Smith, Oosten and Boyatzis (2009) significantly builds on the work of Wasylyshyn (2003) and Wasylyshyn, Gronsky and Haas (2006) by suggesting that "coaching with compassion, rather than the almost instinctive coaching for compliance or to fix or help another directly, can arouse the sustainable processes that will result in desired change" (2009, p.168). They acknowledge the need for further empirical research and suggest that "research should focus on what produces effective coaching, not merely normative or descriptive approaches to what some do" (2009, p.168).

2.2.2 Successful Coaching for Leaders

In addition to the literature reviewed above, there is work on what makes coaching for leaders successful in a broader sense which is not specifically related to transfer and sustainability of learning. Hall, Otazo and Hollenbeck (1999) conducted a study in Boston, USA into executive coaching with the aim of establishing what makes a successful executive coaching experience beyond the realms of self-development. They concluded that "the best coaches are those who give honest, realistic, challenging feedback, are good listeners and suggest smart action ideas" (1999, p.52), and identified the coach's characteristics and style as being one element of successful coaching. Even though their research has been conducted in the private sector in the USA and includes research on both internal and external coaches, their findings are applicable to the context of this study as they research both the perspective of the coach and the executive in terms of "what works best" and "what works least well" (1999, p.48). This is also a feature of the design of this study with both the coach/researcher and the clients completing reflective diaries on the coaching experience.

Hall, Otazo and Hollenbeck (1999, p.45) also concluded that a "good match or fit between coach and client" is important for success as well. However, they warn of the disadvantages of having external coaches who are not part of a corporate programme and commissioned on an

individual basis, because of the "risk of wrong advice by external coaches who do not really understand the business" (1999, p.52). This element of the importance of a good match between the coach and the client is raised in a number of experience-based articles (Stern, 2004; Thach and Heinselman, 1999).

In a recent study conducted by De Haan, Culpin and Curd (2011) the results of a quantitative study into the helpfulness of executive coaching to the individual executive are outlined. One of the key findings from their research is that there is no "preference for a specific technique that makes a difference, but rather the ability to employ many techniques, to use them well and at the right moment" (2011, p.40) which supports the *common-factors* perspective on executive coaching (De Haan, 2008).

Rather than specific behaviours, techniques or models of coaching, De Haan, Culpin and Curd (2011) found that predicting helpfulness of coaching was more about the quality of the relationship between coach and executive, the support system of the executive coach, the personality of the coach, and the expectations of the executive. Executives valued the following qualities in their coach: listening, understanding and encouragement, openness, flexibility, kindness, and availability. They also found some support for Carl Rogers' (1957) idea that what they appreciate most in their coach is general support, encouragement, listening and understanding. There are distinct similarities in their study to the Gyllensten and Palmer (2007) research. Although De Haan, Culpin and Curd (2011) are open about the need for further research with expressed concerns about the statistically valid nature of their quantitative study, their findings are not dissimilar to previous research studies into the coaching relationship and process, and they build on this work.

In addition to work on what makes a successful or helpful coaching experience, Thach's (2002, p.205) study "attempts to fill part of that gap by describing the quantitative impact of a coaching and 360 degree feedback process on the leadership effectiveness of 281 executives". Her study "supports the positive impact of coaching in terms of developing leaders" (2002, p.212) and "there may be a connection to the number of coaching sessions and self perceived leadership effectiveness" (2002, p.212). Her research builds on the work of Olivero, Bane and Kopelman (1997) although it does not specifically research transfer of learning.

2.2.3 Summary

Similar to the transfer of learning literature, research specifically studying coaching and sustainability of learning is rare. Wasylyshyn (2003) provides the seminal text in this field as the first empirical researcher to study this topic, albeit not the primary topic of research; and it is too early to describe the work of Smith, Oosten and Boyatzis (2009) as seminal in this field although

their work provides a much more specific contribution to coaching and sustainability of learning. Unlike the transfer of learning literature, this literature is dominated by coaching psychologists, leaving a gap for HRD professionals in this field of research. The work on what makes coaching for leaders successful is helpful in identifying possible areas for research in the field of sustainability of learning.

2.3   Coaching for Leaders

The literature on coaching for leaders remains relatively sparse and falls into two clear categories: experience based, and academic research based, with the former being historically more prevalent. Although it is fair to say that the academic research has been growing steadily since the 1990s, providing more empirical-based literature for the field of coaching. A range of professional disciplines contributes to the literature including HRD and psychology which has contributed to not only a range of definitions but also perspectives on coaching for leaders.

Whilst this study is focused on coaching as opposed to mentoring, it is acknowledged that both are examples of developmental relationships. The debate about their differences and similarities appears to continue to separate the two concepts. However, Parsloe and Leedham (2009, p.91) suggest that there is a generic coach-mentoring process and they believe that the main purpose of coach-mentoring is to "help the learner to learn". There is little empirical evidence to support this view, although Law, Ireland and Hussain (2007) in their work have started to develop research and thinking about the overlap of coaching and mentoring concepts specifically when linking coaching, mentoring and learning. Daloz (1999), a mentor of adult students, sees mentoring as an extension of the teaching process, stating that "we must be concerned not simply with how much knowledge our students may acquire but also with how they are making meaning of that knowledge ... As mentors we share responsibility for that process." (1999, p.244) So, whilst mentoring is generally viewed as a separate concept from coaching, there are, of course, commonalities (such as learning and making meaning of knowledge) which cut across this separation. However, it could be argued that it is the differences between coaching and mentoring that make them both important developmental relationships, with mentoring focused more on wisdom and coaching focused more on performance and skills.

This section of the literature review chapter covers: processes for coaching leaders; the coaching relationship; and competences for coaches who coach leaders. All of these sections include both experience as well as academic research based work which will be clearly indicated when work is cited. All of the literature quoted relates to stand-alone one-to-one coaching for leaders conducted by an external coach unless otherwise specifically stated.

2.3.1 Coaching Process

Prior to the 1990s, using a coach was generally viewed in a negative light, often being used for remedial purposes (Jellison, 1993). However, by the late 1990s being coached had taken on a more positive, proactive tone (Peterson and Hicks, 1996) and it was becoming more common to coach leaders for personal learning and development. As a result, a broader range of approaches for coaching leaders began to appear, some from academic research but more from professional coaching experience.

For example, Thach and Heinselman (1999, p.35), from their experience in the fields of leadership and organisational development and coaching, suggest three major categories of executive coaching: "feedback coaching", "in-depth developmental coaching", and "content coaching". They also suggest that, whichever personal learning and development approach is adopted for the leaders, coaching must be part of the overall learning and development strategy for the commissioning organisation, thereby attempting to link individual learning from coaching to organisational benefit. Peltier (2001) translates psychological theory into practical executive coaching skills to illustrate how coaching can achieve change for leaders with his "Ten Existential Guidelines for the Executive Coach" (2001, pp.164-167) which draws on the work of a variety of acclaimed existentialist authors. He critically analyses these guidelines and provides the practising coach with some further reading to assist with their professional development. With a focus on achieving change for leaders this suggests learning although, because of the psychological perspective, this may not be entirely the case.

Similarly, Lee (2003, p.2) also promotes the idea that leadership coaching should encompass both psychological and practical issues in order for "managers to achieve significant, sustainable and organisationally relevant change". In his book, he suggests the use of two coaching frameworks: the "ACE FIRST model of change" for making sense of actions, cognitions and emotions (2003, pp.24-42); and the "LASER coaching process" which represents the journey of coaching in five stages – "Learning, Assessing, Story-making, Enabling, and Reframing" (2003, pp.60-76). Lee's (2003) frameworks are stated by him as being processes for change in the individual leader with the frameworks used by the coach helping the leader to make sense of any changes thereby "creating and maintaining a learning space" (2003, p.61). It seems, therefore, that Lee (2003) is attempting to combine both change and learning as outcomes from his coaching model. Stober and Grant (2006) outline a range of theories and bodies of knowledge in their book which they hope "will further contribute to the maturation and evolution of the emerging discipline of professional coaching, through making explicit the wide range of theoretical perspectives that can form the foundations of an evidence-based approach" (2006, p.1). This introduces the concept of evidence-based coaching which encompasses a range of individual and organisational benefits including learning,

Most of the literature advocates a structured approach to the coaching process but not all authors make a link between this process and any learning process as with Thach (1999) and Lee (2003) above, albeit more tenuous in the case of Thach. For example, Stern (2004, p.155), who describes a structured seven-step process starting with "initial needs analysis" and finishing with "transitioning to a more long-term development effort for the executive and the organization", is starting to make a link between the coaching process and sustainability of learning. However, Natale and Diamante (2005, p.363), who present five stages of executive coaching: "alliance check stage, credibility assessment stage; likeability link stage; dialogue and skill acquisition stage; and, finally, cue-based action plans stage", make more of a link between the coaching process and change (debatably similar to learning). There does not appear to be one coaching process which is generally accepted either academically or by practitioners, but a wide range of process examples from which the professional coach can select; and very limited linkage between learning and the coaching process.

2.3.2 Coaching Relationship

Bluckert (2005), drawing on his experience as an executive coach, believes that the coaching relationship is a critical factor in executive coaching and in his concept paper he outlines that the literature on executive coaching up to this point has been mainly focused on models and techniques. He has utilised a secondary research approach through a review of the applicable literature and integrated his experience to argue his point that the coaching relationship is the critical success factor. He draws on the work of Wasylyshyn (2003) which was an outcome study of executive coaching (see section above on Sustainability of Learning), and Kilburg (1997) who examined the characteristics of a successful coaching relationship, all within the context of Rogers (1957) and the use of a client centred approach. His article is useful in bringing together some common themes from similar studies although it does not appear to add anything substantive in terms of research based knowledge.

The Gyllensten and Palmer (2007) research, although not specifically focused on executive coaching, provides a more robust research-based set of evidence about the importance of the coaching relationship, along with other factors. Gyllensten and Palmer (2007, p.171) suggest that "the confidentiality of the coaching sessions played a vital role in helping to build and maintain the trust between the coach and the coachee". There are also some interesting specific developments in the coaching for leaders' literature both in terms of process and relationship: the concept of partnership, the individual being coached taking responsibility and seeing coaching as part of the consultancy process.

The concept of the coach and the client being in partnership or collaborating has only started to appear more consistently in the literature during the 2000 decade. Natale and Diamante (2005,

p.372) in their research have determined that "executive coaching is viewed as a collaborative alliance focusing on change and transformation". The concept of a *collaborative alliance* is applicable to this collaborative action research study with the leaders contributing to both the coaching and the research processes. Stern (2004, p.157) suggests from his experience that "executive coaching works best when the coach does not work alone as a supplier but in partnership with the executive, his or her boss, HR professionals within the organization, and other key individuals."

With regard to responsibility, Hart and Kirkland (2001) outline the responsibilities of the executive being coached. Their advice is to take "responsibility for changing yourself" by "cultivating a close relationship with your coach, and opening yourself to deeper insight and greater personal effectiveness" (2001, p.20). Their article is limited in that it does not go into any specific detail about how the executive might achieve this nor the balance between the responsibilities of the coach and the executive. However, it is an interesting development in the articles on executive coaching as it does introduce the concept of both parties having responsibility.

In respect of coaching and consultancy, the literature covers both consultancy as part of the coaching process and coaching as part of the consultancy process. For the latter, Stern (2004) argues, from his experience, that coaching can play an important role as part of a consultancy contract, for example, with succession planning.

2.3.3 Coach Competences

In the coaching market there are a wide range of adjectives applied to one-to-one coaching, and executive coaching or leadership coaching are two of them. A few examples of others are: life coaching, career coaching, and performance coaching. Stern (2004) argues that, in his experience, a different set of competences is required of coaches depending on what type of coaching is being delivered. Specifically, for executive coaching he sets out nine actions which prospective executive coaches have to take. One example of these nine is "build a base of thorough knowledge in psychology, business management, organizational dynamics, and leadership development that goes beyond reading a few popular books" (2004, p.160).

Stern (2004, pp.156-157) also details some characteristics and style including "experientially oriented coach"; "proficient and oriented to getting down to the real work issues in the context of the organizational system of the business"; and "who can provide live feedback, serve as a role model and provide specific guidance on how the executive should behave and communicate to convey the right message and accomplish the goals with the highest priority".

Hart and Kirkland (2001) wrote about the importance of the commitment of the executive coach. Their work is also based in the USA in a private sector environment. The source of their findings is not clearly stated which implies that this is another experience-based article. They position executive coaching as "all about change – often developmental change" and the role of the coach to move the executive through developmental change via a process of "assessment, challenge, and support" (2001, p.18). There is also some work on coach competences outlined in the section above on coaching and sustainability of learning.

2.3.4 Summary

The coaching for leaders' literature focuses almost entirely on the coaching process and the coaching relationship with some interesting results emerging about the specifics of the coaching process, for example the coach challenging the leader being coached, and the collaborative nature of the coaching relationship. There is a common view that coaching leaders is about learning and change as opposed to a dialogic environment which continues the status quo for the leader being coached.

Overall, the literature on coaching leaders provides a range of work and there is no identifiable seminal work or author dominating the field. This continues to reinforce the diverse nature of coaching and the complexity of defining coaching leaders.

2.4 Summary of Chapter

There is a clearly identified gap in the literature with regard to coaching and the transfer of learning in the external, stand alone, one-to-one coaching relationship with leaders in a business environment; and a need for further empirical research with regard to coaching and sustainability of learning in this regard. In respect of coaching for leaders, there is an emerging pattern of diversity of research in this field with a dominance of research into the coaching relationship and the coaching process. Despite this pattern, this review shows that more empirical research is needed in the field of coaching for leaders to add to the academic research based theories already in existence.

This study will help to fill a serious gap in the literature and add to the existing empirical research in this professional field. In the next chapter, I explain my ontological and epistemological position for the study, setting out the collaborative action research process and design.

Chapter 3
Methodology

This longitudinal study explores the effect of coaching on the transfer and sustainability of learning for leaders. The chapter describes and critiques the research design (including various phases of redesign), beginning with an overview of the research design, an explanation of my research philosophy and the foundation for my decision to conduct a collaborative action research study. The research environment has enabled the creation of a new model of collaborative action research from both the research methodology and the coaching literature which is also presented in the chapter.

As a researcher with no dependence on any organisation, I have had the freedom to design this study to suit the research aims and objectives, underpinned by my epistemological and ontological position. Alongside this independent stance I acknowledge the subjectivity created by the dual role I have as coach and researcher. The managing of this subjectivity through reflexivity is also covered in this chapter.

3.1   Research Design

An epistemological and ontological position of social constructivism was adopted in this experiential based research study. Meanings were constructed as humans engaged with the world they were interpreting and the generation of knowledge was both social and inductive (Crotty, 1998; Creswell, 2009); underpinned by my philosophical belief that meanings are created out of experience. The key experience in this study was the experience by the clients of my coaching practice.

The focus of the research is what helps or hinders the transfer and sustainability of learning by the clients from their coaching experience. With an emphasis on action (the coaching) and change (learning from that experience), there is primarily one suitable research method and that is action research. The study is a "living theory" form of action research in that it is grounded in the ontological 'I' of the researcher and uses a "living logic" of experiences in the moment (McNiff and Whitehead 2006, p.41). The action research process followed Bassey's (1998, pp.93-108) eight stages of enquiry, using the slightly modified version outlined by Robson (2002, p.218). The research design included the development of a new approach to collaborative action learning which included a method called *Feedback Provider Sessions* developed from a coaching model (Rogers, 2008).

There were three action research cycles over a period of thirteen months with data collected, analysed and interpreted after each cycle. The data was analysed using a thematic analysis approach. In a study of this nature where the researcher is the subject of the research and

heavily involved in the research process, preventing over-identification when analysing the data is of paramount importance. Thematic analysis provided a highly structured approach thereby creating a more objective environment for the data analysis. The thematic analysis process in this research takes account of the Braun and Clarke (2006) work, with this study primarily falling into their definition of "theoretical and latent" in its approach.

3.2   Research Paradigm

In planning the research design I took the advice of Cresswell (2009, p.3) who advocates that "the overall decision involves which design should be used to study a topic, informing this decision should be the worldview assumptions the researcher brings to the study". With regard to my worldview assumptions, I believe that meanings are constructed as humans engage with the world they are interpreting and that the generation of knowledge is both social and inductive (Crotty, 1998; Creswell, 2009). This belief has developed from a point of theoretical positioning to one based in practical experience through the process of researching both my own experience as a dual coach/researcher as well as researching the experiences of the clients. Creating meanings through experience seems to be more ideally suited to qualitative research methodology in order to achieve the depth of analysis and profound understanding of the research topic and questions needed to create quality meanings from experiences.

Jones, Torres and Arminio (2006, p.5) with their *Worldview Exercise* table outline a series of belief statements, for example "it is through voices and acknowledgment of both participants and a researcher that knowledge is gained" which in part describes a worldview that "reality is constructed through local human interaction". Through the collaborative action research process in this study, knowledge is created from the voices of both the clients participating in the study and from me as the researcher. Unlike some qualitative research, this study also brings in the voices of work colleagues into the research process providing feedback to the clients on their experiences.

I started my journey of doctoral research with the thought that a positivist paradigm was inappropriate for this study as the research is focused on creating meanings out of experience. However, whilst this is correct, I am aware that previous work and educational experiences have created a bias in me which constantly steers me towards the validity of quantity over quality and the reliability of cause and effect evidence. The reframing of my research paradigm was originally based in logic and in the research process confirmed by experience that an interpretivist paradigm is appropriate to this study. This positivist influence in my life experience has meant that initially my research paradigm was created in this intuitive way and it is only through experiencing the research process that my research paradigm has become clearer.

In the research methodology literature, the epistemological debate appears to have moved from a position of a dominant positivist regime to increasing credibility for the qualitative movement, although as a qualitative researcher it feels like positivism research is placed in a higher order in the academic world. The fact that post-modern positivists are now acknowledging an existence of bias in all research (whether quantitative or qualitative) is helpful in creating a more equal epistemological stance. Robson (2002, p.27) helps with his description of post-positivist "researchers who believe that a reality does exist, but consider that it can be known only imperfectly and probabilistically because of the researcher's limitations".

With regard to the topic being studied, the research question could have been answered from a positivist perspective by taking a number of leaders and their coaches utilising the Holton, Bates and Ruona (2000) *Learning Transfer System Inventory* to measure transfer of learning from the coaching.   However, I believe that an interpretivist approach is more suitable in order to ensure that meaningful data is collected from both my experiences, as the coach and researcher, and the experiences of the collaborative researchers, the leaders being coached. With the research focused on the individual transfer and sustainability of learning outside the coaching experience, the concept of cause and effect becomes less appropriate. It is better to understand the experiences from the different perspectives and then interpret the meanings from the experiences in order to inform coaching practice. This interpretivist approach allows qualitative data to be collected and with a focus on meaning rather than quantity, each individual experience can be valued and included. Patton (2002, p.1) provides a helpful quote from Halcolm's Laws of Inquiry in this regard: "qualitative inquiry cultivates the most useful of all human capacities: the capacity to learn." Interpretivism is a creative research process producing creative results which is the aim of this study's research design.

During the process of research design, an internal debate about social constructivism *versus* social constructionism has been on-going through my development as a doctoral researcher. Initially, I took a firm stand as a social constructivist believing that the internal process of making meaning from individual experience, with me as the object of the research, was the predominant feature in my research design. However, the collaborative action research process itself may also imply an emphasis on 'We' and that maybe a social construction was being created by the research process. Cunliffe (2008) helpfully reminds us that social construction has historically been utilised in organisational based studies and relates to the construction of knowledge in a group social environment which is not the case in this study. With the emphasis on the individual nature of this research, the epistemological positioning of social constructivist becomes clear.

On a simple level we could say that we are all social constructivists in that we interpret meanings from experience every day of our lives, but how we interpret those meanings is important in this paradigm. Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p.205) remind us that "labelling is

dangerous, for it blinds us to enduring issues, shared concerns and points of tension that cut across the landscape of the movement". The key issue is the necessity to ensure that interpretations do not suggest themselves to be 'real' or enable a 'truth' to be revealed.

Patton (2002, p.2) quotes from Halcolm's Laws of Inquiry: "There is no burden of proof. There is only the world to experience and understand. Shed the burden of proof to lighten the load for the journey of experience." This statement became a reality for me as I progressed through the implementation of the research design with a greater understanding that the search for proof in experience is seemingly fruitless, what is found instead is the richness of perception and how that builds a truth in itself.

3.3 Methodology

This research aims to contribute to coaching theory with the creation of a coaching model which enables the transfer and sustainability of learning to outside the coaching experience, through the exploration of my own coaching practice. These three elements create a sense of action and change required from the coaching process. The concepts of practice, action and change are strong indicators that action research is the ideal research method.

I was keen not to decide automatically on action research as a strategy of inquiry because, as a professional researcher, action research has always been my method of choice both for academic research as well as organisational research. Similarly, I did not want to search for another research method solely to provide a range of experience for myself as a researcher. The paramount consideration is the research aim and objectives. I considered both heuristic enquiry, because of a wish to understand my own coaching practice, as well as grounded theory, because of the aim to contribute to coaching theory. However, I deemed heuristic enquiry to be both appropriate and inappropriate because of the emphasis on autobiography. In a study which is exploring my coaching practice, the autobiographical element is enticing. However, this study is primarily about the experience of the clients in transferring and sustaining learning from that coaching experience over a period of just over one year which brings in the element of ongoing exploration of practice. Heuristic enquiry is therefore not entirely appropriate.

Grounded theory may have been appropriate in that this study aims to produce a coaching model as a contribution to coaching theory and the grounded theory allows for the element of change over time. However, I remembered that grounded theory is one of the early qualitative based research methods when qualitative strategy was struggling for recognition in what seemed like a predominantly positivist-based research world at the time (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). As the focus of this research is entirely about creating meanings from experience - a

type of living theory (McNiff and Whitehead, 2006) - a form of qualitative research was needed which allows the individual experiences to dictate the research journey, as opposed to the research method which could be the case with grounded theory.

It could be argued that grounded theory has a close relationship with action research in that they are both from the same qualitative paradigm. Whilst grounded theory has in its origins both a qualitative and quantitative influence, action research has its origins in improving social practice. Grounded theory has developed over time, slightly moving away from the combined qualitative and quantitative influence of its originators (Anselm Strauss and Barney Glaser) but retains the fundamental philosophy of building rather than testing theory. In the same way, action research has also developed over time, embracing work-based practice into its methodology and therefore retaining the philosophy of improving practice through research. However, action research has this unique participatory element which is fundamental to the study.

Whilst grounded theory has a systematic yet creative approach to data analysis, action research does not have a specified approach to data analysis and the grounded theory data analysis approach is one which could be applied to action research data. However, in the same way that theory is derived from the data in grounded theory, improving practice ideas (which may be in the form of a model or framework or something similar) emerges from action research data. In selecting action research as the appropriate methodology for the study, a similarly appropriate data analysis tool was also needed. Action research is often criticised for its lack of rigour in data analysis. Units of analysis and techniques from grounded theory can be integrated into the action research cycles to add rigour and reliability (see section below on thematic analysis)

Strauss and Corbin (1998, p.34) describe grounded theory as "a true interplay between" qualitative and quantitative research with "each method contributing to the theory in ways that only each can". Strauss and Corbin (1998, p.34) also state "one must remember that because emergence is the foundation of our approach to theory building, a researcher cannot enter an investigation with a list of preconceived concepts". Therefore, the quantitative influence in grounded theory was not the only factor in deciding on action research for the study. In designing the study the justification for action research (as opposed to grounded theory) is based on the element of research informing practice, the desire to improve coaching practice both as a whole profession as well as individually for the researcher, and the important participatory element.

As my experience as coach and researcher, together with the experience of the leaders being coached, forms a substantive part of the research, a method which has the flexibility to be collaborative in nature is required. Also, in order to maximise the range of experience from which meanings can emerge and be analysed, specifically in respect of the transfer and

sustainability of learning, the focus on action and change is essential to the creation of an emergent coaching model. Taking this analysis into account, collaborative action research seems to provide the most appropriate and helpful research method for this study.

3.4   Collaborative Action Research

Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) assert that it is not action research unless it is collaborative but this is not a universally held view in the world of action research. McNiff and Whitehead (2006) talk more about participatory action research. This can seem like a semantic distinction as both the words 'collaborative' and 'participatory' require some form of researching together when linked with the term 'action research'. However, in my view collaborative implies more of a commitment (both emotionally and practically) than participatory, as well as a sharing of responsibility which is key in this study.

Consideration of the purpose of an action research intervention is vital when designing the research and this is illustrated in Figure 3.1 below which contains, in part, the three domains of knowledge (Carr and Kemmis, 1986), plus one further domain (Action Learning/Inquiry).

1.   If the purpose is solely a change in the researcher's understanding of a situation (Action Learning/Inquiry), the study will be very different from other types of action research in that participants, if involved at all, will be co-opted as respondents, rather than recruited as active collaborators in the research process. Action research in this model does not necessarily involve an intervention cycle and therefore it would be difficult to argue that this is action research.

2.   If the purpose of the study is to change practice as well as understanding (Technical), then again participants may be co-opted, but there will most likely be an intervention cycle where participants understand that there is an action cycle taking place and will collaborate to a greater degree.

3.   If the purpose is to change or improve group or team practices (Practical) it will be necessary to recruit active collaborators rather than just participants. The group or team needs to understand the research process fully and contribute to that, as well as being participants in the action cycles.

4.   Similarly if the purpose is emancipation through some significant change to the system (organisation, social setting etc) the participants need to be fully involved with that aim and to contribute to the action process (Emancipatory).

* (Carr and Kemmis, 1986)
Figure 3.1: The purposes of action research and how they relate to four domains of knowledge (Cox and Cook, 2010)

Using this model, this study is primarily Technical in purpose in that it is focusing on changing my coaching practice, although one could argue that it is also Practical because of its contribution to the wider coaching profession.

McNiff and Whitehead (2006, p.1) also helpfully suggest that with action research the practitioner researcher is "aiming to generate theories about learning and practice, your own and other people's": the *living theory* concept referred to above. "Action research is simply a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which the practices are carried out" (Carr and Kemmis 1986, p.162). As I act as both coach and collaborative researcher in this study, the chosen methodology of action research generates knowledge from both the experience of the practitioner and the clients who are also collaborative researchers. The study is a "living theory form" of action research in that it is grounded in the ontological "I" of the researcher and uses a "living logic" of experiences at the moment (McNiff and Whitehead, 2006, p.41).

The action research process also follows Bassey's (1998, pp.93-108) eight stages of enquiry, using the slightly modified version outlined by Robson (2002, p.218). Action research became

popular in the teaching world which is where the Bassey stages of enquiry were utilised and this learning environment is complementary to coaching research.

In this study there are three collaborative action research cycles and the key elements of each cycle are illustrated in Figure 3.2 below. They are:

- My dual role of coach and researcher which means, on occasions, a separation of these roles *in situ*. For example, during data collection activities having a primary focus of researcher
- The dual role of leader being coached and collaborative researcher. Each of the clients took both of these roles seriously with the primary emphasis on learning in both roles
- One data collection method: research diaries completed by me and the clients collaborating in this study throughout the research relationship and shared in discussion
- Another data collection method: feedback provider sessions led by the clients in their workplace

Figure 3.2: Developing a coaching theory from researching your own coaching practice, through collaborative action research (Cook, 2010)

The research participants were recruited *via* a professional network of leaders in the UK voluntary sector; a virtual network of contacts built up over 20 years of involvement in the

sector. Initially, I contacted six organisations that were part of a non-virtual HR directors' network I had belonged to for several years. From the initial contact, I gained three of the research participants. The fourth participant came from a wider network of professional contacts in approximately twenty different organisations. All requests were made by email providing some basic information about the study by way of introduction. I did have two other leaders interested at the early stages from two different organisations but one moved job and the other one was in the process of leading on a merger with another voluntary organisation, so the timing and the time commitment involved was not good for them.

The four leaders all received the introductory email information and then spoke with me on the telephone for some more detailed information. It was at this stage that I shared the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix 1) with an emphasis on confidentiality, anonymity and the commitment involved as a research participant. After this stage, I met with each of the four leaders individually and face-to-face for two reasons: so that they could decide if they could work with me as their coach; and to determine their goals and objectives for the coaching in the form of a coaching proposal. It was also an additional opportunity to discuss the research process and their specific contribution. None of the four leaders withdrew and they all proceeded on an entirely voluntary basis. There was no indication of any pressure being applied by their organisations; it felt as if it was completely their choice.

The four research participants are two women and two men; they are based in three different UK voluntary sector organisations; they are all employed in senior leadership positions across a range of roles in these organisations including HR, Social Care and Information Communications Technology; and their leadership experience ranges from a small amount to several years in their current and previous leadership roles. These participating leaders have not been coached by me before and do not have any experience of being coached on a one-to-one basis.

3.5   Research Process

As presented in Figure 3.3 below, the collaborative action research process began with three coaching sessions per client. For the duration of these sessions both coach and clients kept research diaries of their experience, and the coach received three coaching supervision sessions. When the three coaching sessions had been completed, each client facilitated a feedback provider session with colleague(s) at work and the coach/researcher observed. Upon completion of the feedback provider session, the coach/researcher and each client met to share their research diaries and discuss similarities/differences. The data were analysed, categories and themes for a coaching model emerged and changes for monitoring in the second cycle were identified. A critical analysis group with peer professional coaches was held for public

scrutiny purposes to critically analyse the process and the emergent data. This signalled the end of the first action research cycle. This process was repeated in the second action research cycle. The third action research cycle was different in that there were no coaching sessions in this cycle and only the clients completed the research diaries. However, feedback provider sessions took place, followed by diary discussion sessions. There was no critical analysis group at the end of this cycle; in its place, clients came together for a group discussion.
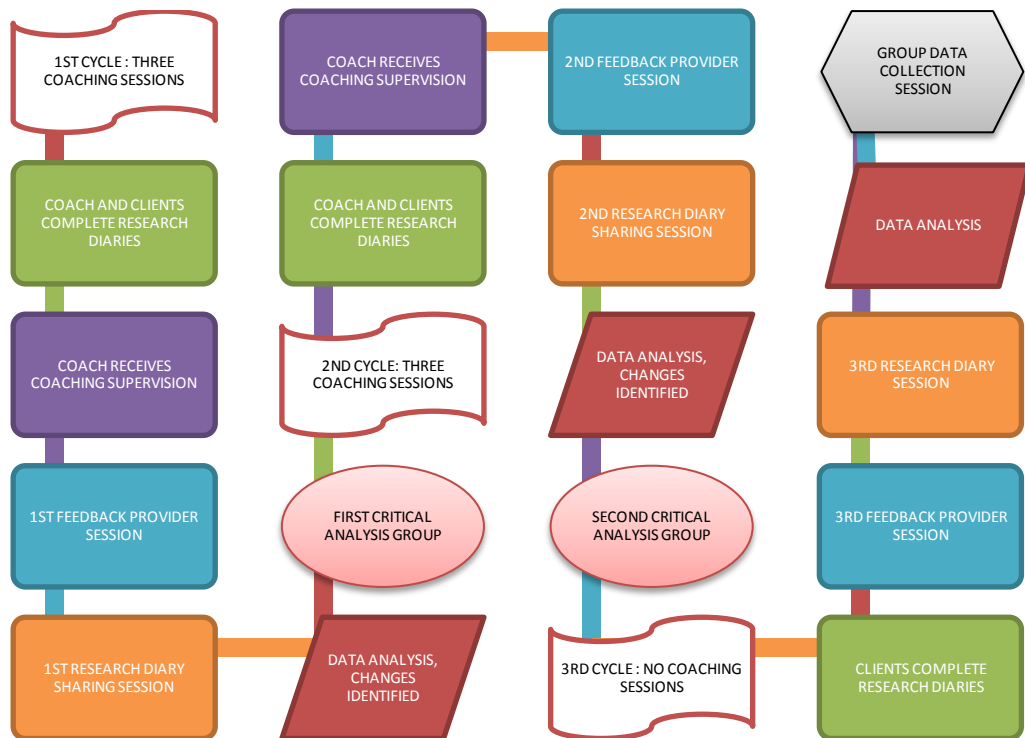

Figure 3.3: Collaborative action research process

3.6   Data Collection and Analysis

The data collection and analysis occurs at four points in the research process, and the data collected is analysed using theoretical and latent thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In addition, there are two critical analysis groups which act as public scrutiny in the research process. All of the data informs the coaching model and theory generated through the collaborative action research process (Figure 3.3 above).

First and Second Data Collection and Analysis Points: there were six coaching sessions for each client and these were split into two sets of three coaching sessions, with each set of three coaching sessions forming one action research cycle. At the same time as one cycle of three coaching sessions were taking place research diaries were kept by all collaborative researchers (including myself).

About one month after completing one cycle of three coaching sessions, a feedback provider session took place and data were collected on the transfer and sustainability of learning. Feedback was sought from peers, line managers, direct reports and/or customers of the clients depending on the identified learning needs of the clients. Ethical issues were also taken into account when selecting feedback providers to ensure that no relationship damage was likely to be caused by the research process, and there were also practical issues of availability. Three of the clients held one-to-one feedback provider sessions with the same person across both the first and second data collection points, and one client held a group feedback provider session with different people each time. The final stage of data collection was the sharing of the diaries between me and the individual clients which included reflections on the coaching experience as well as the feedback provider session.

At the end of the first action research cycle, the data were analysed and a coaching model generated for use in the second action research cycle. After the second action research cycle and further data collection and analysis, identified categories and themes from the first action research cycle were evaluated and refined, and elements of a coaching model began to emerge.

Third Data Collection and Analysis Point: there was a time gap of about two to three months during which time the clients continued to keep their research diaries outlining their reflective learning on the coaching experience. A further and final feedback provider session was held after two to three months after the second data collection point. There was also a final research diary discussion session. At this point, all collected and analysed data from each individual client was aggregated and a coaching model developed.

Critical Analysis Groups: two public scrutiny groups were held after both the first and second action research cycles and the categories of data and data themes generated after each cycle were presented to a group of peer professional coaches with experience of research.

Fourth Data Collection and Analysis Point: the fourth phase was not an action research cycle but an opportunity to bring together the four clients as a group, present the outcomes of the research and receive feedback on the generated coaching model and theory. This was the first time that the clients had seen the outcomes of the study and was an opportunity for critical analysis based on their experience as collaborative researchers. This session took a similar form to the feedback provider sessions with the key difference that feedback was being sought by me in my dual role of coach/researcher.

Supervision: both doctorate supervision and coaching supervision have been regular features throughout the research process. Doctorate supervision took place every other month during the academic semesters and coaching supervision took place on six occasions (one hour

sessions) after each of the six coaching sessions with the clients. Initially this was identified to assist with the separation of my coach and researcher roles. Both research ethics and professional coaching ethics of anonymity and confidentiality were applied as appropriate at all stages of the research process.

3.7   Research Diaries and Diary Sharing Sessions

This section of the chapter outlines the role of research diaries as a data collection method in the study, including commentary on the process of the coach and clients sharing the content of their research diaries through discussion.

Research diaries appear to be most popular in research conducted in the education, sport and health sectors. Bakker and Bal (2010) studied the work engagement and performance of new teachers through the completion and analysis of weekly questionnaires. The weekly reflective activity not only proved to be important to the research study but also to the teachers' development. In sport, Devonport and Lane (2009, p.176) "suggest that practitioners maintain reflective diaries whilst conducting applied work to aid the exploration and recall of operational and procedural issues. Future research could utilize data from reflective diaries to identify factors associated with effective applied sport psychology delivery." In her research, Wiggins (2009) allowed the participating children to record not only their daily pain and symptom information in their diary but also any other information they wanted to share. The daily diary was the primary data collection method.

However, the use of diaries in coaching research is rare, although there is one important piece of work in mentoring research (a similar field). In that work, Cox (2005, p.460) suggests that "the regular use of a reflective practice tool or model makes learning from experience a more reliable and faster method of gaining access to necessary knowledge and wisdom about our work processes and about ourselves". Overall, whatever the professional field, research diaries appear to assist with reflective learning and aid personal development.

It was important to this study that the research diaries reflected both the research aims and objectives as well as the underpinning philosophical beliefs. The diaries needed to have a clear focus on the coaching experience and any transfer or sustainability of learning from that experience. However, as a qualitative study which is primarily concerned with creating meanings out of experience I was also keen for the clients to have some flexibility of style and approach for their diaries which suited their personal reflective learning styles. I thought that by providing this flexibility I would encourage quality data to be collected.

I had to consider the extent to which the diaries should be structured or unstructured. Robson (2002, pp.258-260) suggests that "unstructured diaries leave the interpretation of the task very

much with the pen of the respondent" but conversely he also suggests that "structuring the task ... produces data which are prone to bias". In order to deal with both issues, I implemented a semi-structured approach to the diary completion by providing some research diary guidelines (Appendix 2) which reminded the clients about the research aims and objectives and gave them some pointers for recording experiential learning from a theoretical point of view (*ie* no practical examples) using Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle. At the same time, I allowed them the freedom to complete the diary in whatever format they felt most comfortable (written, electronic, diagrammatic, etc). Willig (2008, p.29) refers to this approach as "unstructured" with "some guidance".

Primarily, the research diaries in this study are vehicles for reflective learning. With this in mind, I explored the *Lifetime Navigator* (Winch and Ingram, 2004, p.231) which combines "the features of a diary and a learning log into an integrated learning navigator that provides an accessible framework for reflective learning" to be part of the research diary guidance note provided for the clients. Despite the fact that their framework for reflective learning has "emerged as a result of a study into transformational learning through equine based experiential learning" (Winch, 2003, Winch and Ingram, 2004, p.234) its specificity was creating too structured an approach and it was rejected very early on in the research design process.

I did also consider the work of Cox (2005, p.459) which outlines a specific "reflective practice model to support work-based learning" which is an adaptation of a model developed by Johns in 1994 for a nursing work environment. However, again, the model was too prescriptive for use in the research diary guidance for this study.

The use of a theory without a detailed framework or model gives the client the freedom to reflect and learn in their own way and the Kolb (1984) experiential learning cycle was used in this way in the research diary guidance. Another theory used was Marshall's (2001) *Inner and Outer Arcs of Attention* which provided some relevant material for self reflective inquiry to include in the research diaries, particularly because of the inclusion of "perceiving, making meaning, framing issues" with attention paid to assumptions (2001, pp.335-336).

After the first action research cycle, I evaluated the research diary approach and decided for data quality purposes to encourage more in-depth collection of data. The depth sought was data which went beyond the experience itself and analysed more of the transformational learning processes including critically analysing subjective assumptions. Hartog (2002, p.233) asserts that "as a reflective practitioner one must extend the cognitive process of reflection beyond the external activity of concrete experience and include the process of internal inquiry/reflexivity". I therefore introduced a form based on Mezirow's (1990, 2000) transformative learning theory for the clients to use on an optional basis. Three of the clients used the form, two of them in addition to their original diary format and one instead of the

original format. The latter was someone who had completed the least amount of diary work in the first action research cycle and the form encouraged a higher quantity and quality of reflective diary work.

With regard to the content of the completed diaries, McNiff, Lomax and Whitehead (2003, p.26) suggest that "Diaries may be kept as records of events and also of reflections on those events and consequent learning." They suggest that a record is kept of both "what happened" and "what I learned". The approach in this research achieved both of these although my diary included more about what happened during the coaching sessions and the clients' diaries focused more on their learning outside the coaching experience. Throughout the collaborative action research process, I emphasised the need to provide in the diaries both explanations and descriptions (although this was obvious to those completing the transformational learning forms from the second cycle onwards). McNiff, Lomax and Whitehead (2003, p.23) espouse this as important in their "Authentic descriptions of the action" in which "Descriptions give accounts of activities that have happened and usually take the form of reports" and "Explanations are the processes of making sense of what has happened, when you reflect on the reported action and give reasons for why it is happening".

During the first action research cycle I did not share the specific content of my research diary with the clients. As I was in a continuing coaching relationship with them, I took the professional view that it was not appropriate for them to see comments I had made about them and my coaching practice. As a researcher, I was keen not to influence their future reflections about how effective the coaching practice had been (either negatively or positively). Therefore, at this stage, only they shared their diaries with me. In the second action research cycle, we both shared diaries although, for ethical reasons, I shared mine face-to-face in case the clients had any immediate questions about comments I had made about them in my research diary.

There was no existing model or framework to follow for these sessions so, for consistency purposes, I compared my diary with theirs, noting areas of similarity and difference, then used these notes to semi-structure these sessions. These notes were used as the starting point for the discussion with other topics discussed as they came up during the session.

3.8   Feedback Provider Sessions

The feedback provider sessions in this study are a unique element of the collaborative action research process; direct observation sessions in which the clients received feedback on the learning from the coaching sessions and I observed the sessions to collect research data. These direct observation sessions provided data from people external to the collaborative action research relationship. In line with the approach of this study and the underpinning philosophical

beliefs, clients were left to choose the format of the sessions they led. Support was offered by me as a sounding board for the clients to discuss their choice of process for these sessions which was taken up by one of the clients. Immediately prior to the session, I had a briefing session with the client to check that the process was suitable for the collection of data for this research.

The idea for these sessions was sourced from a coaching model designed by Rogers (2008, pp.199-203) called a *Real Time Coaching Model* which I have used in my coaching practice previously. As a practitioner researcher in a professional doctorate environment, using a professional coaching model on which to base part of the research process was appropriate. Her model "involves you as the coach working 'live' with the client" (2008, p.199). One of the facets of the Rogers' (2008) coaching model is that the coach is not facilitating the meeting. The key difference is that the coach is there solely for the client which is not the case with the feedback provider sessions in this study as they have a dual role of providing learning for the client, as well as facilitating the collection of research data.

For the first action research cycle, I played the role of direct observer. Flick (1998, p.137) identifies "five features that define types of observation in research:

1　the extent to which the observation is covert
2　the extent to which it is systematic (or standardized)
3　whether or not it takes place in a natural setting
4　whether or not the observer takes part in the activity and
5　how much of it involves self-observation (reflexivity)"

The feedback provider sessions were overt, semi-structured by the clients, took place in the client workplaces, and the observer/researcher did not take part in the activity in the first action research cycle. In the second and third action research cycles, I became more of a participant observer in order to take a more active role in facilitating the collection of research data, specifically to help determine timelines of learning and to identify what links, if any, to the coaching experience. The participation was primarily in the form of questions to the client and/or the participants in the sessions.

3.9   Data Analysis - Thematic Analysis

In a study of this nature where the researcher is the subject of the research and heavily involved in the research process, preventing over-identification when analysing the data was of paramount importance. Thematic analysis provided a highly structured approach thereby creating a more objective environment for the data analysis. Thematic analysis also provided

complete flexibility for categories and themes to emerge from the data rather than being contrived either in advance of the data analysis or during the analysis process.

The thematic analysis process in this research took account of the Braun and Clarke (2006) work, with this study primarily falling into their definition of "theoretical and latent" in its approach. Although, in the same way as thematic analysis is not entirely prescriptive, it could also be argued that there are some aspects of their alternative definitions of "inductive and semantic" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, pp.83-84) in the approach applied in this research. Within a social constructivist paradigm this approach to data analysis allows for the individual experience to have a voice, and for their interpretation of their experiences to continue to exist. It was tempting to put my own labels onto their experiences but instead I used a combination of my and their descriptions in the categories and themes to reflect the collaborative nature of this study. Within an interpretivist paradigm, this method of data analysis allows for interpretations to emerge direct from the data, with meanings made from the experiences through thematic analysis. This structured approach is not suggesting that the process is creating an objective reality but more that the collaborative researchers are helping to construct the 'reality' with me as the researcher (Robson, 2002).

The thematic analysis process was the same for each of the three action research cycles, comprising five steps in total:

First step: read every word of the data collected and highlight possible areas of research data. As the data collection process included the opportunity for the collaborative researchers to discuss any matters in an open and confidential environment, the data collected included some irrelevant material for this study.

Second step: cluster the highlighted data under headings which were created from the originally drafted research aims and objectives, entitled *Data Source and Extracts* in the *Data Analysis Results* table (Appendix 3).

Third step: identify themes from the *Data Source and Extracts,* entitled *Emerging Themes* in Appendix 3.

Fourth step: cluster these themes and allocate codes to these clusters, entitled *Model Codes* in Appendix 3.

Fifth step: cluster the *Model Codes* in order to create the categories of data for the *Emergent Coaching Model* in Chapter 8.

These five steps were repeated a minimum of three times for each of the data sets during the analysis process. The Braun and Clarke (2006, p.96) *15 point checklist of criteria for good*

thematic analysis was employed to enhance the objectivity of the data analysis process and ensure a thorough approach. An example is contained in Appendix 4 in the *Data Analysis Notes* from action research cycle one. In addition, a note of the *Data Sources* was created for each of the cycles and an example from the first cycle is also attached as Appendix 5. The *Data Sources* record illustrates that the data were sourced from all of the data collection methods in the research process.

Boyatzis (1998) describes the time needed for thematic analysis and the frustration if no valuable insights are found through the coding mechanisms. However, in this research the time needed to conduct the thematic analysis felt appropriate to a study which relies on depth of data rather than quantity of data. The thematic analysis process forces the researcher to make an in-depth review of the data collected.

Whilst this structured approach provided a robust method of data analysis, it may have also inhibited the creative process. The thematic structure forces the researcher to decide upon a particular theme or groupings of themes into categories, and this could remove the possibility of data being suitable for more than one theme or category. In order to avoid this from happening, the researcher revisited the data several times to ensure that no valuable insights were lost.

3.10 Phases of Research Redesign

First Phase

As with all research studies, there was learning which had to be addressed along the research journey resulting in two phases of review and re-design. The process of reflection, action and change mirrors the action research process itself and therefore contributes to the validity of this study. Herr and Anderson (2005, p.69) suggest that a feature of action research is "Designing the Plane While Flying It" and the chapter outlines the importance of rigorous continual review by the 'pilot' in this process.

Just before the action research fieldwork commenced, two leaders dropped out due to sudden changes in their working lives, leaving four collaborative researchers when I was originally aiming for a minimum of five. Even though action research studies can be small in nature, (Styhre and Josephson (2007) used six people in their action research coaching process), I was somewhat concerned about this change so early in the research timetable. Therefore, the research design had to be reviewed to assess potential impact on the quality of the research outcomes. As this is a qualitative and not a quantitative research study, as long as the data were collected in depth from the four clients I was not overly concerned. However, I was mindful that the risk remained that additional clients may have to withdraw from the research

process, especially as the intention was to collaborate with them for about one year. Therefore a contingency plan was needed to help manage the potential risk.

Two changes were made as a result. The first was an additional and fourth action research cycle added two to three months after the third action research cycle which would provide a further opportunity to collect data, particularly on the aspect of sustainability of learning, thereby improving the longevity of the study. However, it was acknowledged that this made the timetable more of a challenge to deliver as this cycle would not be complete until March/April 2011 with submission due by October 2011. The second was the addition of critical analysis groups the number of which would be determined later. The initial change was to conduct one after the first action research cycle and then decide how many more to have after that with a maximum of three.

The creation of the critical analysis group concept followed a review of the action research literature. I found Stringer's (2007, p.45) *Critical Reference Groups*: a "charting of stakeholders" which "will help identify research participants" but this did not quite fit my research study. I also found McNiff and Whitehead's (2006) *Critical Friends* concept of "Testing your claims by making them and their evidence base available to public scrutiny" (2006, p.74) which was more suitable for this study. Upon further review, I found an earlier reference to *legitimising rituals* by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988, p.27): "involving consultants or other 'outsiders' who can help to show that respected others are interested". The importance for this study was to find people who would be interested enough to listen to my account of the coaching practice and to critique the detail of such an account, and to be challenging, not just reinforce my biases.

With regard to the membership of the critical analysis groups, it could be argued that a doctoral supervisory team are *Critical Friends* because they have a support role (friend) as well as a critique role (critical). McNiff and Whitehead (2006, p.158), when writing about *Critical Friends*, suggest that "Their job is to guide you and invite you to question your own assumptions ..." which is a role expected of and delivered by a doctoral supervisory team. However, this is a relationship which builds familiarity over time and I was looking for a group of people who would be more outside the study, almost 'visiting' the research with their impromptu observations and analysis. I considered involving coaching clients outside the research to act as *Critical Friends* although it did not feel ethically or professionally appropriate to expect this additional role to be played by my coaching clients, and I did not want to undermine or negatively impact those coaching relationships by introducing a new type of relationship. I therefore decided to choose the membership based on the desired outcome.

McNiff and Whitehead (2006, p.82) ask a challenging question: "How will I ensure that any conclusions I come to are reasonably fair and accurate?" They suggest an answer: "You will need to find critical friends and convene a dedicated validation group who are prepared to offer

you constructive critique about your evidence and claims to knowledge." The thinking behind this is that "If these groupings say your claims are reasonable, you can proceed with some confidence to put your claims into the public domain for further testing" (2006, p.74). As this is practitioner research and the aim is to generate a coaching model, it felt appropriate to invite peer coaching professionals with experience of coaching research, to act as *Critical Friends* and form a *Validation Group*. In order to bring in the flavour of academic research into the discussion, the groups were named Critical Analysis Groups.

Second Phase

During the second action research cycle some delays occurred in the process due to personal and work commitments of the clients. Instead of this cycle being completed by October 2010, it was not completed until December. As mentioned above, the recently added fourth action research cycle was already tight in terms of the research timetable and this delay meant that the fourth cycle was no longer possible. However, I was keen to have a fourth data collection point.

Initially, I considered an additional Critical Analysis Group (one had already taken place as part of the first action research cycle and a further one was planned as part of the second action research cycle). However, I was keen to continue to add to the validity of this study through the process of data collection. McNiff, Lomax and Whitehead (2003, pp.28-29) claim that "validation can happen on a number of levels: self validation (explanation of your practice), peer validation (co-practitioners work through the evidence to understand the claims) and wider public validation." The element of co-practitioners appeared to be missing outside the individual collaborative researcher role.

I therefore invited the clients to come together as a group after the completion of the third action research cycle to discuss and analyse the research outcomes. As this involved revealing their identity to each other, their explicit consent had to be obtained and they all agreed. The group is designed along similar levels to the feedback provider sessions described above (to ensure consistency in the research design) but with the difference that it is feedback for me as the coach and researcher, and I lead the session. Up to this point all the data has been collected on an individual basis. By introducing the group element, the aim was to encourage different feedback, using the group dynamic to open up the discussion even further.

3.11 Validity, Bias and Reflexivity

McNiff, Lomax and Whitehead (2003, p.131) contend that "you are aiming to create new knowledge... you are saying that you have done this ... asking them to validate your new knowledge, you are asking them also to validate your assumptions about the knowledge-generating process.... This public testing is a core feature of all research, and is especially

important in educational action research, where claims to knowledge are grounded in subjective experience. You need to subject your data and findings to rigorous critique at all stages." Feldman (2007, p.22) confirms this view by stating that "qualitative studies do not measure anything per se. Rather, they seek to describe interpret and understand". But he also reminds us that we cannot simply reject the concept of validity because it falls into more of a positivist paradigm, thereby assuming that the quality of the action research itself is enough to justify the research outcomes as credible. As outlined above, the critical analysis groups are important in this regard.

This direct personal involvement, as the researcher and the coach, enriches the research process. When I started out on the research journey, I spent too much time apologising for my personal biases and, as the journey progressed, realised that through recognition of these biases and dealing with them through reflexive processes, my personal biases seemed to add value to the research process by providing a starting point and context for the in-depth analysis of the issues emerging from the research experience.

As a humanistic coach, I have a fundamental belief in the potential of all human beings which has been affirmed over the years through self reflection and client feedback. The resultant bias is my assumption that coaching can help people transfer and sustain their learning outside the coaching experience. This anecdotal bias acknowledges that only some of the learning transfers and sustains, for which I have had no explanation. This research is designed to provide some explanation and, with this explanation, challenge the personal bias.

Reflexivity has facilitated the continual acknowledgement of any personal biases, values and beliefs throughout the research process particularly during the data collection and analysis phases. Etherington (2004, pp.31-32) defines researcher reflexivity "as the capacity of the researcher to acknowledge how their own experiences and contexts (which might be fluid and changing) inform the process and outcomes of enquiry". Detailed self reflection and observation notes were recorded in a personal research diary as part of the collaborative action research process. The researcher reflexivity element emanates from not only the dual role I have as coach and researcher in this study but also the additional, albeit similar, role of professional coach outside the research environment.

In addition, both doctoral supervision and coaching supervision are regular features throughout the research process to assist with the separation of my coach and researcher roles, and to deal with any ethical challenges arising during the research process. Both research ethics and professional coaching ethics of anonymity and confidentiality are applied as appropriate at all stages of the research process.

3.12 Challenges of Collaborative Action Research

Herr and Anderson (2005, p.112) suggest that "doctoral students should go into the field expecting to face ethical challenges". Preparing for these challenges is just as important as continuously reviewing them throughout the research process. Silverman (2006, p.323) and his "Ethical Safeguards" model has four safeguards, and I used these as a starting point to develop my own model for creating a strong ethical environment for this and other collaborative action research studies in coaching (see Figure 3.4 below).

Silverman's (2006, p.323) four safeguards are: "Ensure that people participate voluntarily" - for example in this study with the use of participant information sheets and consent forms; "Making people's comments and behaviour confidential" - for example ensuring that nothing is attributable to any individual in the thesis; "Protecting people from harm" - for example ensuring that no internal organisational relationships of the clients are harmed during the feedback provider sessions; and, finally, "Ensuring mutual trust between researcher and people studied". With this fourth safeguard, the dual role of coach and researcher is advantageous as building and maintaining trust is key to the coaching relationship and this trust can therefore be built into both roles simultaneously. Exploring these four safeguards in the specific context of this research raised some important considerations which fell into two categories: surface and non-surface considerations (Cook, 2010). "Surface considerations are standard protocols such as informed consent and confidentiality.... The key non-surface considerations... are: managing the power relationship in action research with understanding yourself as a key component" (2010, pp.147-148).

Managing the power relationship in collaborative action research is important and that means that understanding oneself is also important. Reflexivity is a key element in this self-awareness and self-control process; coaching and doctoral supervision can assist with this self-analysis process. Coaching is a psychology-based profession which requires an understanding of human psychology and behaviour including, very importantly, your own as a coach.

One of the ethical issues faced during the research process was the choice of timing for sharing the content of my research diary with each individual client. At the end of the first action research cycle we were only half way through the coaching sessions which highlighted the dilemma of whether or not to share the contents of my research diary at that stage as the diary contained my reflections on both my performance as a coach as well my perceptions of clients. I did not want these reflections to have either a positive or negative effect on the coaching relationship going forwards. I checked with each individual client about this decision and they all agreed that it was better for them to see the content of my diary when the coaching sessions

had been completed. This was an issue where professional coaching ethics and research ethics were both applicable.

The situational element of the ethical environment model (Figure 3.4 below) is ensuring that specifics of a study are fully taken into account when preparing for and dealing with ethical challenges. For example, supporting the clients in their choice of feedback providers and the facilitation of those sessions when I was concerned to avoid any damage to the clients' internal organisational relationships during the research process, especially as this type of feedback process was new to all clients.   Having reflected upon how I have dealt with the ethical challenges which have presented themselves, there are two key observations: I have had to continuously reaffirm my commitment to ethical practice particularly when the doctoral research project is under threat from participant withdrawal, for example; and my previous experience as a leader in managing risk has helped considerably in both assessing and dealing with these ethical challenges, an example of transfer of learning from my professional leadership experience.

In addition to ethical challenges, I was also mindful of the challenges of working collaboratively and the importance of clarity and transparency in this regard. For example, when inviting the clients to participate in the research, a Participant Information Sheet was provided (see Appendix 1). In that information sheet, the study was clearly described as a collaborative research study and the clients were described as key stakeholders and participants. At this point in time, the term collaborative was more philosophical emanating from the research methodology. As the study progressed, collaboration became more of a technical term still emanating from the research methodology but, in practice, became an important part of the coaching process and relationship. Therefore, a *post hoc* rationalisation occurred as a result of the research process. Through experience, collaboration was defining itself as requiring commitment of the whole self which appeared to be a deeper involvement than participation and, initially, this was focused on commitment to the research process but, ultimately, was about the collaborative responsibility both within and outside the coaching experience.

Huxham and Vangen (2005, p.4) when writing about their research on collaborative advantage state "that managing collaboration is an inexact art involving a lot of judgement, but that understanding the nature of collaborative situations provides important underpinning for these judgements." Even though their work is focused on people working across organisational boundaries, this statement could apply equally to people being coached by a coach external to their organisation especially as some of their work is concerned with relationships between individuals.

One problem encountered was when one client had to withdraw temporarily from the remaining research process (the coaching sessions had been completed) because both she and her

partner were seriously ill. This was not "collaborative inertia" (Huxham and Vangen, 2005) which is a conceptual term describing the phenomenon of collaborations either making slow progress or dying without achieving anything. This was a valid reason for non-collaboration and a sensitive approach was employed. Once the situation allowed, the client returned to the research process.

Another problem encountered was when one client did not complete her research diary in the third action research cycle. This could be described as verging on "collaborative inertia" (Huxham and Vangen, 2005) or perhaps a better description could be "collaborative fatigue" (Huxham and Vangen, 2005). At this point, we had been working together for almost a year and tremendous effort had been applied by each client in their busy working environments to contribute to the research process. However, this inaction in itself was interesting with the diary sharing session including a discussion on this non-completion. This data reinforced the importance of the collaborative element of the coaching experience to the transfer and sustainability of learning.

Heron and Reason (2001, p.179) when describing *Co-operative Inquiry* state that "We believe that good research is research conducted with people rather than on people." which acknowledges that other people's ideas are just as valuable as the researcher's. However, as described above, this can bring practical difficulties which have to be managed and dealt with during the research process; although these practical difficulties appear to be far outweighed by the advantages of working collaboratively.
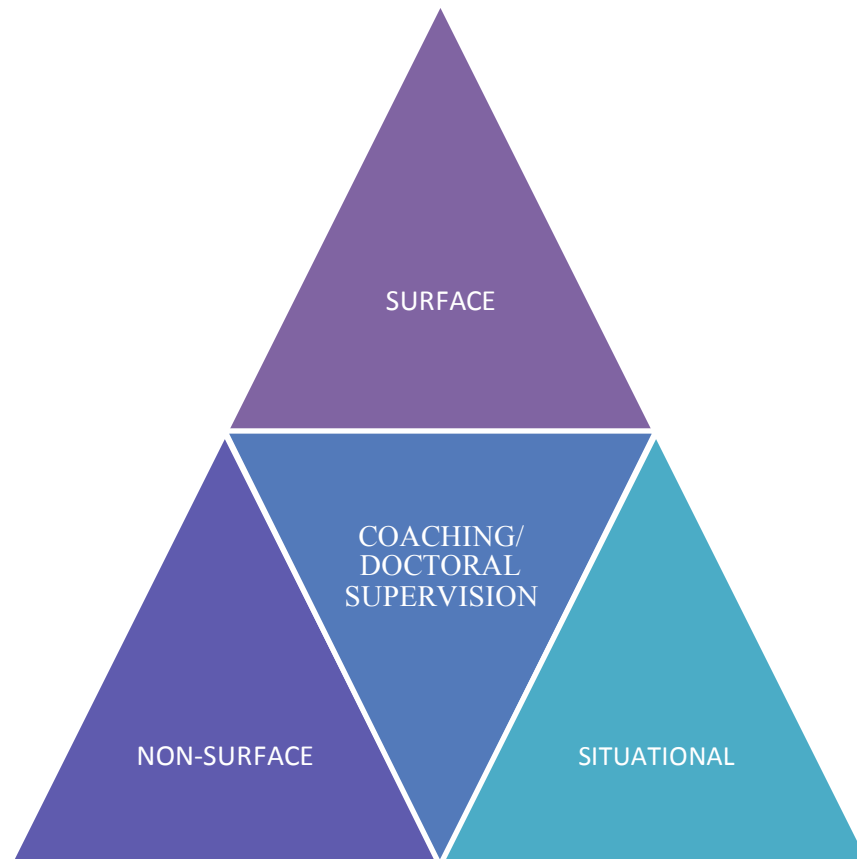
Figure 3.4: Creating a strong ethical environment for collaborative action research in coaching (Cook, 2010)

3.13 Summary of Chapter

The chapter outlines in detail the creation and implementation of the research design for this study including the phases of research re-design as the learning was implemented throughout the process. This includes a description of an original contribution to collaborative action research methodology which includes both the inclusion of feedback provider sessions and the work on the challenges of the research methodology.

With the focus on valuing the individual experience, the epistemological and ontological positioning of this study is clear: qualitative, interpretivist and social constructivist. I believe that individuals construct their own meaning as opposed to individuals constructing meanings based on the influences of wider social systems of which they are part, and that this constitutes empirical data. As Willig (2008, p.3) describes: "... 'empirical' is a descriptive term referring to research involving the collection and analysis of data" and therefore this study contributes to empirical research for coaching.

Whilst this research is described as social constructivist, there is one remaining possible concern about social constructivism which is the use of the past experience of research participants, and there is a question for me about the appropriateness of this in coaching practitioner research. This resonates with the debate in the professional coaching world about the use of past experience in the coaching process, and ensuring a clear boundary between coaching and counselling. However, my belief that knowledge is created through the exploration of experience seems appropriate to the subject of individual learning, particularly when the work on experiential learning by Kolb (1984), whose interest lies in exploring the processes associated with making sense of concrete experiences, is taken into account. Fundamentally, the past experience is an important part of the individual 'system' and therefore needs to be taken into account in the creation of knowledge in this study.

In the next chapter I set out the initial coaching framework which was used as the starting point for the first collaborative action research cycle, including an explanation of how the model was developed and its grounding in theory and practice.

Chapter 4
Initial Coaching Framework for the
First Collaborative Action Research Cycle

It is implicit in this qualitative research where meanings are being created out of experience, that previous experience not only exists but also plays an important part in the new experiences being created as a result of the collaborative action research process. It is therefore important to acknowledge my experience as a coach practitioner prior to the commencement of the study not only in terms of my experience of the issues for leaders in the transfer and sustainability of learning, but also in terms of the existence of a coaching framework explicitly stated as a definitive starting point in the research process.

The chapter outlines my experience of the needs of leaders when transferring and sustaining their learning outside the coaching experience. It also describes the coaching framework utilised by me in the first collaborative action research cycle (specifically for the first three coaching sessions with the clients) including the values and beliefs underpinning that framework and the assessment of its suitability for this study. The chapter also outlines the specific learning needs identified by the clients prior to the commencement of the coaching sessions which they wanted to address during those sessions.

4.1   Needs Assessment

Bassey (1998) describes the thinking which underpins the research as an important stage in the action research process. The thinking for this study is focused on assessing the needs of leaders as a collective group when transferring and sustaining their learning outside the coaching experience. The following is a tripartite assessment of those needs from my experience as a coach for leaders: organisation, client and coach.

The organisation is one environment within which leaders have to attempt to transfer and sustain their learning from the coaching experience and, generally, leaders find this difficult. Their difficulty stems not only from the extent to which their learning is encouraged or discouraged in the workplace, but also from the extent to which they have the courage to experiment with their learning back in the workplace. Therefore, it seems helpful for leaders in transferring and sustaining their learning if learning is encouraged in the organisation but, more importantly, that they are committed to experimenting with their learning when they return to work.

As clients, leaders realise very early on in the coaching experience the effort (both emotionally and practically) they have to apply to learning both during the coaching sessions and outside

the coaching sessions. Through in-depth exploration of their beliefs, values, experiences and self knowledge they identify learning to transfer and sustain back in the workplace. This takes courage on their part not only to identify but also to face up to their strengths and fragilities. Therefore, clients need help and support in the coaching experience to enable them in this identification and realisation process.

As a coach, I have a responsibility to ensure that clients are supported during the coaching sessions through what is sometimes perceived by them as a difficult learning process. My approach needs to be not only empathetic but also to employ a sense of humour to encourage enjoyment whilst they learn. Sustained support outside the coaching sessions relies entirely on the impact you have had in the coaching relationship and process.

In summary, in my experience an organisational environment conducive to learning; a client committed to learning with the courage to implement that learning; and a coach who can support, be empathetic and make the experience enjoyable, all seem to assist with the transfer and sustainability of learning outside the coaching experience.

4.2   Initial Coaching Framework

The espoused coaching framework, underpinned by my values and beliefs, was created from reflective practitioner learning, client feedback and a review of literature over a period of approximately two years, prior to the commencement of this research.

Before this study, whilst coaching other clients, I reflected on my practice through self-dialogue (during and after every coaching session) as well as reflective discussion with my coaching supervisor on a regular basis outside the coaching sessions. Schon (1991, p.68) argued that "when someone reflects-in-action, he becomes a researcher in the practice context. He is not dependent on the categories of established theory and technique, but constructs a new theory of the unique case.... He does not separate thinking from doing." Similar reflective learning processes enabled me to translate my coaching actions into a coaching framework.

Alongside reflective learning, I also obtained client feedback both verbally during coaching sessions as well as in writing (in the form of a feedback questionnaire) in order to reflect on the strengths and limitations of my coaching approach. The results of the reflection were then fed into the coaching framework as appropriate. Coaching models and theories in the literature also influenced the development of my coaching framework and these are detailed below.

The value base which underpins my coaching work is my belief that all human beings have unrealised potential and I believe in improving the quality of people's lives in the communities within which they live and work. This value base has grown out of my love of learning and my

ability to learn which I particularly developed during my time as a leader and an HR specialist when I was responsible for facilitating other people to learn and develop and was expected to continuously develop as an HR professional and leader.

I work with coaching clients on a strong ethical basis with confidentiality, trust and veracity as key features. These traits stem from my professional ethics developed as an HR specialist responsible for ensuring that the values of organisations are embedded in its development. I coached (and still coach) with the aim of enabling a learning environment in which the individual feels able to develop as a whole person. This approach emanated from my work and research into the concept of the learning organisation (Senge, 1990, Senge *et al.*,1994) and the implementation of the research recommendations. This systemic approach to learning at an organisational level led me to understand the importance of a holistic approach at an individual learning level.

Figure 4.1 below illustrates a practical and effective framework for coaching individuals. It is underpinned by continuous professional development so that the practice framework is dynamic rather than static in nature. Such conscious learning appears to enable a synthesis of the learning from a whole range of coaching practitioner experiences, with each person being coached receiving the benefit of the learning from this synthesis. It also seems to have the ability to provide evidence of success on the coaching journey with each individual coached.

However, the framework was not specifically created to enable the transfer and sustainability of learning although, from the client feedback obtained, there is anecdotal evidence that learning from the coaching takes place outside the coaching experience. However, the existing yet evolving framework seems appropriate for this research; the study will monitor and evaluate the framework through the action research process specifically in respect of the transfer and sustainability of learning, and be changed as necessary, according to the data collected.

In Figure 4.1 there are three key facets to the coaching framework which seem to enable a quality coaching experience:

Figure 4.1: Coaching framework to enable a quality coaching experience for individuals

1. Keeping the focus on the needs of that specific client during preparation, the actual coaching session and follow-up
2. Using evaluation methods such as reflective learning and learner feedback throughout the coaching relationship and at every session, to assist with enabling the client's personal development and improving the coaching practice
3. Ensuring openness and transparency at all times with the individual about the delivery and progress of the coaching process

1   Focus on the Needs of the Client

This element of the framework (Figure 4.1) is purposely not called person centred coaching. Having reviewed the work of Carl Rogers (1957) on person centred therapy, the application of this theory in a coaching setting is problematic because the developmental nature of coaching implies the need for a dialogue which will facilitate such development. Carl Rogers (1961) promotes a minimalist approach in terms of the psychologist's contribution to the conversation in person centred therapy focused mainly on asking questions. Transferring this approach to coaching reduces the opportunity for a developmental dialogue between coach and client.

Jenny Rogers (2008) talks about the client setting the agenda and Whitworth, Kimsey-House and Sandahl (2007) describe a client's resourcefulness as key in their *Co-Active Coaching* theory. In my work as a coach, I feel both an ethical as well as a professional responsibility to ensure that the focus is kept on the needs of the client during the sessions: ethical responsibility as the person comes to the coaching sessions with needs that they want to discuss and sometimes resolutions facilitated; a professional responsibility as my clients pay for or are sponsored by their organisation for the coaching services. Creating this focus requires very specific preparation, almost mantra-like, to ensure that I arrive at the coaching session in a good place for my client, having worked hard to block out any of my personal distractions on that day. This focus has to then be maintained during the session. The challenges are: overidentifying with issues raised by the clients which relate to my own experience at work, and transference and counter transference (Rogers, 2008) which can be dealt with through coaching supervision.

2   Reflective Learning and Learner Feedback

Hartog (2002, p.233) in her work on the reflective practitioner, talks about turning "the focus of attention from the outer experience and activity inward to the subjective processes of perception, judgment …… enabling practitioners to act with greater integrity", and professional integrity was one of the main motivators for this aspect of the framework.

There are two further purposes to this element of the framework: 1) to evaluate the client's progress in achieving what they want to achieve in the coaching sessions by the coach and client jointly monitoring progress against the identified goals and objectives for the coaching; and 2) to evaluate the performance and impact of the coach through the use of a Learner Feedback Form (after every three coaching sessions or half way through the total number of sessions) which is completed by the client and discussed in the next coaching session. In practice, both processes help both purposes. In summary, both the client and the coach need to actively contribute to reflective learning and learner feedback as part of the coaching process.

These reflective learning and learner feedback processes have helped me develop an identity as a coach. For example, I am often described in learner feedback processes as challenging but supportive. This is mirrored in part by Daloz (1999, p.206) who asserts that "mentors seem to do three fairly distinct things: they *support*, they *challenge*, and they *provide vision*."

However, my experience in the past has been that it is difficult to persuade clients of the importance of reflective learning in between coaching sessions, particularly written reflective learning in the form of a learning log.

3   Be Transparent About How You Work

This aspect of the framework is to explain during the contracting phase about how I work as a coach; during the coaching sessions it is about using a range of coaching theories and models which are selected during coaching sessions depending on the needs of the client. Gyllensten and Palmer (2007, p.172) in researching the coaching relationship found that "because the coach had been open and transparent with the coaching process some participants felt that there was little that could have been improved in the coaching sessions. Thus, some participants clearly viewed transparency as one of the most important aspects of the coaching." In the coaching framework, it is important to share process ideas with the client. It feels important for the success of the client learning process to be open and transparent about the coaching approach being taken as well as sharing specific processes, as appropriate, during the coaching sessions.

The practical implementation of this aspect of the coaching framework requires the continual review of practical tools and techniques for use during the coaching sessions, and is an important part of my continuous professional development. I hold this accumulated information in a Personal Coaching Manual (which can be used for preparation and follow-up), but the skill required is to be able to recall the most appropriate tools and techniques during a session with a client as the manual is not physically used during sessions, which is a challenge. This skill has developed over many years of experience as a coach with knowledge of different tools and techniques accumulating over time and updated on a regular basis.

4.3   Identified Learning Needs of the Clients in this Study

During the introductory phase of the research and coaching relationship, each client identified a set of goals, objectives and business benefits which they would like to achieve from the coaching sessions. These needs were written up as part of a Coaching Proposal agreed between me and the client. Flaherty (2005, p.41) calls this "Stage One: Relationship" in his "Flow of Coaching" model. It is also generally known as the contracting phase.

Three of the clients are responsible and accountable for internal infrastructure services, specifically HR and Information Communications Technology, and one client is responsible for external services to vulnerable adults in the community. All of the clients had the goal of developing as a leader in their specific workplace roles with motivation as an additional goal for one client.

The effect of coaching on the transfer and sustainability of learning

The specific learning objectives for the coaching sessions included:

- all levels of working relationships, *ie* superior, peer, subordinate and internal customer
- specific operational matters: recruitment, performance management
- specific strategic level matters: strategic leadership, planning, organisational development, learning and development, change management, managing the balance of strategic and operational matters, strategic contribution of internal service
- personal development areas: confidence, style, authenticity, effectiveness

Various topics were agreed at the contracting stage of the relationship as content for the coaching sessions. These are direct quotes from the coaching proposals for all the clients, listed in alphabetical order and clustered under headings created for presentation purposes:

Figure 4.2: Identified learning needs of the clients

Leadership Competences: Customer Relationship
Assertiveness in the context of customer service
Customer communication
Customer relationship management
Developing a stronger customer focus

Leadership Competences: Other Relationships
External networking
Handling conflict

Influencing people and change

Internal and external networking

Internal relationship management

Managing expectations

Maximising resources in the HR team

Relationship management

Self management (identified by two clients)

Leadership Competences: Operational/Strategic Skills

Organising skills/project management

Performance monitoring

Political acumen (identified by three clients)

Strategic leadership

Strategic planning

Work management

Leadership Role/Style/Traits

Accountability

Authenticity as a leader

Feeling valued

Leadership style

Organisational role of strategic HR leadership and management: roles, style, delegation, etc

Role of line management in people management and development

In my experience of being a leader and coaching leaders, this list of identified needs is not unusual. There are numerous similarities with leaders I coach who are not participating in the study.

4.4   Summary of Chapter

The chapter links the research methodology (Chapter 3) with the findings from the study (Chapters 5 to 7) by describing the starting point for the first collaborative action research cycle. Underpinned by my continuous development as a coach, the framework outlined in Figure 4.1 highlights the importance of being client centred, reflective and open, and is driven by a belief that all human beings have unrealised potential.

There is no suggestion that the framework is either appropriate or inappropriate for addressing the research question in this study as it was not developed with this purpose in mind. Through the collaborative action research process, the framework will be evaluated and changed as necessary for use in the second action research cycle in order to achieve a closer alignment

with the research objectives, *ie* the transfer and sustainability of learning from the coaching sessions to outside that experience.

In the following three chapters, the data collected, the results of the data analysis and the emergent findings from all three action research cycles is presented, including an analysis of how the literature informs the coaching model generated by the research. For anonymity purposes, all clients participating in this study are referred to as females in these findings chapters.

Chapter 5
First Collaborative Action Research Cycle

This chapter presents the data collected from the first action research cycle, *ie* the first three one-to-one coaching sessions for each of the clients. The sources of data in the first cycle are the research diaries completed by me and the clients, the research diary sharing sessions, the feedback provider sessions, and the critical analysis input from peer professional coach researchers who were external to the research. The collected data were analysed using thematic analysis (full details are in Chapter 3); categories and themes identified, and reviewed utilising both coaching theory and researcher reflexivity.

Bassey (1998, pp.93-108) describes action researchers as "intent on describing, interpreting and explaining events while they seek to change them for the better". This element of changing for the better is included in the chapter with an explanation of how the initial coaching framework outlined in Chapter 4 compares to the identified categories and themes from the first action research cycle. Also, the chapter outlines the changes which will be monitored in the second action research cycle as a result of the data collected in the first cycle which is in accord with Bassey's (1998, pp.93-108) stage four: "review the data and look for contradictions", and stage five: "tackle a contradiction introducing a change".

It is important to acknowledge that all the clients who participated were informed before the research commenced about the research aims and objectives, primarily for ethical purposes. They were, therefore, explicitly aware from the beginning that the research is concerned with the transfer and sustainability of learning from the coaching sessions to outside the coaching experience. There is a high likelihood that this created a commitment to the transfer and sustainability of learning and this is supported in that most of the data in the first cycle illustrates how the transfer of learning is helped by coaching, and there is much less data on how the transfer of learning is hindered by coaching. However, whilst this may have been the clients' initial commitment, this commitment did not diminish as the first cycle progressed.

The data in the chapter is presented in six parts; part one outlines the coach responsibilities (client centred and enabling/facilitating learning); part two the client responsibilities (session content and active learning); part three the shared coach and client responsibilities (coaching relationship and reflective learning); part four illustrates the categories and themes which were identified from the data; part five compares the identified categories and themes with the initial coaching framework set out in Chapter 4; and, finally, part six describes the changes which will be monitored in the second cycle.

5.1   Coach Responsibilities

There are two categories of data set out below: client centred and enabling/facilitating learning. Both of these categories have five data themes which are described and explained below.

5.1.1 Client Centred Process

In the first action research cycle, the data indicates that the client centred process in coaching is a key element of the transfer of learning provided that a client centred approach enables clients to take responsibility for their learning. One client stated that this client centred process needs to include an exploration of an individual's "role, values, self/feelings, past behavioural approaches and philosophical viewpoints" as well as enabling the client to reflect on learning, helping to reinforce this learned behaviour. The data also suggests that a client centred coaching process needs to take into account when a client has no coaching experience as well as any psychological barriers for individuals being coached, recognising that these may slow down the coaching process.

There are five data themes emerging from the first action research cycle which all fall under the client centred process category and these are set out below: coach in charge of process; tailored tools and techniques; challenge and support; client context; and physical environment.

Coach in charge of the process: the data indicates that the coach being in charge of the process encourages transfer of learning for the clients. At the very first coaching session with one client, the process was most definitely in the hands of the coach. She reflected in her diary:

> "Once in the session, having outlined my issue that I wished to discuss, I felt things were a little superficial. Going through my mind was the feeling that this may end up being little more than a sharing exercise with some homespun wisdom and a bit of common sense, but as we got into the discussion I actually felt we were peeling the layers back and looking at how to deal with this particular situation but also in terms of any learning that there might be about dealing with similar ones."

Another example from the data is the coach ensuring that the thread of any discussion is not lost during a coaching session. One client observed that digressing from a topic might be an avoidance tactic on the part of the client and therefore it was important for the coach to bring back the discussion and check with the client if this topic needed to be resumed.

One element which I usually include in each coaching session is to reflect on learning and/or actions from the previous coaching session. This not only helps to embed any learning but also provides an important check on whether the experience of applying that learning has either

confirmed or denied its validity. One client reflected in her diary: "We reflected on the previous session and it was clear that a black and white view... wasn't going to work.... It had, however, been a useful exercise in that I am thinking about the issues and it has had some effect... but I think the knack is not to get too hung up on it." This provides an additional reflective learning opportunity in the coaching process.

Tailored tools/techniques: the differentiation being applied across these two terms for the purposes of this research is that tools are artefacts or psychological theories and techniques are used to apply these tools. This close relationship between the two means that it makes sense to consider the findings on tools and techniques together and consider them as a generic theme. As a result of the focus on the needs of each individual client, a range of tools and techniques were used during the coaching sessions. A few examples are: a boss relationship questionnaire designed by me; role play and situational questions; highlighting emotional/rational responses; sharing metaphors; positive feedback from the coach; real-life scenarios; and stories. Using a variety of tools and techniques was important, with one client saying that "philosophical things as well as practical things" were useful. For example, the use of stories was particularly commented upon by one client who said that this was "useful, brings it to life, can choose which bits are helpful", "stories transfer learning from coach to leader", but that it is the "correct selection of stories" which is important.

During a client's first coaching session, I highlighted the potential difference between emotional and rational responses in their relationship with her boss using real life situations presented by the client. We discussed in this session the different behavioural responses by the client towards her boss depending on whether she was responding emotionally and rationally. During the session, the concept seemed to immediately resonate with the client. In her diary during the next few weeks and before the next session, she noted: "I have revisited my relationship with [boss] and my knowledge of the way she and I work which is not the same. I am now looking for ways of working in a way that means [boss] listens to me and working on an emotional-rational balance that meets both our needs. I am feeling more positive...". Later on in the diary, she recorded: "[boss] said that she felt much better about the challenge/discussion as it was more controlled. This was without doubt the result of the coaching and me approaching in a different way using emotional-rational." This indicates an immediate transfer of learning through a new technique only discussed once.

In contrast, one client identified the use of self-assessment tools (for example, MBTI (Myers, 1962) questionnaire) as potentially hindering the transfer of learning. Her concerns centred on the accuracy of self-assessment and that the results might "hinder the person from identifying the learning need and pretending that they are like this", although another client thought that it provided helpful reaffirmation and "helps build confidence".

Challenge/support: seen as another key area for the transfer of learning process in the study. One client stated that "challenging questions/observation statements are helpful and enable learning". However, another client said that it had to be "relevant challenge" and another comment from a different client stated that she "likes challenge, it encourages learning". Interestingly, a feedback provider made the observation "supporting you to make that difficult change" when describing the coaching process employed in this cycle. This reminds me of the work of Daloz (1999) in which he talks about the role of the mentor in providing support, challenge and vision. Daloz (1999, p.208) opines that "if both support and challenge are low, little is likely to happen". Interestingly, one client defines support as "providing a safe space" which relates to the data below on coaching relationship.

During the coaching sessions, I challenge by bringing to the surface the question or statement that is simmering under the surface but takes courage for the client to face. They already know these challenges, albeit subconsciously, but are often too fearful to bring these issues to the surface. However, once they are surfaced and I help the client face these challenges through the provision of support, learning occurs. This could be learning about themselves and/or others, or learning what action they could take in the future. One client reflected on her experience of being challenged in a coaching session: "Was very positive though extremely hard for me as it pushed buttons with my own self doubt ... Not a bad thing as this has drawn further thought on why some of these things are where they are and why I feel like I do." She later transferred this learning into a situation not reflected upon during a coaching session in advance of the experience: "... working with Janice has made me far more aware of my strengths and weakness and also political acumen ... I feel that I have got far more out of this course due to my coaching sessions as I was better at fully listening to other people's views." This was after two coaching sessions. One example of a client learning about herself and considering changing longstanding embedded behaviour is recorded in her diary as follows: "I have changed my approach following coaching and tried to take a step back, think for a while/overnight about things which are helping ..."

I am very aware as a coach that this combination of both challenge and support is important for the wellbeing of the client. However, despite the support provided I still check with clients explicitly during sessions if they are comfortable with the challenging in recognition of how difficult it can be for people to face their fears.

Client context: the data raised the issue of how possible it is to transfer learning into a specific organisational context from a coaching process. A peer feedback provider said that "it's whether the organisation is allowing you to be a good manager ... the rest of the organisation has got to change with you or be willing to change". This study does not include an assessment of the organisational learning capability of the three individual organisations who allowed the clients to participate in this study as this study is focused on individual learning. However, the

client context seems to impact on how the client is enabled to take responsibility for their own learning back in the workplace. In addition, there is the issue about opportunity to experiment with one client recording her diary: "Not been into many meetings in the past few weeks to see if I can put the theory into practice".

Physical environment: a negative aspect of the data collected in that the physical environment during one client's first coaching session was too noisy and we both suffered in silence for the whole session. As a person with a hearing problem who was struggling to hear the client in this noisy environment, I should have at least checked with the client if she could hear sufficiently well but instead we both just carried on with the session. It was later revealed in the diary sharing session that the client also has a hearing problem and she also suffered in silence. The data collected indicates that this only partially hindered the transfer of learning. My reflections indicate the importance of checking within coaching sessions how the session is going.

This same client wrote in her diary after the second coaching session:

> "At the end of the session I did feel more energised, less negative about what I was doing and felt that there was a way forward. I'd felt much more relaxed within this session even though I was stressed in a different way than the first time, but I don't know whether being in my own office ... had something to do with that. It was certainly better not being in a public area ...".

As a coach this was an unusual experience as clients predominantly do not want to meet in their office environment, although this was not the client's primary office location.

The predominant finding from the five data themes in this category is that whatever arises in the coaching sessions, the coach should ensure a client centred process to assist with the client's transfer of learning; the data suggests that by centring on the client's needs rather than the coach's preferences the transfer of learning is enabled.

5.1.2 Enabling/Facilitating Learning

In the first action research cycle, the data indicates transfer of learning is encouraged when the coaching process enables and facilitates learning which includes a mixture of directive and non-directive approaches. The five data themes set out below provide the specifics of this enabling/facilitating process: encouraging practice back in the workplace; sharing experience to facilitate learning; suspending judgement; not therapy; and lasting impact of coach.

Encourage practice back in the workplace: by encouraging practice back in the workplace, experimentation is enabled to take place. In one client's diary, there is a pattern of

improvement recorded over time, flowing through the period of this cycle, with this recorded comment just before the third coaching session: "Both of these sessions [work meetings] actually provided me with the opportunity to demonstrate my ... skills and again I got gratification from the fact that these are going well ..."

By encouraging the use of real scenarios in the coaching sessions, practice back in the workplace can be encouraged in a very specific manner. For example, one client reflected early on in her diary: "Coaching session for this was really helpful in giving me different tips on how to develop my relationship management. It isn't easy to change your style and it will take me some time to master it if I'm able to." Then later on in the diary after more coaching sessions, the same client recorded: "I certainly feel that I have changed my approach ... from the coaching sessions ... The coaching gave me some things to think about and I [took action] which I wouldn't necessarily think about doing. It enabled me to try and think more widely about things." In this example, there is both different action being taken as well as different thought processes transferring from the coaching experience. The data showed also that transfer of learning was observed back in the workplace by feedback providers as a result of this encouragement.

Share experience to facilitate learning: one of the most interesting and challenging areas for me as the coach/researcher. I went into this research with the view that coaching should be non-directive and that the coach should not give advice. Rogers (2008), a well respected coach practitioner, strongly advocates this approach. She states that "if advice worked as a helpful tactic, it might be possible to make a case for it as a prime approach to coaching. However, it doesn't" (2008, p.33). The data is not suggesting that providing advice is a 'prime approach' in coaching but it has found that providing suggestions which the client can consider for implementation is a 'helpful tactic'.

What has come through very strongly in the research is that removing this element of sharing experience hinders the transfer of learning. The clients in this study felt strongly that the sharing of this experience was useful for a variety of reasons:

a) "It saves time"
b) "No point in leaving people to flounder"
c) "Opportunity to learn from someone more experienced"
d) "Brings in real life"
e) "Can visualise it more"
f) "You can pick out the bits that are relevant to you and your situation"
g) "Looking for a bit of a steer"

The clients' decision to be coached by me had been influenced by my experience and this experience was therefore an important asset for use in the coaching process, as evidenced by the client who checked out my professional credentials on my business website prior to being coached by me.

I struggled with this shift in thinking during the first cycle and used coaching supervision to come to terms with this change in philosophy as a professional coach. Simply adhering to a non-directive approach to coaching could potentially become a barrier to the transfer of learning.

However, aligned to this shift of approach is a caveat not to use the sharing of experience as a means of telling people what to do or implying that your way (as the coach) is the right way (for the client). The data indicates that the sharing of opinions (as opposed to experience) could lead to not allowing the client to have their own learning from experience. Even with this important caveat, the data is clear that sharing of relevant and appropriate experience is an important element in the transfer of learning process. The data indicates that a key function of the coach is to enable learning and development, and this could be seen as one important technique for achieving that. This could be described as 'coaching/consultancy'.

One client reflected:

> "The chance to put actual scenarios to Janice and then Janice asking me to reflect
> is very useful in seeing how things could be done differently to achieve a more
> satisfactory result. This method of self reflection I find really helps ... my reflections
> and working through things I want to achieve is helping me ... has helped me look
> at things from another perspective ... know I am reflecting more and also taking
> time to think things through more thoroughly before reacting."

Suspend judgement: as one client said, in particular, making sure that the body language of the coach is "never looking as if they are judging", with another client saying that being judged by the coach would be a "massive barrier to learning". Auerbach (2002) had a similar view in her book on *Personal and Executive Coaching* by emphasising the importance of the coach being non-judgemental and having unconditional positive regard for their clients.

Not therapy: one client (a trained counsellor) identified "clear links" between coaching and counselling but felt that "coaching is more self reflective ... wider ... and deeper than counselling", more of a "two-way relationship, more equal". Another client stated that there was "no value in looking at personal history" which she felt was better placed in a therapeutic environment rather than a coaching one.

The literature around coaching and therapy is dominated by the debate about the differences between the two. For example, Hart, Blattner and Leipsic (2001, p.235) researched the

differences between coaching and therapy professionals and looked at similarities: "similar methods of inquiry, propensity for advice giving, boundary issues, and potential for power differentials". However, Price (2009, p.147) concluded from his research that "organizational coaching would maximise its potential by accepting that it includes therapy, and coaches would benefit themselves and their clients by being therapeutically trained".

Lasting impact of coach: the responsibility of the coach to enable and facilitate learning appears an obvious statement when looking at what helps the transfer of learning. However, the data indicates that it is the skills and processes employed by the coach which enable/facilitate the transfer of learning. In this first cycle, these are focused on a mixture of directive and non-directive coaching, non-judgemental approach, establishing an equal relationship and having a lasting impact.

The data reveals the idea of "Janice in my head" when clients were not in the coaching sessions. This metaphor acted as a "helpful reminder of things that help" rather than a reminder of how the coach said it should be done, something that was specifically checked out with the clients. In addition to this idea of "Janice in my head", there is also the issue of role-modelling coaching techniques in the sessions which clients can use back in the workplace. One example of this was after the first session when emotional-rational responses were discussed (described above under Tools/Techniques). The impact was so strong for this particular client, enabling her to transfer learning almost immediately, that she used it in a session with one of her direct reports. She recorded in her diary:

> "I spoke to [direct report] regarding the emotional-rational approach and how she deals with things ... I asked [direct report] to look at what had happened and she was still unhappy about the situation as she felt she was right. I showed her where it stood on the emotional-rational ... I asked her how could she have dealt with the issue in a better way looking at the tool of emotional-rational ... [direct report] agreed that if she had waited and addressed where the issues could have been dealt with she could have spoken ... with a calm approach, she could have made a valid point without being rude and ended up with a much better result."

5.2 Client Responsibilities

In this first cycle, the data strongly indicates the importance of the clients taking responsibility alongside the coach in helping to transfer learning to outside the coaching experience. There are two categories of data: session content and active learning.

Session content links with the data collected indicating that the coach is in charge of the process (see above under Coach Responsibility). With the coach in charge of the process and

the client in charge of the session content, this creates a collaborative coaching experience from which learning can be transferred. Session content has two data themes which are set out below: contracting, the starting point; and client bringing the content. Active Learning has three data themes which all relate to the client's responsibility to learn actively as collaborators in the coaching partnership which the data suggests helps the transfer of learning: colleague feedback; transfer of learning measures identified; and being open to learning.

5.2.1 Session Content

Contracting: start point: prior to the commencement of the coaching sessions, each client created a set of goals and objectives for the coaching process. This initial contribution from the clients not only provided a starting point but also a framework for evaluation throughout the coaching relationship. The data suggests that this created a commitment on the part of the client in the initial stages which established a strong basis for the transfer of learning as the coaching progressed. **Client bringing content:** these initially identified goals and objectives could be varied by the clients whilst retaining the responsibility for establishing the framework for the session content. The data indicates that the more clients are in charge of the coaching session content, the more transfer of learning is enabled.

5.2.2 Active Learning

Colleague feedback: requires the client both to explicitly share their learning as well as practise their learning from the coaching back in the workplace. It is a judgement call by the client as to how and when to put this into effect, depending on the particular situation or set of relationships involved. For example, one client practised overtly with peers whilst another client started using coaching techniques with her direct reports. Another client covertly practised her learning with her line manager and another confessed to having "little secrets ... that nobody else sees". It is interesting to pause and reflect which might be more successful: covert or overt sharing of learning back in the workplace. In this research the data suggests that both help with the transfer of learning and that both are effective in their own way.

The feedback provider sessions provided a key process for obtaining colleague feedback on the learning from the coaching sessions. One feedback provider suggested that they carry on the role of feedback provider on a more regular basis, thereby creating a regular peer coaching opportunity. This was only an idea in this first cycle, ready for practising in the second cycle. Therefore there is no data at this stage that this facilitates the transfer of learning but it was identified as a change for monitoring in the second action research cycle.

On one occasion, the learning observed by a peer in a feedback provider session was not the client's intended learning. The data suggests that the addition of unintended learning transferring from the coaching sessions is positive and indicates that often we are not aware of the wide range of learning being transferred outside the coaching experience.

Transfer of learning measures identified: during a feedback provider session a customer identified some clear improvement measures: "you are happier in your job, your team are happier, your line manager's happier, and you know where you're going ... a more cohesive team that knows where they are going". This was interesting feedback for the client in how to evidence transfer of learning outside the coaching experience and reinforces the importance of peer feedback and support in the transfer of learning process.

Being open to learning: openness to learning was not psychometrically assessed in the research as the assumption was built in from the beginning that, if the clients were volunteering to be coached as part of a study researching the transfer and sustaining of learning, they would commit to being open to learning. This assumption was confirmed in a feedback provider session when the feedback provider observed that she had a "sense that they were open to learning, that they wanted to make the coaching work and wanted to be able to learn and change."

One client said at the preparatory stage, *ie* before the coaching sessions had started: "I see it as a way to learn and improve and help with my decision on my way forward as slightly lost at present ... I am positive and really looking forward to this opportunity." However, being open to learning is not always about positive reactions to the coaching process. One client said: "I found this questioning difficult, partly because of the lack of understanding of what this meant in practice and then looking at how I may manage this as I hadn't thought about it before". This client found being open to learning uncomfortable on this occasion, but in a later recording in her diary created her own model from this coaching experience to use in this situation in the workplace. In this example, being open to learning started the transfer of learning process but it felt uncomfortable before the learning transferred. Therefore, the experience of the transfer of learning process may be positive or uncomfortable.

5.3   Coach And Client Responsibilities

The data is suggesting that both the coach and the client have a responsibility for ensuring a successful coaching relationship in order to help the transfer of learning; although, in this first cycle, the coach's responsibility is active and the client's passive. However, the data is indicating that reflective learning is an active responsibility for both the coach and the client with a strong indication that this reflective learning helps the transfer of learning for the client.

Coaching relationship has five data themes: comfort, safety/confidentiality/trust, coach and client match, face-to-face, and external coach. There are four data themes in the category of reflective learning: reflective diaries completed by both the coach and the clients; feedback provider sessions led by the clients and observed by the coach/researcher; record-keeping by both coach and client; and coaching supervision for the coach.

5.3.1 Coaching Relationship

The data strongly indicates that the category of coaching relationship is key in terms of encouraging the transfer of learning. It also indicates that the coaching relationship is primarily the responsibility of the coach, and there is little data indicating that the client has any shared responsibility at this point in the research process. Although the data does suggest that the clients were not passive in the coaching relationship and therefore had a secondary responsibility during the first cycle. Boyce, Jackson and Neal (2010, p.917) found that in order to "support effective coaching outcomes", the coaching relationship has to be "a mutual responsibility between a coach and client ... the coach cannot accomplish the process alone."

Comfort: *a*s the coach, I put a great amount of effort into creating a comfortable relationship with the client. I had had a small amount of contact with each client in the research preparation stage (as described in Chapters 3 and 4) which had ensured an ethical and clear approach to working together in the study, and had also included a discussion about their individual coaching goals, aims and objectives. It was this discussion which triggered the commencement of the coaching relationship and it was then that I introduced discussions with each client about how I work as a coach.

One client observed that creating a comfortable relationship "takes a while to build up" which confirms the need for persistent effort over time by the coach; this statement also implies that the transfer of learning was not immediate. Whilst creating a comfortable relationship is a challenging and uncertain aspect of coaching, this was not a surprising element of the research data as it confirmed my anecdotal experience as a professional coach. However, the research diary process and coaching supervision (see Reflective Learning below) helped considerably in creating reflective learning opportunities for achieving a comfortable relationship with each client.

Safety/Confidentiality/Trust: the safe element of this theme links to a "sense of safety" as described by one client, in the context of confidentiality. One client described this as "very important" in the process and valued me being "explicit about confidentiality and potential conflicts". In this study a safe and confidential environment played an important role in the transfer of learning. However, trust is "a vital part" of creating a "valuable coaching

relationship", according to Gyllensten and Palmer (2007, p.171) and the data in this study confirms this. The data included a perspective on how trust in the coaching relationship is created. One client said: "how you came across put me at my ease". I reflected on this comment with my coaching supervisor to explore how this could be replicated across clients and we concluded that it is likely to be a combination of manner, interpersonal skills and language. Another client built up trust in a different way; they looked up my business website and spoke to me on the telephone before agreeing to meet with me. For her, this built a sense of professional credibility to take on the role of her coach and was another method of building trust prior to the commencement of the face-to-face relationship.

One client said at the preparatory stage:

> "Just talking with Janice as we went through things has already started my
> thinking process and helped me to answer things. So therefore talking through
> with someone independent who I know will keep confidence is very useful. My
> initial reaction when I met Janice last year was favourable and today's meeting has
> confirmed I feel able to trust and share with her which is a big thing for me. I do
> not trust people easily and pick people quite quickly from initial conversations and
> impressions. I also listen to what people say and how congruent I feel they are."

After one session, this same client reflected in her diary: "Talking through some of the issues and being given the chance to reflect in a safe environment has been of immense benefit to me." It seems that these face-to-face meetings prior to the commencement of the coaching built a foundation of trust from which learning was transferred later.

Boyce, Jackson and Neal (2010, p.914) in their research highlight the impact of trust on outcomes. They found that "relationship processes of rapport, trust and commitment positively predicted coaching program outcomes, including client and coach reactions, behavioral change, and coaching program results". This is also suggested by respondents in this study, showing a link between the element of trust in the relationship and the transfer of learning. However, whilst the individual elements are important, overall the data is suggesting that it is also the combination of safety, confidentiality and trust which enables the transfer of learning.

Coach and client match: the data suggests that matching criteria is only the starting point. One client commented that the "coach mustn't assume that the match is ok; they must use their intuition to assess this". This goes beyond the research of Boyce, Jackson and Neal (2010, p.914) who examined the impact of matching criteria in a leadership coaching programme and suggested that "complementary managerial and learning styles and relevant job-related credibility support the development of client-coach relationships and therefore positively impact leadership coaching programs". Although Boyce, Jackson and Neal (2010, p.926) do also go

on to say that "it is through the effect on the client-coach relationship that the match or fit between the coach and the client influences the coaching program success".

Face-to-face: models of e-coaching are appearing which do not involve face-to-face contact and telephone coaching has increased in popularity over the years. Noonan (2008 and 2011) points out the economic benefits of e-based personalised learning but goes on to say that there is "further value of using collaborative tools in a developmental context on a one-to-one basis" (2008, p.51), for example in coaching and mentoring. Although it appears that she is suggesting these are to be used alongside face-to-face sessions rather than replacing them. Cox and Dannahy (2005, p.39) explored e-relationships in coaching and mentoring and

> "suggest that the use of NVC [non-violent communication], with its focus on feelings and needs, encourages trusting personal relationships characterised by openness. The NVC process appeared to obviate many of the communication issues, such as silence and the affects of a limited sensory environment, that have seen to be restrictive in the development of online relationships."

However, this study only involves face-to-face work and, in terms of building up an effective relationship and the resultant transfer of learning, this was felt to be important. One client said: "once I met you I was ok". However, it is acknowledged that other types of interface were not involved in the study. Therefore there is no comparison to be made with alternative methods and general assumptions about face-to-face as a preferential process are not entirely possible to make, although there is a strong indication that this was important to the clients for their transfer of learning.

External coach: one client said that it "helps being completely outside". This links back to the idea of a safe and confidential environment described above and being external allows the coach to create an environment in which the client can be open and honest when discussing their learning needs. The clients' perception was that this external relationship, which facilitates openness and honesty, assisted with the transfer of their learning.

Wasylyshyn (2003) in her research on executive coaching looked specifically at the pros and cons of internal and external coaches. In looking at external coaches Wasylyshyn (2003, p.99) found that there was 100% positivity about "objectivity, confidentiality, breadth of experience (other companies), psychological expertise (better trained), no 'political agenda', trust and integrity". However, there was 76% negativity about "insufficient knowledge of the company, its culture, industry, key executives". Whilst Wasylyshyn's (2003) research is broader than the data found in this study on internal and external coaches, there are important similarities between their findings on confidentiality and trust in the coaching relationship and the findings in this research.

Bluckert (2005, p.336) further states that the coaching relationship is the "critical success factor in successful coaching outcomes" although the outcomes he is looking at are not specifically the transfer of learning. This study suggests that the quality of the coaching relationship directly links to whether or not the learning is transferred outside the coaching experience, specifically in the relationship areas outlined above. However, the clients were clear in this cycle that the relationship responsibility lies with the coach whilst acknowledging that they are not in a passive role.

5.3.2 Reflective Learning

The data suggests that reflective learning is just as important for the client as for the coach in encouraging the transfer of learning, in particular the reflective work completed with the research diary. One client observed that without this experience the "learning would be lost". The data also indicates that the coaching experience itself contributes "alternative ideas, raising areas for reflection", and the client through self-reflective processes provides feedback for themselves to make changes in the workplace. Coaching provides the opportunity for the client to reflect, to "check on changes, what is being done differently and identifying links across similar issues".

Reflective diaries: the research diary reflective work had two facets for me as the coach: recording reflections on my i-Phone immediately following the coaching session, and then further reflection a few days later when writing up the research diary. I always started by typing up the recordings on the i-Phone and then adding in further reflections at that later point. This mirrors the action research process by providing two cycles of reflection for each coaching session experience.

One client said at the preparatory stage, *ie* before the coaching sessions had started: "I felt the diary will be of real interest and use to me as a reflective tool and help with my learning", and this was confirmed to be the case in later reflections. This positive attitude towards reflective learning may have also had an impact on the transfer of learning.

Feedback provider sessions: one client said that "it gave me an opportunity to reflect on how I have consciously been changing my approach". This shift from unconscious to conscious learning enables the transfer of learning outside the coaching experience. Another client described it as a "reality check in terms of one's own self perception ... whether things you are doing actually are making any difference that's perceivable to anybody else as well". This external confirmation of transfer of learning was important in the transfer process; this is a direct example of where the research process has now merged with the coaching process.

The coaching process should enable a shift from unconscious to conscious learning. The addition of the feedback provider sessions into the process seemed to enable this to happen. As one client observed:

> "I really feel the feedback session was very useful as it gave me the opportunity to reflect on how I have consciously been changing my approach and also to gain feedback from [boss] on her view on this ... It gave me time to look at how far I have moved forward and where I need to do some more work ... It made me even more determined to get more out of what I do ...".

In addition, these sessions provided an opportunity to have a positive impact on internal organisational relationships through reflective learning. This was an unintended consequence of the research process.

Record-keeping: the data suggests that the most effective method is for both the coach and the client to take notes during the coaching session to support their specific responsibilities in the relationship and enable the transfer of learning. One client noted after her second session: "On reflection I should have taken notes at the time as there is so much now going around in my head and Janice agreed on this occasion that she would produce a brief summary. I will endeavour to make notes in future meetings to act as an aide memoire." When this client asked me if I would send her my notes of the session, I encouraged the client to take their own notes as well, because my experience suggests that client and coach take different notes and each person's notes are of most importance in terms of their role and responsibilities in the relationship.

Coaching supervision: took place once a month upon completion of one coaching session per client providing an opportunity to reflect on all the sessions in preparation for the next month of sessions. This additional opportunity to reflect with another coaching professional assisted with all identified categories and themes (Figure 5.1). For example, having the opportunity to reflect and receive constructive feedback on building effective coaching relationships, in order to enable transfer of learning for each individual client. Whilst the data reinforces the importance of coaching supervision, it also reinforces the need for the coach to be open to change in their professional practice through reflection and feedback.

Included in his model of expert –v- reflective practitioner Schon's (1991, p.300) idea is that "uncertainties [on the part of the professional practitioner] may be a source of learning for both them and their client". Throughout the first cycle it felt more like personal learning to enable me to perform to a high standard, but with the data collected its importance to the transfer of learning for the clients became apparent.

5.4   Summary of Categories and Themes Identified from the Data

Figure 5.1 below shows all the themes (listed under six identified categories) emerging from the data collected in action research cycle one, identified from the data as enabling the transfer of learning.

CATEGORIES					
COACH RESPONSIBILITIES		**CLIENT RESPONSIBILITIES**		**COACH AND CLIENT RESPONSIBILITIES**	
CLIENT CENTRED PROCESS	**ENABLING/ FACILITATING LEARNING**	**SESSION CONTENT**	**ACTIVE LEARNING**	**COACHING RELATIONSHIP**	**REFLECTIVE LEARNING**
THEMES					
Coach In Charge Of The Process	Encourage Practice Back In The Workplace	Contracting: Start Point	Colleague Feedback	Comfort	Reflective Diaries
Tailored Tools/ Techniques	Share Experience To Facilitate Learning	Client Bringing Content	Transfer Of Learning Measures Identified	Safety/ Confidentiality/ Trust	Feedback Provider Sessions
Challenge/ Support	Suspend Judgement		Being Open To Learning	Coach And Client Match	Record-Keeping
Client Context	Not Therapy			Face-To-Face	Coaching Supervision
Physical Environment	Lasting Impact Of Coach			External Coach	

Figure 5.1: First action research cycle – identified categories (6) and themes (24)

5.5   Comparison with the Initial Coaching Framework

The findings outlined in the chapter show that the three key facets of the initial coaching framework (the starting point for this cycle outlined in Chapter 4) have remained as part of the

emerging data, even though they have been developed in significantly greater detail. The three key facets are:

1. Keeping the focus on the needs of the client during preparation, the actual coaching session and follow-up. This has been expressed in the data more specifically in all of the five categories of the Coach's Responsibilities. For example, by using Tools and Techniques which are appropriate and suitable for each individual client, as well as understanding how they prefer to learn and the context in which they are operating as leaders. There is additional data in this study on what this means for the clients and how this element should be applied in practice. The "common factors approach" (Tallman and Bohart, 1999) acknowledges that the common factor is the client and this current study confirms the importance of focusing on the client and their individual needs in order to effect a transfer of learning.

2. Using evaluation methods such as reflective learning and learner feedback throughout the coaching relationship and at every session, to assist with enabling the client's personal development and improving the coaching practice. Reflective learning was found to be a significant data theme in the transfer of learning process but not just for the coach, but also for the client . I did seek learner feedback by means of a short questionnaire at the end of the three months of coaching sessions but the feedback through the research data collection processes (combined with the self reflection) was weighted much more importantly in the transfer of learning process.

3. Ensuring openness and transparency at all times with the individual about the delivery and progress of the coaching process. This was an important element of the responsibilities of the coach with the development of the coaching relationship.

5.6 Changes For Monitoring In The Second Action Research Cycle

The four main changes for monitoring in the second action research cycle are:

A. The importance of the coaching relationship, maintaining the safety and trust developed in the first cycle and building on that for the second cycle. This will be monitored through my reflective diary, coaching supervision and feedback from clients during coaching sessions.

B. In the coaching process, the key area of sharing experience to facilitate learning and developing this further into more of a 'coaching/consultancy' model. Clients will be encouraged to bring specific work projects/tasks to coaching sessions for coaching/consultancy purposes.

C. The clients were requested to identify someone in the workplace who could act as a constructive feedback provider during the next cycle and not just wait for the next feedback provider session at the end of the cycle. Three of the clients identified the person from their first feedback provider session (two line managers and one peer). The fourth client tentatively identified a different colleague, a fairly new customer with whom she needed to build an effective relationship. This would provide additional colleague feedback for the purpose of transferring learning back in the workplace.

D. Finally, the continuation of the collaborative responsibility element with both individual and shared responsibilities for the coach and clients. In order to enable this continuation, the same research data collection processes used in the first cycle will be used in the second cycle.

5.7 Summary Of Chapter

The data collected in the first cycle is entirely focused on the transfer of learning, there is no data suggesting that any sustainability of learning is evident at this point. However, this is unsurprising as the definition being applied in this study for sustainability of learning is learning sustained over time and this data has only been collected in the first few months of the action research process. It is the combination of the identified categories and themes, as well as the collaborative responsibility for both the coach and the client, which leads to the transfer of learning from the coaching sessions to outside the coaching experience.

The most significant result emanating from this first cycle is the unintended impact of the collaborative action research process. By its very definition researching collaboratively means a shared responsibility for the research process which was the case in this study, while acknowledging that accountability rests with me to write and deliver the doctoral thesis. Therefore, from the commencement of the research relationship with each of the clients, expectations of each other were clearly defined within a paradigm of collaborative responsibility and this could impact on the emergent coaching model, particularly because each of the collaborative researchers took their research responsibilities seriously.

This was an unplanned outcome, as I went into this research believing that a coaching model would emerge which focused solely on the coach's responsibility, particularly because the focus of the research is my own coaching practice and also because the initial coaching framework (the starting point for the action research described in Chapter 4) is entirely focused on the coach's responsibility.

De Haan, Culpin and Curd (2011, p.39) concluded in their research "that clients perceive the helpfulness of their coach almost indiscriminately across all possible coaching behaviours" and

believe that this offers "some support for the importance of so-called common factors in coaching". Common factors that make a difference are defined by De Haan (2008, p.237) as "the motivation and self-regulating ability of the coachee, the coaching relationship, and personal attributes of the coach". De Haan (2008) espouses that these general factors are present in every coaching relationship as opposed to specific coaching behaviours, models or techniques. The data from this action research cycle suggests a slightly different viewpoint in which the coaching relationship is one key element and the coaching process with a client centred focus contributing another key element.

In the next chapter I present the data collected from the second action research cycle including the results of monitoring the changes identified in the first cycle.

Chapter 6
Second Collaborative Action Research Cycle

This chapter presents the data collected from the second action research cycle which consisted of the final set of three one-to-one coaching sessions for each of the clients. The sources of data remain the same as in this first cycle: the research diaries completed by me and the clients; the research diary sharing sessions; the feedback provider sessions; and the critical analysis input from peer professional coach researchers who were external to the research. However, one client withdrew from this data collection cycle for serious personal health reasons so I was not able to hold one feedback provider session and one diary sharing session during this cycle. The collected data were analysed using thematic analysis (full details are in Chapter 3); categories and themes identified, and reviewed utilising both coaching theory and researcher reflexivity.

Reason and Bradbury (2006, p.1) describe action research as seeking to "bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people ...". This second cycle of collaborative action research continues with a theme of action and reflection, theory to practice, emanating from the coaching relationship and process, and which is focused on the learning needs identified by the clients.

The data in the chapter is presented in seven parts: part one outlines the coach responsibilities (client centred and enabling/facilitating learning); part two, the client responsibilities (session content and active learning); part three, the shared coach and client responsibilities (coaching relationship and reflective learning); part four outlines the categories and themes which were identified from the data; part five, some specific examples of transferred and sustained learning; part six compares the categories and themes identified in this cycle with the first cycle; and, finally, part seven describes the changes which will be monitored in the third cycle.

6.1   Coach Responsibilities

There are two categories of data set out below: client centred and enabling/facilitating learning, with six and five data themes respectively. These categories also appeared in the first cycle but there are three new themes in the category of client centred and one new theme in the category of enabling/facilitating learning identified from the data in this second cycle.

6.1.1 Client Centred Process

In this second action research cycle a new expression was used by one of the clients. She described client centred as the coach "tailoring" the sessions to the client, "a more free flowing approach, tailoring as you go along" to aid the transfer of learning. Of the six data themes identified in the second action research cycle, three themes are the same as in the first cycle: coach in charge of the process, tailored tools/techniques and challenge/support; and three of the themes are new in this cycle: setting goals, sounding board and friendly support. However, two themes from the first cycle do not appear in the second cycle: client context and physical environment.

Of the three themes that are the same across both the first and second cycles, for the **coach in charge of the process** one client said that it is "seen as the coach's role to be in charge of the process, makes it more challenging, happy with this" which is similar to the comments in the first cycle. One difference in the second cycle is that there was a comment about the potential hindering of transfer of learning. The data indicates that the client centred process, of which the coach is in charge, needs to include tailoring the timing of the sessions to the needs of the client. Unfortunately, even though this feedback was provided in time for the timings to be changed, this change was not possible because of the need to adhere strictly to the research timetable. Some flexibility was possible but two of the clients (both the more recently appointed senior managers) would have preferred much greater flexibility with a delay of a few months for the last couple of coaching sessions. They were anticipating some new experiences in their work timetables and they wanted the final two coaching sessions to coincide with these new experiences to help support their learning.

In respect of the **tailored tools/techniques**, whilst different tools and techniques were used in the second cycle, they were still being selected by the coach on the basis of the needs of individual clients, as in the first cycle. Some examples of new tools and techniques utilised in the second cycle are: role play, putting oneself in someone else's shoes, new metaphors and the use of hypothetical scenarios.

The role play was a particularly effective tool as it immediately improved the client's confidence. The role play was an interview, with the coach interviewing the client in a particular area of expertise which the client felt was not a strong area of competence for her. The client said about this experience in her diary: "Whilst some of the coaching in terms of [the role play] was a little uncomfortable, essentially it made me realise that I was under-estimating and under-valuing my knowledge in this area. ... I felt much more confident following the coaching in this ...". The client provided specific examples of this learning transferring back into the workplace,

particularly with regard to her increased confidence in managing a direct report and the contribution she made to their specialist area of expertise.

The continuing use of metaphors for one client in this cycle continued to be highly significant in the transfer and sustainability of her learning. They became the language of communication between the coach and the client in the learning process, as well as in her reflective learning. For example, the use of a 'playing poker' metaphor to help the client develop political acumen, sustained throughout the second cycle. The client said in her reflective diary: "Cards – pairs or full flush, has helped me decide what I play at what time". Another example of developing political acumen is using a 'battles and wars' metaphor which a client said helped her to "decide how I take things forward or leave things." The data suggests that the important factors are that the individual client found metaphors useful for her learning and the choice of metaphors strongly resonated with her, encouraging the transfer and sustainability of learning.

An example of a visual image technique used with one client to help her think more strategically than operationally was recorded in her diary as follows: "Janice suggested taking a helicopter view, taking myself out of the wood and look down on it instead. This is helpful as it enables me to take a step back and determine where I want the [service] to go in the future." The use of this visual image in a coaching session enabled the client to transfer the learning from that session back into her day-to-day working life.

A technique where there was little or no impact was the use of theories in coaching sessions, one client was interested in utilising theories as part of the coaching process but there is no data to suggest that the use of theories as techniques were enabling the transfer of learning. I am reminded of the work of Honey and Mumford (1992) on Learning Styles and this may be because the clients in this study were not predominantly theorists.

Challenge/support continued to exist in the data as being important for the transfer of learning. There is an example of the coach challenging resistance to a course of action being taken by the client whilst allowing them to decide for herself about what different action to take in the future. The client listened to the challenge, options were discussed in the coaching session (the support aspect), the client decided what to do differently outside the session (after reflection) and she then took that action (this was recorded in her diary).

This cycle saw three new data themes emerging under the category of client centred: setting goals, sounding board and friendly support. The first one is **setting goals** as part of coaching process. One client said that the sessions "need to have goals to work, could be goals in the moment or agreed in advance". When contracting with the clients prior to the first cycle, they identified goals, objectives and business benefits for their sessions. However, I emphasised at the time that this was a framework which would be reviewed as the coaching sessions

progressed, it was not necessarily fixed for the duration of the coaching relationship. The second is the coach being a **sounding board** for the client. The data suggests that by providing an environment in which the client can bounce ideas off the coach and the coach shows common sense when the client is frustrated with the situation, the transfer of learning is helped.

Finally, the third new data theme is the coach providing **friendly support**. The context of this emergent theme is one client who suffered a personal tragedy during the coaching relationship. This situation raised the issue of professional boundaries, particularly in terms of the coach as a professional and not the role of a friend, and also in terms of a coach not being a counsellor. Both of these boundaries proved to be really important in this situation which required empathy. However, what was important to the client was that the empathy came with friendliness, *ie* not cold professional empathy. Hence her description of "friendly support" and the link she has made with transfer of learning.

6.1.2 Enabling/Facilitating Learning

In the second action research cycle, the data continues to indicate that enabling and facilitating learning in the coaching sessions encourages the transfer of learning outside the sessions. Of the five data themes emanating from the second action research cycle, four are the same as in the first action research cycle: encourage practice back in the workplace; share experience to facilitate learning; not therapy; and lasting impact of coach. The fifth data theme of coaching consultancy was introduced as a change for action and reflection in the first cycle. Suspending judgement appeared as a data theme in this category in the first cycle but does not appear in the second cycle.

With regard to **encourage practice back in the workplace**, real work situations were brought by the clients to the coaching sessions for in-depth analysis and discussion. Throughout these discussions, I kept the focus in the coaching on what the client will do either the same or differently when she went back to work. By keeping the responsibility firmly with the client for taking action following the coaching discussion, the client had the opportunity during the discussion to work through the practicalities of implementation back in the workplace. The coaching discussion provided options for the client to take away, reflect upon and then take the action she felt was appropriate. One client said that she had become "much clearer how to deal with the situation after the coaching discussion". Another client observed the coach as teacher: "teaching you how to think differently ... teaching you how to brainstorm out of a problem".

However, there was one example in this theme of how the coaching has not encouraged practice back in the workplace. The discussion was about how to have developmental

conversations with her manager. The scenario was a challenging boss/direct report relationship in which the client, as the direct report, did not feel that she received sufficient developmental support from her line manager to succeed in her new leadership role. The client did not feel confident enough to facilitate such a discussion with her line manager and this reflected a general lack of confidence in her own leadership role. In reflective discussion with the client, we drew the conclusion that this was a case for a longer term coaching relationship as the leader is fairly new into post. Confidence can take time to build for some individuals, and a longer term coaching relationship would assist with building this confidence over time.

Therefore, encouraging practice back in the workplace is not sufficient in itself to enable the transfer of learning; it is also about the client's readiness to take this action (Kretzschmar, 2010). It is also about the appropriate support back in the workplace by the line manager to enable this learning although, in this situation, the line manager had already been identified as a barrier to the transfer of learning. Another barrier to the transfer of learning in this theme was the "lack of opportunity to transfer learning from the coaching session around business skills" but the client said that she has the session notes to refer back to in the future. Another client said that there had been "limited experience to practise learning". These comments make the distinction between lack of opportunity and people or situations acting as barriers to transfer of learning.

Another continuing data theme in the second cycle is **share experience to facilitate learning**. One client found it helpful for the coach to share her experience to help develop her business writing skills. These were very practical discussions, as opposed to theoretical, based on real examples from my historical working practice. So, similar to the theme above, the discussions were very practically oriented. Another example was a client benefitting from my experience of managing a team and she recorded in her diary: "I may not have taken this approach prior to the coaching. ... I am really pleased that the coaching has enabled me to realise this and put it into practice."

Even though **not therapy** is also a continuing data theme, it emerged in a different way in this cycle from my reflections as the coach, rather than the reflections of the clients. One client had an on-going issue about how she saw herself having an attitude in certain situations and the coach tried to encourage her to change this attitude. However, whilst the problem was acknowledged by the client, she could not make this change in her attitude. My reflection at the end of the relationship is that it was possibly a deep psychological issue either requiring more time to resolve or beyond the role of the coach. During the discussions it felt as though there was a psychological barrier to this change emanating from an experience outside the workplace which may require some therapeutic support to resolve. This view is supported by Bluckert (2005, p.96) when he states that: "Coaching and therapy share some similarities but in

significant ways are also quite different. Typically the intention is different, with coaching strongly grounded in work effectiveness and performance rather than wider life issues."

The concept of "Janice in my head" came up again in this cycle with the same client. This has sustained itself throughout the second cycle continuing "to act as a reminder, a conductor of learning" thereby continuing the theme of the **lasting impact of coach.** In addition, this cycle saw a new lasting impact of coach example, as a role model for the clients. One client said that "being coached is enabling me to coach [back in the workplace]".

Coaching consultancy is a change put in place following the data analysis in the first action research cycle, and this was explicitly offered to all clients in the second cycle as part of the coaching process on a needs-led basis. The new element of this approach was to be more directive, more advisory, and more instructional on specific topics brought to the session by the clients. Some examples of specific topics brought to the session are: change management projects in their own departments; a corporate strategy which she was in the process of drafting; and the coach provided help with structuring a work report, presenting an alternative structure which the client found helpful. One client said that the coach suggesting a different way had enabled the client to be clearer and provided "a springboard to find" her own way.

One client said that this addition of consultancy support "reduces the isolation" of the client "with support provided in a safe, confidential environment". However, another client said that she did not "notice any more emphasis" being applied on the consultancy aspect, and the primary role of the coach continued to be on coaching not advising. A specific comment regarding transfer of learning appeared in a reflective diary:

> "Having talked about this throughout coaching, it was really helpful in terms of setting out my report, trying to focus on what I needed to cover and, more importantly, being aware of the political aspects involved. I knew this would be political ... and through the coaching I felt in a better position to understand the politics involved. I was more able to position my business case ... and was able to use the learning from the coaching to ensure all these facets were brought into the equation."

In relation to the provision of advice, one client observed that "suggestion is stronger than advice" and it was helpful that the coach "used a broad range of examples with differing slants on things, using different experiences from different environments". One client said that the coach "provided more advice than instruction". Rogers (2008) states that HR professionals are familiar with giving advice in their role but this statement appears to make assumptions about how advice is provided by HR professionals and the word *giving* implies an instructional focus.

As an HR professional, I know that advice can be provided with a developmental, rather than an instructional, focus depending on approach, style and circumstance.

However, there is one example of the coach instructing rather than facilitating in this second cycle. This occurred outside a coaching session in a research diary sharing session. I would not have even considered issuing an instruction as a coach, whereas in my researcher role I was not restricted by being in coaching mode and I said to the client: "perhaps you should just take responsibility". The client stated that this had a "huge impact" on her learning and this learning sustained for over four months. This was a real catalyst for the client. Therefore this experience goes against the Rogers' (2008) philosophy of not advising on an instructional basis and reinforces again the need to tailor the coaching approach to the client.

In Goldsmith (2000, p.72), Schein states that "coaching is a subset of consultation. If coaching is to be successful, the coach must be able, like a consultant, to create a helping relationship with his or her client." Therefore, Schein, who is looking at coaching from a consultancy perspective, sees a relationship between the two roles. He further states (2000, p.72) that "the coach should have the ability to move easily among the roles of process consultant, content expert, and diagnostician/prescriber." This supports the client centred data outlined above with the coach using a range of processes to suit the client needs.

6.2   Client Responsibilities

In the second action research cycle, the data continues to strongly indicate the importance of the clients taking responsibility alongside the coach in helping to transfer and sustain learning from the coaching sessions to outside the coaching experience. There are two categories of data: session content and active learning.

Session content links with the data collected indicating that the coach is in charge of the process (see above), and has one theme of the client being in charge of the content of coaching sessions. These dual roles continue to create a collaborative coaching experience from which learning can be transferred and sustained. The colleague feedback theme in the active learning category of data include the identification of work colleagues to provide the feedback, which is one of the changes put in place from the first action research cycle.

6.2.1 Session Content

In the first cycle, this category had two data themes one of which is not relevant for the second cycle as it related to the contracting process prior to the commencement of the coaching sessions. With regard to the second data theme identified in the first cycle, **client bringing**

content, this remains in place in the second cycle as important to the transfer of learning although it was mentioned much less in this second cycle.

6.2.2 Active Learning

In the first cycle this category had three data themes, with one of these remaining in the second cycle – colleague feedback. The remaining themes of transfer of learning measures identified and being open to learning did not arise in the second cycle. In addition, there are two new themes in the second cycle linked to the transfer and sustainability of learning outside the coaching experience: client takes responsibility for their learning; and reflective practitioner.

With regard to the one remaining theme, **colleague feedback** was identified as an area for monitoring change in the second cycle. All four clients were asked to identify a colleague who could provide feedback about the learning they were transferring and sustaining back in the workplace. Two identified their line managers, one identified a peer and the other identified a customer. One client reflected that:

> "The feedback relationship has continued on an ad hoc basis, spending time on joint reflection with both my feedback provider and another peer colleague. This has strengthened the relationship with both of them ... I would formalise this again in future coaching relationships. Makes the learning longer lasting. If a new relationship, might be uncomfortable asking for feedback so flexibility in choosing the feedback provider is important."

With regard to the **client takes responsibility for their learning** and deciding what action to take, there is a specific example of one client stating that she had to "take responsibility for [her] own learning and be open to learning" in order for transfer and sustainability of learning to occur. The client reflected that this required a change of attitude not just a change in behaviour. As a result of participating in the coaching, she had managed to change an attitude which had been embedded for several years, *ie* that her lack of job satisfaction was the responsibility of the organisation, her boss and her work colleagues.

In respect of **reflective practitioner**, this relates to the importance of reflecting on discussions held during the coaching sessions. During this second cycle one client had a "very difficult personal situation" and identified that this deep emotional trauma "enabled reflective learning". She said that she "did some of the best work during this period, it's really concentrated my mind". In our reflective discussion on this point, we observed that this emotional trauma enhanced her ability to reflect and learn at a much deeper level than previously.

6.3   Coach and Client Shared Responsibilities

In the second action research cycle, the data continues to suggest that the coach and the client have a shared responsibility for ensuring the transfer of learning and, in addition in this second cycle, the sustainability of learning. There continue to be two categories of data in this area of shared responsibility: coaching relationship and reflective learning. There were five data themes in the coaching relationship category in the first cycle with only one of these emerging in the second cycle: external coach; and three additional themes: honest dialogue, primary role as coach, and keeping in touch outside coaching sessions. For reflective learning, the same four themes were identified in this cycle as in the first cycle: reflective diaries, feedback provider sessions, record-keeping and coaching supervision.

6.3.1 Coaching Relationship

External coach came up again in the second cycle with one client saying that "having a coach who is not part of the organisation is helpful". However, none of the clients had experience of either an internal or external coach before this experience. **Honest dialogue** in this second cycle was honesty from the client as opposed to the openness and transparency of the coach in the initial coaching framework (see Chapter 4). One client said that she "found it helpful being honest in the relationship". This was a shift from the first cycle in which the data on the coaching relationship focused entirely on the responsibilities of the coach.

At the beginning of the research process, I identified the ethical challenges of the dual role of coach and researcher (see Chapter 3). However, over time these challenges diminished as the clients saw my **primary role as coach** and this was confirmed by a client who said: "coach is always in coaching role even when researching". This appears to have happened because of the nature of coaching and its commonalities with collaborative research. For example, creating an equal relationship based on trust and confidentiality applies to both coaching and collaborative research and, therefore, the boundaries between the two were much more blurred than originally anticipated.

With regard to **keeping in touch outside coaching sessions,** at the contracting stage this was covered specifically in the arrangements whereby significant contact in between sessions was not agreed as part of the contract, but it was recognised that it might happen and special arrangements would be made in these circumstances. However, one client said that "a bit of keeping touch by email and phone in between sessions" was helpful, although she found this more useful at the beginning than the end, and then again when faced with extreme difficulties at work. This keeping in touch, albeit minor, helped to sustain the learning that had transferred from the coaching sessions.

The effect of coaching on the transfer and sustainability of learning

6.3.2 Reflective Learning

There were four data themes in the reflective learning category in the first cycle and the same were identified in the second cycle: reflective diaries, feedback provider sessions, record-keeping and coaching supervision.

The **reflective diaries** continue to be important for both the clients and the coach. One client stated that the reflective notes recorded outside of the coaching session:

> "registers the learning, using the notes to refer back to which creates helpful space between the experience and referring back to the notes to determine action, the reflective notes then become a list of things to do with a date on it, it works for me really, really, really well ... not done before the coaching sessions and definitely came out of the coaching sessions."

As the coach, the research diaries were just as useful to me in this second cycle providing an opportunity to reflect immediately following the coaching session and then to reflect again on these reflections a few days later. This 'double reflection' helps to embed the learning.

The data theme of **feedback provider sessions** is even stronger in the second cycle than in the first in terms of transfer of learning, with a range of comments from the clients as follows:

- "provides the opportunity for explicit conversations"
- "brings issues into the conscious awareness"
- "enabling new ways of behaving in the relationship with the feedback provider"
- "sessions go into more depth than other one-to-one workplace discussions"
- "coaching from line manager during feedback provider sessions" which was not a part of their usual working relationship
- "makes a very good contribution and provides good feedback"

I checked specifically with the clients and the feedback providers whether or not these sessions would be helped or hindered if facilitated by the coach. One response from a client and their feedback provider was: "helpful to have someone to check back about what is being discussed to prevent getting pulled off to other topics, keeps the focus otherwise easy to go off at a tangent, helps to bring the discussion back to a more reflective process". However, this view was not consistent across the clients, which again suggests that this should be decided upon depending on the individual client's needs.

With regard to **record-keeping** in the second cycle, one client reflected that "taking notes during the coaching sessions helps to get the learning into the brain, something to look back on, useful for reflection". A different client felt that the research diary reflective notes were more

helpful: she said that these notes "register the learning" and that she did not do this before the coaching sessions started so she had no previous experience. One client stated in her diary: "I need to go back to my coaching notes to remind myself about it and put it into practice more as it doesn't come naturally to me."

Coaching supervision continues to be an important aspect of the coach's reflective learning. In this cycle, supervision provided the opportunity to discuss the closing of the coaching relationships, which was particularly challenging because of the need to stop the coaching sessions (because of the research process) and the continuing researcher relationship with the clients. This opportunity to have a confidential discussion of the options was invaluable.

6.4   Categories and Themes Identified from the Data

Figure 6.1 below shows all the categories and themes emerging from the data collected in action research cycle two, identified from the data as enabling the transfer and sustainability of learning. The categories of data are the same as those identified in the first cycle.

CATEGORIES					
COACH RESPONSIBILITIES		**CLIENT RESPONSIBILITIES**		**COACH AND CLIENT RESPONSIBILITIES**	
CLIENT CENTRED PROCESS	**ENABLING/ FACILITATING LEARNING**	**SESSION CONTENT**	**ACTIVE LEARNING**	**COACHING RELATIONSHIP**	**REFLECTIVE LEARNING**
THEMES					
Coach In Charge Of The Process	Encourage Practice Back In The Workplace	Client Bringing Content	Colleague Feedback	External Coach	Reflective Diaries
Tailored Tools/ Techniques	Share Experience To Facilitate Learning		Client Takes Responsibility For Their Learning	Honest Dialogue	Feedback Provider Sessions
Challenge/ Support	Not Therapy		Reflective Practitioner	Primary Role As Coach	Record-Keeping
Setting Goals	Lasting Impact Of Coach			Keeping In Touch Outside Coaching Sessions	Coaching Supervision
Sounding Board	Coaching Consultancy				
Friendly Support					

Figure 6.1: Second action research cycle – identified categories (6) and themes (23)

6.5   Transfer and Sustainability of Learning

During this second cycle, there were a range of specific examples of both transfer and sustainability of learning and these are outlined below. Also included are a couple of examples of where learning was not transferred. One member of the Critical Analysis Group described identifying the transfer and sustainability of learning in coaching as "the Holy Grail" as, in her

experience, clients often found the coaching sessions enjoyable but returned to work and did not transfer any learning.

The examples of **transfer of learning** were all intended areas of learning, *ie* they were content brought by the clients to the coaching sessions. The content covered the full range of work relationships (peer, direct report, boss and customer), and a wide range of areas of learning depending on the identified needs of the client. Some general statements from the clients about this transfer of learning are:

- "I know I have changed"
- Analysing "each little thing" and then taking the learning into different situations – "that's been a massive eye opener for me"
- "I work in far more different ways now than I ever did"

In contrast, there was a practical suggestion about using a particular tool in the workplace to help the client develop strategic leadership skills but she did not follow-up on this action within the timetable of this data collection process. However, she did say that she would keep it in her notes and follow-up later.

There were numerous examples of **sustained learning** in the data from this second cycle:

- "I was absolutely different to a year previous"
- Overall increase in competence and confidence, " a lot of positive moving forward"
- "continual improvement identified ... changes sustained ... putting into practice over time"
- Learning has sustained over a period of ten months and still used by the client and "better at reflecting", "I look at things far more deeply before I react" which was sustained even through a major emotional experience at work, "sustained performance improvement ... over a period of about 12 months"
- "stuck with the coaching" despite various stresses at work
- "I know I have retained information and reused it so much, and will continue to do so. It will also support me as I move forward ..."

In contrast, there was one client who was clear that she needed a different number of coaching sessions over a different timeline to help improve the sustainability of learning. She suggested that the model should be "ten sessions over a period of eighteen months, takes persistent coaching, six sessions too brief to make something sustainable". This emphasises the importance of tailoring the number of sessions and the regularity of the sessions to the client. This same client said that it is a "bit early to tell if new members of the team have settled in

better". In addition, she identified that her confidence had diminished in the area of marketing herself and dealing with her boss.

There was also one negative comment in a reflective diary: "This is the political acumen side of things which I don't really feel I have got a handle on even though we talked about it throughout the coaching." There are both positive and negative comments in her diary on this point which suggests that the sustainability was inconsistent.

6.6   Comparison with Data Identified in the First Action Research Cycle

This second cycle had two action research change interventions as an explicit part of the process which were identified from the first cycle: coaching consultancy (the responsibility of the coach); and identified work colleagues to provide constructive feedback for the clients (the responsibility of the client). Both of these are reported on in this chapter.

In addition, there was the monitoring of the importance of the coaching relationship: specifically, maintaining the safety and trust developed in the first cycle and building on that for the second cycle. The second cycle saw this category not only retain its importance in the model but also become more of a shared responsibility.

Finally, the continuation of the collaborative responsibility element, facilitated primarily by the research data collection processes, which continues to enable the transfer of learning and, in addition in this cycle, the sustainability of learning outside the coaching experience.

Overall, the data continues to illustrate that the research process remains highly influential in creating an environment of collaboration in the coaching process, and that without the research diary and feedback provider elements in the model, the transfer and sustainability would likely be reduced in both quantity and quality.

Specifically, the emerging categories and themes continue to include both individual and shared responsibilities for both the coach and the client. With regard to the shared responsibilities, the coaching relationship is now equally shared in this second cycle, and the reflective learning continues to be a theme which both coach and client have to prioritise. The coach's individual responsibilities are entirely focused on the coaching process, and the client's responsibilities are focused on both the coaching session content and also their responsibilities for actively learning from the coaching experience.

6.7 Changes for Monitoring in the Third Action Research Cycle

The significant change in the third and final action research cycle is that there are no coaching sessions taking place. The six sessions for each client have now been completed. Therefore, monitoring this change through action and reflection in this final cycle will rely heavily on the clients until the research data collection processes at the end of the cycle.

6.8 Summary of Chapter

The main change that has occurred from the action, change and reflection in this second cycle is that there is clear evidence of both transfer as well as sustainability of learning. In the next chapter I set out the findings from the third and final action research cycle including the results of monitoring and evaluating the changes identified in the second cycle.

Chapter 7
Third Collaborative Action Research Cycle
and
Summary of Findings

The chapter presents the data collected from the third action research cycle which had no coaching sessions and was entirely based on the client experience back in the workplace. The sources of data for the third cycle are: the research diaries completed by the clients, the feedback provider sessions, and a discussion with me about their research diaries. As there were no coaching sessions in the third cycle I did not complete an action research diary. The critical analysis group was replaced with a group client session as a final data collection process.

One client did not complete her diary in the third cycle (and this is covered under reflective learning in the chapter) and the client who had to withdraw towards the end of the previous cycle was able to participate again. We were able to have a diary sharing discussion and she was able to provide feedback on the areas covered during the group client session which she was unable to attend. The collected data were analysed using thematic analysis (full details are in Chapter 3) categories and themes identified, and reviewed utilising both coaching theory and researcher reflexivity.

McNiff and Whitehead (2006, pp.8-9) describe activities in the action research process as "observe, reflect, act, evaluate, modify, move in new directions". During the previous two action research cycles the concepts from the emerging data have developed and the third cycle continues the developmental process. The data in the chapter is presented in five parts: part one outlines the coach responsibilities (client centred and enabling/facilitating learning); part two, the client responsibilities (active learning and reflective learning); part three outlines the categories and themes which were identified from the data; part four, some specific examples of transferred and sustained learning; and, finally, part five compares the categories and themes identified in the third cycle with the first and second cycles. This is the final action research cycle and the chapter concludes with a summary of findings across the three action research cycles.

7.1   Coach Responsibilities

Whilst there were no coaching sessions in the third cycle, the responsibilities of the coach identified in the previous two cycles continued to have an impact on both the previously identified categories of client centred and enabling/facilitating learning remaining. However,

there were fewer data themes identified in these two categories compared with previous cycles: two were identified for client centred (tailored tools/techniques and client context); and three for enabling/facilitating learning (share experience to facilitate learning, not therapy and lasting impact of coach). These are described below.

For the category of **Client Centred Process,** the data still strongly indicates that tailoring the number and timing of the coaching sessions to each individual client is important for the sustainability of learning as well as being a strong indication of how the client context can also sometimes hinder the transfer of learning. With regard to **tailored tools/techniques**, the data shows that tools and techniques tailored for individual clients during the coaching sessions continued to be utilised by the clients and that they helped the clients sustain their learning in their roles at work. One example is the use of metaphors which, for one client, was very significant in enabling her transfer and sustainability of learning: "I now think along those lines to help work things around ... I don't think they will go now, they are ingrained." During the third cycle, there was evidence for the first time of the metaphors helping the transfer of learning into her private life not just in the workplace, for example the 'playing poker' metaphor in developing negotiation skills, and the 'fighting battles not wars' metaphors for keeping a focus on the bigger picture.

Client Context has not been highlighted in the data since the first action research cycle when it was presented in a positive way. However, in the third cycle this was raised as something that hindered the transfer of learning with one client describing a situation at work in which she is "not always allowed to manage things the way" she wanted to. The organisation expecting her to deliver in a particular way disabled the development of an authentic leadership style. It also reduced the confidence of the client and encouraged her to see herself negatively.

Similar to the client centred process category, the data in the category of **Enabling/Facilitating Learning,** indicates themes that are helping the transfer and sustainability of learning as well as hindrances, of which there are three from the third action research cycle: share experience to facilitate learning; not therapy; and lasting impact of coach.

The data continues to show that the clients are still utilising the experience shared by the coach and the **share experience to facilitate learning** category is continuing to have an impact beyond the coaching sessions, *ie* it is sustaining. This reinforces the position that the primary role of the coach is to facilitate learning in the coaching sessions. In the third cycle, the data theme of **not therapy** arose again with the same client and the same issue as in the second cycle. This appears to be further confirmation that coaching was not the solution for a seemingly deep psychological issue which is preventing the transfer of learning from taking place. "I don't know I ever will be ... I think I will always be like it ... I can understand the concept ... it made sense ... there is no incentive to change ... I can't see what I would change

... maybe I have always been like it ... can't remember being any different ... can I really change ...". Coaching has failed to enable the client to identify and remove the barriers to this alternative proposition and she is still resisting change despite several discussions during the coaching sessions. In my professional experience, this would indicate that a deeper psychological process may need to be explored by the client, *ie* therapy, psychoanalysis.

The **lasting impact of coach** and the concept of "Janice in my head" continue in the third cycle with a new expression surfacing from one client: "coach as a conductor of learning", the coaching influenced the client to question "what would Janice do?" which was particularly evident in the data regarding the sustaining of learning in the cycle.

7.2 Client Responsibilities

In the third cycle the data continues to indicate the strong impact of active learning and reflective learning for the client. Active learning has one data theme: reflective practitioner. Reflective learning has three themes set out below which emerged from the cycle: reflective diaries, feedback provider sessions, and record-keeping.

In the category of **Active Learning**, specifically for the theme of **reflective practitioner,** one client has found it useful having a "reflective buddy to continue the reflective learning work". During the third cycle, another client sought feedback from her direct reports which she reflected is a new way of behaving since the coaching experience. One client has developed as a reflective practitioner since the coaching and research experience, she said: "I do reflect on what people say far more than before and I do ask people for feedback more than I have done in the past." "It is now natural to me to write down, think and evaluate." For the category of **Reflective Learning**, specifically in the theme of **reflective diaries,** one client did not complete her diary during the third cycle although a diary discussion session did take place to ensure that this was explored. The client reflected that she had experienced a large increase in workload as a result of the decline in the market economy as well as some major internal issues during the cycle period. So, even though some significant experiences had taken place during this period of time, she had not found the time or prioritised the recording of them. She explained that:

> "it's easier to put it off when you have other pressing things, and it is one of those
> things where other things need more pressing attention, you can put this off, then
> things build up and it is much more of a struggle ... when it is not scheduled it gets
> missed ... haven't got a deadline ... if it was an absolute, you had to do it ... it is
> more laborious to write down my reflections, but this is deeper reflection ...".

For this client, there are no peers in the organisation also doing reflective learning work and she appears to be consciously reflecting in action about experiences to help decision-making or identify what to do differently the next time. I asked her what she would do about reflective learning in future coaching experiences. She stated:

> "if I had a choice whether to write it down or not, no I probably wouldn't ... I find writing notes during the coaching sessions more helpful ... would have to be a requirement for me to write it down ... do run the risk you forget about your previous experiences ... makes my life harder, it is another thing to do, if I had more time to do it I may be more inclined to make notes ... if I had the choice I would not do the reflective notes ...".

I have two observations about the discussion: it provided an important opportunity for reflection on significant experiences outside the coaching session, and it could be argued that the reflective element of the coaching discussion is important for the transfer and sustainability of learning, not just the completion of the research diary itself; and the data suggests that it is the act of reflective learning which helps the transfer and sustainability of learning, which could take the form of a reflective diary or reflecting in action in the workplace.

In the third cycle, the data continues to indicate the value of the **feedback provider sessions** in helping to sustain the learning from the coaching and previous feedback provider sessions. One client reflected in her diary discussion session about her relationship with her boss

> "by having those feedback provider sessions she is actually taking note, I was prepared to change and now she has changed and she genuinely does want to make it [the relationship] work ... from the first time we had the feedback provider session the change was dramatic, it gave her the opportunity to raise things that she hadn't been brave enough to raise ... she was playing the avoidance game and then she felt that this environment was safe enough to do that".

The data also indicates there is a positive impact of holding these sessions every few months as part of an agreed way of working with work colleagues. One of the client's feedback providers said that they "probably wouldn't otherwise happen" in the same way as "it's not so easy to stand back" in normal workplace sessions. However, the data also suggests that the feedback provider sessions have influenced the agenda for these usual workplace sessions with topics and issues discussed during the feedback provider sessions appearing on the agenda of meetings outside the research process.

The value of these sessions encouraged the participants to commit to continue with them after the research process has been completed. One client said that she "should make the effort

every three months" to have further reflective sessions, to "be honest with each other". She was concerned that these sessions could get lost because of busy jobs but was clear that "we'd lose something". As part of the feedback provider process, I questioned the participants about whether or not they thought the coach should facilitate these sessions, going back to the *Real Time Coaching Model* (Rogers, 2008, pp.199-203) on which these sessions were based. There continued to be a mix of opinion on this although, predominantly, they still feel that there is a preference to have a facilitator, someone who can keep them on track in the discussion, called "a referee" by one feedback provider. One client observed that it keeps the focus on reflective learning and feedback. However, the issue of cost arose which might make this prohibitive, unless it is part of the cost of the coaching sessions. An alternative view was that it was important to have the coach involved initially but that "they have moved forward" and could "still have a similar conversation without the coach being there", they "would feel able to challenge each other" now.

With regard to **record-keeping**, one client said that she had a preference towards the notes she made during the coaching sessions rather than the diary notes. She felt that these notes were more of a helpful reminder about what she had learned which encouraged her learning to be sustained. However, another client said that the process of completing the research diary enabled a transfer of learning and that the notes continued to provide an opportunity to reflect, and both encouraged her learning to be sustained.

7.3 Categories and Themes Identified from the Data

Figure 7.1 below shows all the categories and themes emerging from the data collected in action research cycle three, which were identified from the data as enabling the transfer and sustainability of learning. There are only four categories of data identified in the third cycle with no coaching relationship or session content categories as in the previous two cycles, which is unsurprising as there were no coaching sessions in the cycle.

CATEGORIES			
COACH RESPONSIBILITIES		**CLIENT RESPONSIBILITIES**	
CLIENT CENTRED PROCESS	**ENABLING/ FACILITATING LEARNING**	**ACTIVE LEARNING**	**REFLECTIVE LEARNING**
THEMES			
Tailored Tools/ Techniques	Share Experience To Facilitate Learning	Reflective Practitioner	Reflective Diaries
Client Context	Not Therapy		Feedback Provider Sessions
	Lasting Impact Of Coach		Record-Keeping

Figure 7.1: Third action research cycle – identified categories (4) and themes (9)

7.4 Transfer And Sustainability Of Learning

The focus of the study is the transfer and sustainability of learning from the coaching sessions to outside the coaching experience and this focus was consistent throughout the data collection and analysis process. During the third cycle, the data provided an increased number of specific examples of both transfer and sustainability of learning and these are outlined below. Also included is an example of where learning was not transferred.

The **transfer of learning** examples include both intended and unintended examples of transfer of learning. Intended transfer of learning is learning from session content brought by the clients with no deviation from that specific content during the coaching discussions, and the examples almost exactly reflect the learning needs identified by the clients prior to the coaching sessions (see Figure 4.2 in Chapter 4). For example, relationship management, with one client observing transfer of a practical solution to managing her boss in one-to-one sessions, "it was good"; and another client identifying improved political acumen, "used very successfully ... much more aware of … some of the politics". Another example, operational/strategic skills, with one client trying hard to be both strategic and operational and a feedback provider said: "you make a valiant effort". Another client received peer feedback about not getting drawn into the day-to-

day work. In addition, clients transferred learning when managing their direct reports, with one client observing a change in behaviour with regard to performance management of direct reports, resulting in evidence of improved performance against SLA targets and customer feedback about the team being more responsive; and another client improved at showing direct reports that they are valued by having a specific section in one-to-one sessions about all the good work they have done that month.

There was also data collected on a more general competency of leadership role/style/traits with one client receiving customer feedback about signs of developing as a manager – "it's the sign of a developing manager that somebody doesn't feel threatened by someone that comes in with similar qualifications and experience but just takes them on board because you know that you'll be able to utilise their skills". Another client had peer feedback about improving in developing leadership style and approach – "I've seen the improvement in the team that your style of management has brought about". Finally, one client reflected that she had increased in confidence as a leader which "enabled me to grow a bit more in confidence and in the job, and feel a bit more comfortable"; another client stated that they were "amazed how the coaching has helped me work so more positively with my weaknesses ... while still prodding and slowly achieving results".

In contrast, unintended transfer of learning is learning which happens in the moment during coaching sessions. The learning does not directly stem from the session content brought by the client to the session, but surfaces during the coaching discussion deviating away from the session content. For example, one client was tailoring her leadership approach to particular direct reports with a positive response. Another client said that prior to the coaching, she would not have even applied for a job in the restructure, and "there would have been no point. It is unbelievable how ****** has changed her approach to me" and "I have also changed my approach". She also stated that the coaching work completed on dealing with emotional and rational responses to challenging situations had been utilised during this stressful restructure with the client saying: "I really do work through things" which was not the case prior to the coaching sessions. On the contrary, there is an example of no change in behaviour following an agreement in a previous feedback provider session. There was an agreement between the client and her line manager (the feedback provider) that there was a lack of clarity about what was expected the first time around so this was clarified between them and noted for future action by the client.

In the third cycle there is an example of learning not transferring: one client said that an identified learning need had not been met because she had not been in the job long enough:

> "maybe I needed more time in the job to get my head around it, but the longer I have been in the job the more I have got a handle on it ... by experience and time in the job I am getting a handle on it ... long way to go ... it may have been too soon in the job ... but was always aware it was an area of the job I needed to learn more about".

This confirms two findings from previous cycles: the importance of the client bringing the session content; and the value of being client centred and adjusting the timing of the sessions to suit her situation. With regard to the session content, the client felt that it may have been too early to discuss her particular identified learning need (even though she introduced the topic to the sessions) as she realised that she was not in a position to practice on a regular basis back in the workplace, which links to the timing of the sessions. As was stated in the previous cycle, she would have preferred to have the last couple of sessions further apart with more than a gap of one month in between, with the client reflecting that the first three coaching sessions seemed too short and too far apart. This confirms the need for regular review by the coach and client as part of the reflective process to ensure that the timing and content of the coaching sessions remains suitable to the needs of the client. It seems that coaching is following a model of counselling, having six monthly sessions and maybe this is less suitable to a developmental relationship where the client's learning needs are the focus of the sessions.

The data also provided a range of specific examples of **sustainability of learning** dating back to the coaching sessions which were completed in the second cycle. Sustainability of learning was particularly prevalent for the client who was experiencing a difficult restructure process. She reflected that an imposed change of job and structure had made this incredibly hard to sustain but she was convinced that it was the learning from the coaching which enabled her to cope; she stated that "Improved self-awareness and self- control have been sustained even through this difficult time of the restructure." However, she also observed that there had been a slight reversal of learning during a difficult restructure meeting when the client did not have the necessary information to complete her allocated task, but she reverted within twenty-four hours once she had the necessary information to hand. Her sustained learning was confirmed with positive feedback from participants provided by her feedback provider. The same client also said that changing the way they [she and a colleague] work together is "even better than I could ever anticipate"; despite all the difficult challenges of the restructure both the feedback provider and the client agreed that the trust between them had been maintained.

Other clients reflected on their sustained learning during the third cycle: one client said that if a topic is high on the business agenda back at work that provides a lot of opportunity for the client

to practise and therefore sustain her learning; another client stated that the coaching had facilitated growing confidence which had been sustained since the coaching sessions ended; similarly another client observed that the reflective learning processes had been sustained for one year, encouraging her to "analyse how other people manage other teams and manage people". The data also suggests that the coaching has encouraged clients to coach their direct reports; one client said that "getting them to think through problems before asking for a solution" was now a feature of her leadership style.

Overall, there is clear evidence of sustainability of learning even though there were no coaching sessions experienced by clients during the third cycle. Sustainability in the future can only be the subject of conjecture. However one client reflected that there had been a change from the original transfer of learning which initially felt like a change of behaviour but the feelings had to follow, now "feeling more comfortable" and "things have changed totally". This sense of complete change might predict future sustainability of learning.

7.5   Group Data Collection Session

The session was held about one month after the completion of the final action research cycle. The aim of the session was to create a new sharing environment in which clients could discuss and reflect on their coaching experiences and the transfer and sustainability of learning from those sessions. Three clients participated in the group session and the fourth client contributed individually. They were asked to reflect on their learning from the coaching experience and with that learning in mind decide what they would commission from a new coach in the future. The scenario included the fact that the aim of this new coaching would be to transfer and sustain learning and this should be borne in mind when they provide their thoughts and ideas. They were asked to provide information on: the coaching relationship (what the clients expect of the coach as well as their responsibility); the coaching process (for example, tools or techniques); and any other factors which might help to transfer or sustain learning from the coaching experience. I interwove into the discussion as many of the categories and themes emerging from the data as the discussion allowed.

Initially, they discussed how they decided to be coached by me and participate in the study. Two of the clients had known me in a non-coaching capacity prior to the coaching relationship as their organisation was an existing client of mine and therefore they were familiar with my experience and expertise, whereas the other two organisations and clients were not known to me prior to the research. My HR background was seen as important because it implied an understanding of people and people management. One client said that she just saw me as a "person coach", *ie* someone who understood human beings and was not just process driven. My experience as a leader, up to director level, was also seen as important. However, the

general opinion was not altered that this was an opportunity for development for all the clients confirming the view that they all anticipated learning from the coaching.

With regard to the coaching relationship, I asked a question about how they weighted the coaching relationship as opposed to the coaching process. Generally, they felt that a good relationship was fundamental to enabling the transfer and sustainability of learning and agreed that experience is not enough (albeit important); it has to be the right person for them. It was the trust that was most important, that information would not go back to third parties which raised the issue of possible conflicts of interest where we have people in our networks who we both know. It was agreed that the coach needs to be very explicit about this early on in the relationship, being clear about any boundaries with regard to relationships in common. My HR background was helpful in this regard as I am used to compartmentalising data, not prone to gossiping, and have the ability to boundary relationships. They agreed that these boundaries would be much more difficult for an internal coach. The guiding principle for me, as a coach, is that everything I know from that coaching relationship is confidential. This discussion had not arisen in any of the one-to-one data collection sessions and so the group session achieved its objective of creating a different environment in which individuals were able to raise different issues. They all agreed that the relationship has to be open, that there can be no barriers otherwise "you might hold yourself back and not be true to yourself".

The clients agreed that the coaching process is key: "it has to work". Some interesting observations were made: "you may need advice or you may need telling" – facilitation is not enough; "another time a suggestion gets you thinking and later on the reality comes in and gets you going ... once you go back over it, the suggestion springs to mind" – the coach is facilitating clients to be resourceful back in the workplace; "I expect to learn from Janice's experience, this enables me to look at things in a different way, for me this was very beneficial, suggestions about how to do things differently" – the coach facilitating clients to find their own way; "it would be easier not to be challenged but how much would you benefit from that" – the coach facilitating learning through challenge. I discussed with them the specific issue of challenge by commenting that "sometimes people are not in a good emotional place to be challenged, I usually check out as my natural tendency is to challenge". They agreed that "questioning is not enough on its own, need some suggestions as well, then find your own way, a combination is useful ... it is about how confident you are in the first place, you need some suggestions to help increase your confidence"; "need challenge to get out of your comfort zone, take them to the cliff edge but not so far that you go off the cliff". This confirms the category of data of **challenge/support**.

With regard to feedback, one client said (and the group agreed):"I wish I could empathise like Janice and say things in such a lovely way that helps people develop ... you deliver the

message in a very positive way, nice supportive way of putting it". I shared during the session that my ability:

> "comes from my desire to help people, I am not there for myself, I am totally there for the individual ... be totally open, help that person learn and develop ... I do believe it as well ... If I haven't got any positive feedback to give, I try to get them to think of a more positive thing, so it is not just words".

Most of the discussions during the session were about sustaining the learning which they described as "about time and not slipping back". They agreed that the note-taking both in the sessions and after the sessions was useful for future reference otherwise they would "forget and not sustain [their] learning". There was a discussion about how best to take the notes and one client said that she found it best to write the diary with a pen. "Janice in my head" came up again in this session and another client said that the question "Would Janice do that?" still came up in her head. A client reminded herself of a metaphor used in one of her coaching sessions, being the conductor of an orchestra rather than a member of the orchestra. This metaphor was still helping the client in her leadership role.

I raised the issue of whether enough work had been done on self-coaching which had featured as a discussion in the final session for each client. One client said that clients "need confidence to self coach" and that may be true of some areas of learning but not others; another client felt that more coaching would be needed to do this really well (these clients are the less experienced leaders). The other more experienced leaders felt as though they were already self-coaching and the coaching experience had helped to reinforce and develop that for them. They all agreed that this was important for the sustainability of learning.

Overall, most of the issues raised had been raised by the clients individually which suggests that they felt comfortable in raising issues with me on an individual basis. The session was dominated by the learning which had sustained since the coaching sessions began just over one year ago, with a great deal of repetition of how that learning had been sustained as a result of the coaching experience.

7.6   Comparison with Data Identified in the First and Second Action Research Cycles

The third cycle is unique in the study because there were no coaching sessions for the clients but the clients continued to use their reflective diaries throughout the cycle as part of the research process. As there were no coaching sessions in the third cycle, it is unsurprising that

the coach's individual responsibility diminished considerably (although interesting that there were some categories and themes for the coach in the cycle); however, the shared responsibility disappeared completely. Unsurprisingly, the client's responsibility remained similar with the emphasis on client responsibility unique to the third cycle.

In addition, there were more negatives with regard to the transfer and sustainability of learning in the third cycle than any other. Despite this, there was considerable evidence of both transfer and sustainability of learning during the third cycle, confirming some of the previously identified categories of data and data themes. The impact of the coaching had lasted not only beyond the coaching sessions but also over a period of up to thirteen months. There is continuing evidence in the third cycle of both transfer as well as the sustainability of learning from the coaching sessions to outside that experience.

7.7   Summary of Findings

The three collaborative action research cycles were completed over a period of fourteen months, including the group data collection session described above. The six categories emanating from the data remained constant from cycle one, and the thirty-three data themes accumulated from each of the three cycles (see Figure 7.2 below). It is clear from the emerging data across the three cycles, that it is the combination of all six categories (and the thirty-three themes) which over time enable the transfer and sustainability of learning; there does not appear to be any weighting of a specific category or theme.

Overall, one observation is that in the first cycle only transfer of learning occurred; in the second cycle, both transfer and sustainability of learning occurred with transfer being dominant; and in the third cycle sustainability of learning was more dominant than transfer of learning. With the sustainability of learning becoming more of a feature over time, this confirms the definition of sustainability of learning used in the study. In addition, there was a significant increase in the data of examples of both transfer and sustainability of learning in the third cycle which could be explained by an accumulation of the learning from the coaching sessions which encourages the transfer and sustainability of learning to increase over time. Therefore, sufficient time to transfer and sustain learning from the coaching sessions appears to be important in the findings.

With regard to the categories of data, all the clients agreed that the **coaching relationship** was important with three of them saying it was of prime importance. This category is identified as the responsibility of both the coach and the client (see Figure 7.2 below) which agrees with Boyce, Jackson and Neal (2010, p.917) who found that, in order to "support effective coaching outcomes", the coaching relationship has to be "a mutual responsibility between a coach and client ..." Although this research differs slightly to the work of De Haan (2008) in which he

espouses general factors that are present in every coaching relationship as opposed to specific coaching behaviours, models or techniques. The data from this research suggests that the coaching relationship is one key element and the coaching process with a client centred focus contributing another key element.

The data suggests that the clients and I were more aware of the coaching relationship during the first cycle than the second cycle which makes sense as this was when the relationship was being formed and, during the first cycle, the coach seemed to have primary responsibility to ensure a successful relationship. Once the relationship was established, the clients began to take more of a shared responsibility. A case could be made that it is harder to see a link between the coaching relationship and the transfer and sustainability of learning in the same way as with the coaching process categories (**client centred process, enabling/facilitating learning, session content**) because the relationship is less tangible. However, the data suggests that the coaching relationship created the learning environment in which the coaching process could flourish. As with the coaching process categories, the **active learning** category of data is similarly tangible, albeit different, because the processes take place outside the coaching experience. With the client taking responsibility to actively learn away from the coaching sessions, transfer and sustainability of learning is enabled. The weighting of the categories of **client centred process, enabling/facilitating learning, session content and active learning**, did not change over time, they were important throughout each of the three cycles.

This equal weighting over time also applied to the **reflective learning** category of data, the contribution of reflective learning in relation to transfer and sustainability of learning was clear from the first cycle through to the third. **Reflective learning** was encouraged by the research data collection processes: reflective diaries, feedback provider sessions and coaching supervision which all became data themes. The reflective diaries were based on both Kolb's (1984) *Experiential Learning Cycle* and Mezirow's (1990, 2000) *Transformative Learning* theory. The fourth data theme of record keeping (see Figure 7.1 below) was not part of the research process. The influence of the research process was unexpected and important in the transfer and sustainability of learning from the coaching experience.

The data themes outlined in Figure 7.2 are covered in detail in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, with each of them being important for the coach and the client when applying the categories of data in the coaching relationship and process. In line with the **client centred process** category of data, these themes should be tailored on an individual basis to each client in every coaching for leaders session.

CATEGORIES					
COACH RESPONSIBILITIES		**CLIENT RESPONSIBILITIES**		**COACH AND CLIENT RESPONSIBILITIES**	
CLIENT CENTRED PROCESS	ENABLING/ FACILITATING LEARNING	SESSION CONTENT	ACTIVE LEARNING	COACHING RELATIONSHIP	REFLECTIVE LEARNING
THEMES					
Coach In Charge Of The Process	Encourage Practice Back In The Workplace	Contracting: Start Point	Colleague Feedback	Comfort	Reflective Diaries
Tailored Tools/ Techniques	Share Experience To Facilitate Learning	Client Bringing Content	Transfer Of Learning Measures Identified	Safety/ Confidentiality/ Trust	Feedback Provider Sessions
Challenge/ Support	Suspend Judgement		Being Open To Learning	Coach And Client Match	Record-Keeping
Client Context	Not Therapy		Client Takes Responsibility For Their Learning	Face-To-Face	Coaching Supervision
Physical Environment	Lasting Impact Of Coach		Reflective Practitioner	External Coach	
Setting Goals	Coaching Consultancy			Honest Dialogue	
Sounding Board				Primary Role As Coach	
Friendly Support				Keeping In Touch Outside Coaching Sessions	

Figure 7.2: Three action research cycles – identified categories (6) and themes (33)

Figure 7.3 below illustrates which categories of data were identified in each of the three cycles with a notable consistency across the cycles. One additional point to those made above regarding the **coaching relationship**, is that only the clients experienced reflective learning in the third cycle. There was no opportunity in the third cycle for the coach's reflective learning to enable the clients' transfer and sustainability of learning because there were no coaching sessions.

CYCLE	COACH RESPONSIBILITIES		CLIENT RESPONSIBILITIES		COACH AND CLIENT RESPONSIBILITIES	
	Client Centred Process	Enabling/ Facilitating Learning	Session Content	Active Learning	Coaching Relationship	Reflective Learning
1ST CYCLE	√	√	√	√	√	√
2ND CYCLE	√	√	√	√	√	√
3RD CYCLE	√	√	√	√		√ (client only)

Figure 7.3: Comparison of categories of data across three action research cycles

One consistent feature across the three cycles is that there are no examples of what might be described as 'negative learning', *ie* learning something which could be politically unacceptable or possibly damaging to the organisation. My observation is that this is about my experience as a leader combined with my ability as a coach to facilitate clients' learning about taking actions which could be unacceptable or damaging to them or their organisations. It is also possible that this is strengthened by the fact that some of my experience is specifically in the same sector as the clients which may have prevented any 'negative learning' being transferred or sustained. Another consistent feature is the element of individual and shared responsibility which is important for maximising the transfer and sustainability of learning from the coaching experience to outside that experience. Chapter 8 outlines how this collaboration influenced the emergent coaching model.

Chapter 8
Conclusion

The concluding chapter summarises the whole study including a presentation of the main findings, the methodological contribution, the coaching model which has emerged from the research data, and the conclusions for coaching practice as well as the implications for future coaching research. The study researches my own coaching practice in collaboration with four leaders from the UK voluntary sector over a period of thirteen months, specifically to explore what helps/hinders the transfer and sustainability of learning in coaching for leaders.

There are two main findings from the study: coaching can help the transfer and sustainability of learning; and both the coach and the client have individual and shared responsibilities in the transfer and sustainability of learning from the coaching sessions to outside that experience. The Collaborative Action Coaching for Leaders model (see Figure 8.1 below) illustrates how coaching can help the transfer and sustainability of learning from the coaching sessions, highlighting the importance of both individual and shared responsibility. The model was created using thematic analysis after each of the three action research cycles. The data were analysed, categories and themes were created, albeit not all the same categories and themes emerged from each of the cycles (see Chapters 5, 6 and 7). The final set of six categories became the model with a clear illustration in Figure 8.1 as to whether the coach or the client or both are responsible for that category. The themes for each of these categories are detailed in Figure 7.2 in Chapter 7.

The concept and language of collaborative action emerged from the influence of the research methodology, with the application of the components of collaborative action research influencing the means by which the learning was transferred and sustained. Specifically, the reflective research diaries and the feedback provider sessions had a profound impact on the clients' transfer and sustainability of learning; these are both themes under the category of **reflective learning** which is a shared coach and client responsibility. The reflective learning practised in the study followed Kolb's (1984) experiential learning model with both coach and client not just reflecting on learning but also doing something differently as a result. Not only recording the reflective learning of experiences but also discussing the reflections, has enabled the transfer and sustainability of learning from the coaching experience. Law, Ireland and Hussain (2007, p.202) recognise that clients "gain from having time to think, reflect and review their learning" and the study confirms this view.

Collaborative action is reflected in that both individual and shared responsibilities exist in the model. For coaches individually, the positive or negative effect of the coaching relies entirely on an ability to be **client centred** in their approach which was described by one client as "client

tailoring". The ability to tailor the coaching approach to the individual client occurs almost entirely in the moment, as opposed to any advance preparation. Also important to the transfer and sustainability of learning is the coach's ability to enable and facilitate the learning of the client. This **enabling/facilitating learning** utilises the coach's experience in a way that encourages clients to make their own decisions about how they will apply the learning outside the coaching experience.

Figure 8.1: Transferring and sustaining learning through coaching: a collaborative action coaching model for coaching leaders

For clients individually, the positive or negative effect of the coaching relies entirely on an ability to ensure that the coaching **session content** reflects their required areas of learning which needs advance preparation and continual review on the part of the clients. Also important to the transfer and sustainability of learning is for the client to practise **active learning** which includes a willingness on their part to encourage and receive feedback from colleagues at work which

requires a proactive and open approach to their learning; and being open to transfer and sustain learning from the coaching sessions back in the workplace which requires focus and tenacity.

For both coaches and clients, there is recognition that at the beginning of the first action research cycle and the initial stage of the coaching the coach had primary responsibility for the **coaching relationship**. However, as the sessions progressed and the coaching relationship developed the responsibility became shared with both parties having similar responsibility to ensure that the relationship is effective in encouraging the transfer and sustainability of learning.

The **reflective learning** category in Figure 8.1 includes a theme of coaching supervision (see Figure 7.2 in Chapter 7) which could be seen more as a coach responsibility than a shared responsibility with the client, but it is the overall shared responsibility for reflective learning which is most important to the transfer and sustainability of learning, with coaching supervision representing one element. The link between coaching supervision and the transfer and sustainability of learning is certainly more tenuous than the link between the reflective diaries completed by the clients and the transfer and sustainability of learning. It is more of an indirect link because the coach reflects on the coaching relationship and process for all clients during the supervision process, and the learning emanating from these discussions is transferred by the coach into those relationships and processes to encourage the transfer and sustainability of learning. This indirect link relies on a transfer and sustainability of learning by the coach from supervision into the coaching sessions. The study does not include any analysis of the coach's transfer and sustainability of learning but acknowledges the contribution this learning makes to enable the transfer and sustainability of learning for the clients.

In the group data collection session (see Chapters 3 and 7), we hypothesised about the clients' sustainability of learning in the future and compared my own experience of being coached a few years ago. We concluded that it is possible that the more profound the learning experience the more likely it is to sustain over a longer period of time. Perhaps less life-changing learning just becomes more natural, *ie* it is not recognised, it just becomes part of day-to-day behaviour and approach.

Whilst the model has a positive focus of 'helping factors', the study did identify that coaching can hinder, albeit to a much lesser extent, the transfer and sustainability of learning from the coaching experience, although the hindrances are found to be almost entirely confirmation of the 'helping factors' identified from the research process. The main feature which hindered the transfer and sustainability of additional learning was the fact that the coach was not able to delay any of the coaching sessions as the research timetable dictated that they be held within a specific period of time. This was of particular importance to the more newly appointed clients, who felt that they would like to delay a couple of the coaching sessions in order to wait for certain new or different experiences at work, whilst the more experienced leaders did not find it

a hindrance, which confirms the need for a **client centred process** as in the Collaborative Action Coaching for Leaders model.

The other identified hindrance was some lack of opportunity for practising of learning back in the workplace which was partly due to the clients not bringing current content to the coaching sessions, partly due to the lack of opportunity in their organisational context, and partly due to the session timing issue in the paragraph above. The session content is the responsibility of the client; the opportunities to practise back in the workplace are more in the control of the client than an external coach but may not always be possible to engineer back in the workplace; and the timing of the sessions is the responsibility of the coach. The 'helping factors' in the Collaborative Action Coaching for Leaders model significantly reduce possible hindrances to the transfer and sustainability of learning which, it could be maintained, is because there is a strong emphasis on both the coach and the client taking responsibility.

By focusing on the responsibilities required of both the coach and the client (individually and shared), the majority of hindrances are dealt with through the coaching relationship and process itself, rather than expecting others outside the coaching process and relationship to take responsibility for any hindrance to the transfer and sustainability of learning. With the centre of attention on taking responsibility, a positive environment for the transfer and sustainability of learning from the coaching experience was created. The findings and conclusions from the study are overwhelmingly positive which, in part, could be associated with the emphasis on taking responsibility encouraged by the collaborative action research methodology, but it could also be argued that other factors may have impacted on the mainly positive outcomes of the study. For example, my belief that coaching enables the transfer and sustainability of learning, especially as the study is researching my coaching practice, or the positive coaching relationships developed with the collaborative researchers. Further research could explore the impact of the coach's beliefs on the coaching outcomes; however, the coaching relationship is already a key 'helping factor' in the Collaborative Action Coaching for Leaders model.

Unlike the literature on coaching and transfer of learning (Hannah, 2004; Allan, 2007; Styhre and Josephson, 2007; and Stewart *et al.* 2008b), the study focuses specifically on transfer and sustainability of learning as outcomes of the coaching experience. The Collaborative Action Coaching for Leaders model details both coaching relationship and coaching process factors which combine to enable the transfer and sustainability of learning. This goes some way to meeting Stewart *et al.'s* (2008b) identified need for coaching research of examining factors beyond the coach and client relationship. However, further research needs to be conducted to expand the focus beyond my coaching practice and clients who are leaders in the UK voluntary sector. The Collaborative Action Coaching for Leaders model provides a good starting point against which other coaching activities could be explored through research.

8.1   Methodological Contribution

The collaborative action research process was specifically designed for the study in that it not only drew on existing components of collaborative action research in research methodology literature, but it also created a new component of feedback provider sessions which was inspired by a coaching model (Rogers, 2008) in its design (see Chapter 3). It could be contended that this revised approach to collaborative action research is only suitable for coaching research because of the use of a coaching model in its design. Alternatively, it could be viewed as helpful for research into other formal learning and development methodology or in any research which is exploring the impact of particular relationships or processes, for example a line management relationship. However, despite the positive contribution to research methodology, there are lessons to be learned from the implementation of the whole research design.

Herr and Anderson (2005, p.69) describe the action research process as "Designing the Plane While Flying It" and this study was no different in that stages of re-design were necessary during the research process (see Chapter 3). One of the areas of re-design was the addition of a Critical Analysis Group at the end of both cycle one and two. These groups (different people both times) were helpful and challenging simultaneously: helpful because they provided good feedback on the emerging categories of data and data themes (which eventually formed the Collaborative Action Research Coaching for Leaders model) from people who were outside the collaborative action research process but were experienced coaching practitioner/researchers; challenging because it was difficult in a short space of time to bring the members of the groups to a sufficient level of understanding about my research to enable a high level of critical analysis. The key areas of learning were the selection of participants and the process of the critical analysis group discussion.

With regard to the selection of participants, it would have been preferable to involve coaching practitioners who had direct experience of doctoral level research in coaching which might have improved the quality of the public scrutiny process, although two of the contributors did achieve a distinction at masters level in coaching and mentoring. This would have been a challenge to achieve with such a relatively small community of doctoral level coaching researchers based in the UK, but the community is growing each year and therefore this should be considered by other researchers in a similar position in the future.

In respect of the group discussion process, one solution might have been to extend the time of the session from half a day to a whole day but, undoubtedly, this would have made it more difficult to find participants willing to give up such an amount of time. Again, with a growing community of doctoral researchers it may be possible in the future. At the start of both

sessions, I presented an outline of the research study and the specific categories and themes emerging from the action research cycle, with time for questions which took about one hour of a three-hour session. Perhaps a more detailed presentation might have helped but that would, of course, decrease the time for discussion. However, I would not want these lessons learned to deviate from the important point that good feedback from peer professionals was obtained, enhancing both my reflective work and the analysis of the data which helped to create the Collaborative Action Coaching for Leaders model.

8.2   Comparison of the Initial Coaching Framework and the Collaborative Action Coaching for Leaders Model

The collaborative action research process commenced with the initial coaching framework as outlined in Chapter 4. As the study is researching my own coaching practice, it is likely that the coaching model emanating from the data would bear some relationship with the initial coaching framework. In comparing the two, the following two similarities are immediately apparent: the emphasis on a client centred approach, and the inclusion of reflective learning. However, there are key differences within these two areas of similarity.

I went into the research with a view of coaching that it enabled and facilitated learning but that it was not appropriate to advise clients during the coaching sessions, which is in accord with the opinion of Rogers (2008). I took this issue to coaching supervision on more than one occasion to determine my professional stand on this, using the research experience specifically to inform these reflections. The Collaborative Action Coaching for Leaders model in Figure 8.1 clearly indicates the need to enable and facilitate learning but that could be either through the sharing of experience or specifically through coaching consultancy (see the data themes in Figure 7.2 in Chapter 7 above), depending on what is needed and what will work best for the individual client to enable them to transfer and sustain the learning. There was an expectation from my clients that I would share my experience with them during the coaching sessions, as my relevant experience was one of the reasons they selected me as their coach. It felt unprofessional, therefore, not to share my learning and it became more about how I shared my experience in order to help the client find their own way rather than advocating to clients that there is one right way. This is a difficult road to tread as the coach can easily put a doubt in the client's mind when sharing experiences that they are doing something wrong. I conclude that advice based on experience sometimes has a place in a coaching session, depending on the needs of the client, otherwise the coach is not being client centred in their approach which has been shown to be important in the transfer and sustainability of learning. The experience has initiated a philosophical shift for me as a coach in that client centred can include a coaching consultancy approach which, prior to the research experience, I was adamantly against. Whilst enabling

and facilitating learning appears to be suitable to achieving the transfer and sustainability of learning, further research is required into the role of the coach, particularly in regard to the appropriate emphasis on the coaching consultancy aspect of the role.

Another key difference is my responsibility for reflective learning. Prior to the research I did not do any immediate reflections from the coaching sessions nor did I do any in-depth written reflections. The research has shown the potency of this deeper reflective work on the transfer and sustainability of learning for the client and is now a feature of my coaching practice.

The overall difference is the fact that the initial coaching framework outlines the responsibilities of the coach and the Collaborative Action Coaching for Leaders model outlines the responsibilities of both the coach and the client, including shared responsibilities. In addition, the initial coaching framework had quality coaching as an outcome from the coaching, whereas the Collaborative Action Coaching for Leaders model has transfer and sustainability of learning as outcomes. Therefore, the addition of client responsibilities and the change in focus to the transfer and sustainability of learning has caused major changes from the initial coaching framework.

8.3   Implications for Coaching Research and Practice

Chapter 2 outlined a clearly identified gap in the body of knowledge with regard to coaching and the transfer and sustainability of learning in the external, stand-alone, one-to-one coaching relationship with leaders in a business environment. The study helps to fill this gap and adds to the empirical research in the professional field, by focusing on what actually happens in the coaching experience to enable the transfer and sustainability of learning. The literature appears to be politically motivated towards proving to the business world that coaching has a good return on investment, and the study is values motivated - exploring what facilitates the transfer and sustainability of learning from the coaching experience to help both the individual and the organisations for which they work.

The study augments the research of Stewart *et al*. (2008b) although their suggestions for further research were more psychological than learning orientated, for example, individual motivation. The study also complements the seminal work of Olivero, Bane and Kopelman (1997) which acknowledges the importance of a "safe, personalized environment" (1997, p.461). Both these elements are reflected in the Collaborative Action Coaching for Leaders model with safety identified as one part of a theme for both the coach and client; and personalized environment is reflected in the Client Centred Process category which is the coach's responsibility. With regard to sustainability of learning, this study builds on the work of Wasylyshyn (2003) and Wasylyshyn, Gronsky and Haas (2006) and Smith, Oosten and Boyatzis (2009) by focusing on

the contribution of both the coach and the person being coached rather than simply focusing on the contribution and competence of the coach.

Law, Ireland and Hussain (2007) in their book argue that both the coach and the person being coached have to be actively engaged in learning with their learning process of "input, means and outcomes" (2007, p.53), which resonates with the findings from this study. This bears some similarity to data emerging from the research, for example, *Input* could be the session content brought by the clients, *Means* could be the coach enabling/facilitating learning, and *Outcomes* could be the identified transfer of learning from the coaching experience. The concept of collaboration in coaching is not entirely new (Stern, 2004; Natale and Diamante, 2005; and Law, Ireland and Hussain, 2007). However, this study looks specifically at the collaborative coaching relationship and processes required of both coach and client, as detailed in the Collaborative Action Coaching for Leaders model.

However, despite the positive contributions the study makes to the existing body of knowledge, it is clear that further research is required, at the very least to deal with the limitations and delimitations of the study. A delimitation which narrowed the scope of the study is that it took place in the environment of the UK voluntary sector only. In addition, all the clients come from the same sector and all from large voluntary organisations. Unfortunately, the two clients who expressed an interest but were unable to take part in the research were from the same sector in much smaller voluntary organisations. As a result, further research needs to be conducted in the UK voluntary sector and other sectors as well as a range of both large and small organisations, in order to assess if the sector or size has any positive or negative impact on the transfer and sustainability of learning from the coaching experience.

A limitation affecting the scope of the study which I could not control is that it would have been useful to develop the study to a fourth cycle. However, the commitments of the participants did not allow for an extra cycle within the research timetable. A fourth cycle would have been a duplicate of the third cycle (Figure 3.1 in Chapter 3) in terms of research process, but with an extended period within which the clients would be experiencing either sustaining or not sustaining their learning from the coaching sessions, thereby extending the longitudinal nature of the study and enhancing the data on sustainability of learning.

Also, further research could be conducted on other factors which emerged during the research data collection but were not included in the model as there was no evidence of transfer or sustainability of learning from these factors. There was the factor of the line manager of one of the clients being coached simultaneously by two different coaches during the period of the study. The line manager was also the feedback provider and the simultaneous coaching took place during the first and second action research cycles but not the third. There was a sense from the line manager that the transfer of learning "would take longer" without the element of

simultaneous coaching. However, the client felt that the line manager's coaching had not had a great impact, not helped by the fact that the line manager did not share anything that came out of the coaching sessions. This appears to confirm the importance of reflective learning in the transfer of learning process, but it also acknowledges that this element was not specifically researched in the study. Simultaneous coaching of line manager and direct report (with different coaches) could be the subject of new research (there does not appear to be any current published research covering this aspect of coaching) to determine if such an element helps or hinders the transfer and sustainability of learning.

The ethical considerations have been paramount for me in the study, on two levels: ethical practice for me as a coach/researcher; and in regard to the issue raised in Chapter 1 about ethical professional conduct with regard to coaching in the UK voluntary sector, specifically about ensuring that the investment of charitable funds in coaching results in something valuable for the leader being coached. The ethical considerations regarding the conduct of the study have been present consistently. This is a challenge in a study of such a collaborative nature in which all participants have a voice, with the researcher having the dual role of coach. However, this is the type of challenge which professional coaches have to cope with all the time when coaching leaders, so learning was transferred by me as the coach into the researcher role. Value in the research is placed on the transfer and sustainability of learning from the coaching experience and positive results have emerged with the Collaborative Action Coaching for Leaders model which encourages both the transfer and sustainability of learning. As a result of the research, professional coaches have a model which could help their clients to transfer and sustain their learning outside the coaching experience and show that the investment made in that coaching is worthwhile.

With regard to the contribution to coaching practice, one conclusion relates to the time needed for learning to transfer and sustain from the coaching experience, and that coaching is not a speedy solution for leaders who are dealing with complex issues on a day-to-day basis. Leaders need time to reflect on their learning, time to experiment with their learning outside the coaching experience, and then more time to reflect on their learning. Of course, the study assumes that coaching is about learning and, in fact, one member of a Critical Analysis Group challenged whether the purpose of coaching generally was really about learning. When clients first volunteered to participate in the study, the main attraction was that it would be a learning experience and therefore the participants came in with an assumption that learning was the purpose.

One feedback provider had a sense of "speedier learning" with this approach to coaching. However, this is difficult to determine from a research perspective as there is no sense of speed being evaluated in the study. For example, there is no definition being applied in the study to either fast or slow learning. However, it could be hypothesised in this study that learning did

speed up once the whole Collaborative Action for Leaders model was in place although there is no evidence to support such a hypothesis. The concept of speed of learning could be included in further research.

The study is about the coaching relationship and process and how they may or may not impact on the transfer and sustainability of learning; how the clients' learnt in the coaching sessions, *ie* their own individual psychology of learning, is not part of the study. This could also form further research to explore the Collaborative Action Coaching for Leaders model from a different perspective.

Through in-depth research into my own coaching practice, a practical model of coaching has emerged and is already influencing my work with clients. For example, I have new clients who have agreed to keep a reflective diary of events using the practical reflective tool I developed in the study using Mezirow's (1990, 2000) theory of *Transformative Learning* (see Chapter 3)*.* It is a descriptive rather than a prescriptive model as it was developed through a particular lens in the study which may or may not be entirely transferable into all coaching for leaders practice. It should be viewed, therefore, as a model of practice and not a procedure to be applied no matter what the circumstances.

Overall, conducting and participating in this collaborative action research has been inspiring both as a coach and a researcher. As a coach, I have been inspired by the commitment and enthusiasm of the clients which has been a humbling experience. As a researcher, I have been inspired by the collaborative action research process and its effective contribution to the emergent coaching model, which was completely unexpected and one of the significant aspects of the study.

The main contribution to coaching practice is the Collaborative Action Coaching for Leaders model in Figure 8.1 above. However, there are many issues to take into consideration when assessing the generalisability of the model, for example, it could be contended that the model is able to be used by other professional coaches when they coach leaders but not necessarily for use with non-leaders as only leaders participated in the study. Alternatively, it could be argued that, because of the way the model has been developed, *ie* through researching my own coaching practice, it is not possible for the model to be used in practice by other coaches who will bring their own style and approach to the coaching sessions. This raises an important question on a micro level about the extent to which my ability to coach, to learn and to continuously develop has affected the model; similarly, the extent to which the clients' ability to learn, to be open to learning and to be willing to practice/experiment outside the coaching experience, has also impacted on the model. On a macro level, a question is raised about whether any coaching models are transferable from coach to coach and yet, in the profession, this assumption is prevalent.

As a researching professional completing a new professional doctorate in coaching and mentoring, I am the product of the development of coaching as a profession and, therefore, it could be argued that the study has been influenced by this political and social environment. For example, if the study had been completed as a PhD in the 1980's, it is likely that the results would differ. In addition, the shape of the findings from the research is also influenced by my professional stance as an HRD professional, *ie* that coaching is a learning and development methodology. This epistemological view means that this coaching research is shaped by a broader view of coaching set in a business context which is interested in knowledge transfer for future sustainability.

As a social constructivist, I do not believe in absolute truth and would not presume, therefore, that any coaching model was the one right way to coach. However, the Collaborative Action Coaching for Leaders model includes the coach's responsibility to be client centred. Paradoxically, by saying that one model suits all clients seemingly goes against a client centred approach which the Collaborative Action Coaching for Leaders model includes as effective for the transfer and sustainability of learning. Ives (2008, p.100) argues that "by understanding more clearly the nature of the difference between approaches, it will also be easier to fit a coaching model to specific situations." Therefore, rather than suggesting that the Collaborative Action Coaching for Leaders model is generalisable for all coaches when coaching leaders, it is one model which coaches can explore through practice. By bringing their own style and approach as a coach, as well as putting their clients' learning needs at the centre, both coach and client can determine collaboratively if the model is helping to transfer and sustain learning from the coaching experience to outside that experience.

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PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANT LEADERS

Study Title - Coaching for Leaders: an Exploration of the Effect of Coaching on the Transfer and Sustainability of Learning for Leaders in the UK Voluntary Sector

Researcher – Janice Cook FRSA MSc (HRM) FCIPD

You are being invited to take part in the above research study. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to 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 aim of this study is to explore through action research how one-to-one coaching can help or hinder the transfer and sustainability of learning for leaders. There will be an exploration of various models of intervention in coaching; an identification of various factors and relationships between factors; a coaching model generated and evaluated; and a coaching theory developed which helps leaders to transfer and sustain their learning through coaching.

Why have I been invited to participate?

If you decide to take part, you will be one of seven leaders from a range of UK-based voluntary sector organisations. I will coach the leaders for six two-hour sessions over a period of approximately nine months with the intention that coaching sessions will not take place more frequently than monthly. This is a collaborative research study and the key stakeholders are: the coach/researcher, the leader participants and their organisations. In addition, you will identify relevant people from whom feedback about your learning will be sought during the research process. The feedback providers will be appropriate to your identified learning needs.

What will happen to me if I take part?

As a leader participant you will be invited to complete a research diary focused on the research objectives throughout the duration of the research study (see below), and three discussions will take place about these research diaries (after three coaching sessions, after all six coaching sessions, and two to three months after the coaching relationship has ended).

It is intended that the feedback on your learning will be acquired via three group observation and feedback sessions involving you (subject to your and the feedback providers' agreement), around the same time as our research diary discussions. These group observation and feedback sessions combine the coaching (observation) and research processes (feedback). If you or the feedback providers do not agree to your participation, the group feedback data will be collected by me without you present. The specific process and your participation or non-participation will be agreed with you and the feedback providers in advance. These sessions will be audio-recorded.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

The duration of the research study will be about one year commencing in February/March 2010. It is estimated that the leader participants will need to commit the following amount of time for each aspect of the research process: 1) two hours per month for the coaching sessions (6 in total); 2) one hour per week for completion of a research diary; 3) 6 hours in total for the research diary discussions; 3) nine hours in total for the direct observation sessions with your feedback providers (if you agree to participate) or three hours in total if you do not agree to participate, for an alternative process. This equates to approximately 1.5 hours per week over a one-year period.

During this research process, the description and discussion of experiences may involve unpleasant recollections which might occasionally cause you some distress. I will remain mindful of this possibility at all times, and you will not be pressurised to reveal details of any experiences which may result in you feeling distressed in any way. In these circumstances, you will also be reminded that your participation is voluntary and that you are free to withdraw at any time.

In addition, you will be provided with my full contact details and enouraged to contact me at any time should you wish to discuss matters arising from participating in the research following your involvement in the study. In addition, I will ensure that appropriate referrals are made (eg to a different coach, to a counsellor) in the event that any distress becomes inappropriate for me to contain and manage. I will receive regular coaching supervision throughout the research process to support the management of risk and any adverse or unexpected outcomes.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

For the leader participants, this study will provide the opportunity for learning and support from the coaching process as well as the benefit of the reflective learning from the research process. For the feedback providers, they will have the benefit of the learning from the research process. In addition, there is the benefit for all participants of learning about research and the importance of research in the coaching profession.

Do I have to take part and what should I do if I want to take part?

It is entirely up to you to decide whether or not to take part in this research. If you do decide to participate, and therefore contribute to our further understanding of the research topic, you will be given this information sheet to keep and asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part, you are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

Will what I say in this study be kept confidential?

All information collected in the course of this research will be kept strictly confidential, within the limitations of the law. Paper records will be kept in a locked filing cabinet and electronic files will be protected by the use of passwords. In accordance with Oxford Brookes University's policy on Academic Integrity, the data generated will be kept securely in electronic form for a period of five years after the competition of the research study. Immediately following their collection, all data will be de-identified to ensure anonymity, ie codes will be used to identity research participants in place of their names.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

Findings from this research will be used within Janice Cook's doctoral thesis, and may form the basis of articles submitted for publication in appropriate journals. Participants would be

referred to by pseudonym in any publication arising from this research. Naturally, copies of any article(s) accepted for publication will be made available to you, should you wish to receive them.

Who is organising and reviewing the study?

I am conducting the research as a doctoral student of the Business School at Oxford Brookes University. The research has been approved by the University Research Ethics Committee, Oxford Brookes University. I am being supervised by Dr Kate Gilbert and Dr Elaine Cox, both senior researchers within the Business School. The research programme, which began in September 2008, will run for approximately 3 years.

Who do I contact for further information?

Should you require any further information, this can either be obtained from me via my e-mail: 07101644@brookes.ac.uk. If you prefer, you can contact my Director of Studies, Dr Kate Gilbert, Oxford Brookes University, Wheatley Campus, Oxford, OX33 1HX, e-mail: k.gilbert@brookes.ac.uk. If you have any concerns about the way in which the study has been conducted, you should contact the Chair of the University Research Ethics Committee on ethics@brookes.ac.uk.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and seriously considering whether or not to participate in this research study.

January 2010

Researcher – Janice Cook FRSA MSc (HRM) FCIPD

Project Title - Coaching for Leaders: an Exploration of the Effect of Coaching on the Transfer and Sustainability of Learning for Leaders in the UK Voluntary Sector

DRAFT OF RESEARCH DIARY GUIDELINES (to be discussed and agreed with the leader participants as co-researchers)

Purpose of Research Diary

To create meanings out of experience in an honest and open way

Process Objectives

1 To maintain a record of your experiences, activities and feelings
2 To record learning transferred and sustained, why learning has not transferred or been sustained, any unlearning that has taken place
3 To record any learning from the 3 x informal discussions with the Feedback Providers
4 To use as a basis for an informal discussion with the researcher at 3 points in the research process: after 3 coaching sessions, after 6 coaching sessions, after 2 to 3 months have elapsed since the final coaching session
5 To pass to the researcher as data for the research study

Guidance on Maintaining the Diary

1 Entries should be made as close in time to the experience, activity or feeling as possible. It would be unusual for this to be less regularly than weekly and may even be daily
2 Entries should be in your own words and your own style
3 Direct quotes are encouraged
4 Decide on your medium of reporting, eg digital recording, audio recording, written record, video, etc

Support Whilst Maintaining the Diary

Janice is available by phone (07872 119903) or e-mail (opentolearning@btinternet.com) should you need support of any kind. This could be practical or emotional support.

Helpful Information for Diary Completion

Your Starting Point

Your Identified Learning Needs (add to/amend these throughout the coaching process):

Your Reflective Learning

Using the following model, please reflect on your experiences in relation to the identified learning needs above:

1 STATE THE EXPERIENCE
2 DESCRIBE YOUR OBSERVATIONS ON THE EXPERIENCE
3 STATE YOUR LEARNING CONCLUSIONS FROM THE EXPERIENCE
4 DESCRIBE HOW YOU HAVE TRIED OUT SOMETHING NEW OR DIFFERENT
   EMANATING FROM THIS LEARNING EXPERIENCE

This is based on Kolb's model of experiential learning. The following website gives some brief information about his Learning Cycle:
http://www.ldu.leeds.ac.uk/ldu/sddu_multimedia/kolb/kolb_flash.htm

NB: take care not to 'under' or 'over' reflect

Your Self Reflective Inquiry

Notice the self-processes of meaning making, framing and speaking out
Notice your taken for granted assumptions, your ways of knowing
Get to grips with the ideas of others
Reflect further on anything which is causing some perturbation or curiosity

Your Checklist for Diary Completion (using Research Objectives)

Your Reflections on the Effect of the Coaching Sessions

What factors in the coaching sessions are helping you/hindering you to learn?

Is there anything particular about the coaching relationship which is helping you/hindering you to learn?

Are there any coaching tools or techniques which are helping you/hindering you to learn?

Is there anything in the coaching sessions which is helping you/hindering you transfer your learning back into the workplace?

Is there anything in the coaching sessions which is helping you/hindering you sustain your learning?

Key Definitions

TRANSFER OF LEARNING: leader transferring their learning from the coaching environment to outside of that environment
SUSTAINABILITY OF LEARNING: learning sustained during the months of coaching and for two to three months beyond
COACHING PROCESS: the journey of the individually needs-led coaching session
COACHING RELATIONSHIP: the interaction between the coach and the leader

DATA ANALYSIS RESULTS - ACTION RESEARCH CYCLE ONE

FOUR COLLABORATIVE RESEARCHERS: LEADERS A, B, C AND D

RESEARCH CATEGORIES	DATA SOURCE AND EXTRACTS	EMERGING THEMES	MODEL CODES (see key below)
TRANSFER OF LEARNING			
Coaching Relationship 1: Coaching relationship factors which help the transfer of learning	B10: "feeling comfortable in relationship", "takes a while to build up" depending on "how complex issues are/needs are". Sense of "safety".	**1.1 Creating a comfortable relationship**	**C/R**
	D9: confidentiality/safe environment is very important, coach was explicit about confidentiality and potential conflicts of interest, eg professional relationship with a colleague in the organisation	**1.2 Creating a safe and confidential environment**	**C/R**
	D15: trust – "how you came across put me at my ease", "congruence". Leader researched coach on her website and spoke to her before deciding to go ahead with coaching.	**1.3 Creating an environment of trust**	**C/R**
	D16: matching – coach mustn't assume that the match is ok; they must use their "intuition" to assess this.	**1.4 Checking out match of coach and leader is ok**	**C/R**
	D17: "once I met you I was ok".	**1.5 Importance of meeting face-to-face**	**C/R**
	D18: "helps being completely outside", can focus on "holistic coaching".	**1.6 Importance of being an external coach**	**C/R**

Coaching Relationship	None	None	None
2: Coaching relationship factors which hinder the transfer of learning			
Coaching Tools/Techniques	A5: On the verge of putting something into practice and somebody else stepped in and said what the leader was going to say to demonstrate their learning in an explicit way. Maybe there had been some implicit or explicit behaviour prior to this which prompted this comment from somebody else. In this example, the learning is transferring back to the workplace and to colleagues.	**3.1 Encouraging Practice Back in the Workplace**	**C/EN**
3: Coaching tools/techniques which help the transfer of learning			
	C9: a peer Feedback Provider had noticed a more reflective approach to issues which the leader linked to a specific discussion in the coaching session. Technique of "putting yourself in someone else's shoes". Leader: "I have actually been very thoughtful about that".	**3.2 Encouraging breadth of thinking through understanding other people's perspectives**	**C/EN**
	D4: boss relationship questionnaire (designed by coach/researcher prior to research), "helpful tool to facilitate discussion".	**3.3 Questionnaires designed for specific situations**	**C/T**
	A21: leader said that experience of voluntary sector and HR profession influenced their decision to be coached by coach/researcher. Also, sharing of this experience is useful and saves time. Coach offering something from their experience. Leader said that there is no point in leaving	**3.4 Sharing Experience to Facilitate Learning/Embed Learning/Change Behaviour Self control on the part of the coach not to be advisory**	**C/S**

	people to flounder.		
	B4: leader said that it was an "opportunity to learn from someone more experienced", "brings in real life", "can visualise it more", picking out the bits that are relevant to you and your situation". "You don't want to say something stupid, be looking for a bit of a steer".		
	C12: experience is helpful, inexperience is unhelpful.		
	D11: "sharing of experience is helpful, prompts thinking, look at things from different angles, not advice. Having experience in the field means the coach has "credibility" and it brings "common sense" to the sessions.		
	A23: variety to tools and techniques is helpful, stops the sessions from being 'samey', eg philosophical things as well as practical things	**3.5 Ensure a variety of tools and techniques are used**	**C/T**
	A24: challenging questions/observation statements are helpful and enable learning	**3.6 Use challenging questions/observation statements to assist learning process**	**C/CH**
	B6: "relevant challenge", "helps to put it into context"		
	D25: "likes challenge, encourages learning"		
	A25: leader sets their own agenda, joint responsibility of both leader and coach to check back on objectives	**3.7 Be client-centred, enabling client to take responsibility**	**C/CL**

		for achieving goals/objectives	
	A28: exploration techniques for exploring role, values, self/feelings, past behaviour approaches, philosophical viewpoints		
	A29: following up on previous session, reflecting on what was learnt, reinforcement of learned behaviour		
	B13: role play, situational questioning – good/ok	**3.8 Using role play, situational questions to facilitate learning**	**C/T**
	D10: use of stories in coaching sessions – "useful, brings it to life, can choose which bits are helpful". "Stories transfer learning from coach to leader", correct selection of stories is important, helps to share other people's experiences for the leader to learn from.	**3.9 Use of stories in the learning process**	**C/T**
	D21: highlighting emotional and rational responses has been helpful.	**3.10 Distinguishing between emotional and rational responses to help learn new ways of responding**	**C/T**
	D22: sharing metaphors	**3.11 Sharing metaphors to help learning**	**C/T**
	D23: Coaching giving positive feedback about transfer of learning is useful.	**3.12 Giving positive feedback to assist transfer of learning**	**C/T**

	D24: using scenarios to encourage learning	**3.13 Using scenarios to encourage learning**	**C/T**
Coaching Tools/Techniques 4: Coaching tools/techniques which hinder the transfer of learning	A6: Leader concerned about the accuracy of an MBTI self-assessment process. "And have I conned myself in answering?" "I've somehow deluded myself". Where the reality is not matching the results, this can hinder the person from identifying the learning need and pretending that they are like this. D19: opposite view – "re-affirmation important, helps coach help client, helps build confidence".	**4.1 Use of Self Assessment Techniques/Information in coaching can be limited**	**C/T**
	A20: no value in looking at personal history/not therapy D20: "counselling and coaching have clear links, eg achieve some of the same things, but definitely different. Coaching is more self reflective. Counselling looks at issues in personal life and work life, it shows you the way, just about you. Coaching is wider than you and deeper than counselling, more 2-way relationship, more equal."	**4.2 Coaching is not therapy**	**C/N**

Other Factors in the Coaching Experience 5: Other factors in the coaching experience which help the transfer of learning	A (overall): the agenda for the FP session brought by the leader was structured around the topics he had brought to the coaching sessions, ie they were not imposed by the coach.	**5.1 Coaching Topics Brought by Leader to Coaching Sessions, ie client centred**	**C/ CL**
	A10: support from colleagues to give feedback about identified areas of learning on an on-going basis. This has come out of identifying the Feedback Provider and having a discussion with them about the specific areas of learning. The coach/researcher observed: "Does this help you learn or are you avoiding learning this way?" The feedback provider said: ".. I think if you know that something's being measured or watched or something, then automatically you try and do it more ..". The leader said: .. the idea is to change behaviour and sustain that. And so we don't want it to be a role play."	**5.2 Colleagues Identified to Provide Continual Feedback on Learning Needs Identified by the Leader – could be peer coaching depending on skills and abilities of colleague. Does this create an independent learner or a dependent learner?**	**L/P**
	A12: Reflective learning practice outside of the coaching environment and encouraging that same practice with direct reports and teams. C13: leader noted the importance of reflective learning in the transfer of learning	**5.3 Reflective Learning/Reflective Practitioner as an aid to transfer of learning**	**L/RE**
	D7: leader said that the reflective diary experience was "good to reflect" and "good to have a record" otherwise the "learning would be lost	**5.4 Reflective Diary to aid the transfer and sustainability of learning**	**L/RE**

	A (overall): the opportunity to reflect with a colleague who wants to help the leader learn. A15: the leader described the feedback provider session as a "reality check in terms of one's self perception, but also in terms of whether things that you are doing actually are making any difference that's perceivable to anybody as well." And "useful". D6: leader said – "I really feel the feedback session was very useful as it gave me an opportunity to reflect on how I have consciously been changing my approach	**5.5 Feedback Provider Sessions provided an important opportunity to reflectively learn with a colleague (can be fraught with problems – judgement, being told what to do rather than facilitating learning/coaching)**	**L/F**
	A14: "supporting you to make that difficult change …." Said by feedback provider by way of observation during the dialogue.	**5.6 Creating a supportive coaching environment in the Feedback Provider Sessions**	**C/CH**
	A16: feedback provider said that they had a "sense that [the leader] is open to learning" and they had a "real sense that [the leader] wanted to make [the coaching] work" and that they wanted "to be able to learn and change"	**5.7 Facilitating the desire to learn and change in others in the Feedback Provider Sessions**	**C/E**
	B1: the feedback provider had a sense of 'speedier' learning than they originally anticipated	**5.8 Coaching can help people learning more speedily than when they are not receiving coaching**	**O/SP**

	B3: using a model similar to feedback provider sessions for coaches to observe areas for further development.	**5.9 Feedback provider sessions in model to assist the leader to learn**	**L/F**
	C1: possible negative or positive effect on customer relationship through feedback provider sessions	**5.10 Positive impact on internal organisational relationships through reflective learning processes**	**L/F**
	C2: using peers to advise/support development	**5.11 Peer support for individual development**	**L/P**
	C4: sharing learning with direct reports and team. Identified as not taking place prior to the feedback provider session.	**5.12 Sharing of learning with direct reports and the team**	**L/SH**
	D26: transferring coaching techniques into line management, eg questioning techniques, highlighting emotional –v- rational responses in the workplace		
	C6: is change conscious or unconscious? Customer feedback provider said: "You can never not change. Today will change you. Today will change us."	**5.13 Facilitating conscious change, moving the learning from the unconscious to the conscious**	**C/E**
	C7: how to measure improvement. Customer feedback provider suggested "To me your measurement will be that	**5.14 Identifying measures for**	**C/I**

	you're happier in your job, your team are happier, your line manager's happier and you know where you're going. ....a more cohesive team that knows where they're going ..."	**improvement/learning**	
	D5: Line manager being coached during a similar period to the first set of 3 coaching sessions. Line manager believes the learning would have still transferred from the leader but "would take longer". Leader agreed. Leader said that it is best to have different coaches so that "they're seeing it from your view". Line manager agreed because it may create a trust barrier if the same coach. Not counselling or mediation.	**5.15 Both leader and line manager receive coaching simultaneously from different coaches (or the same if part of an advance agreement)**	**O/SI**
	A22: coaching provides an opportunity to review, contributing alternative ideas, raising areas for reflection.	**5.16 Contribute ideas for the leaders' reflection**	**L/RE**
	D14: opportunity to "check on changes, what is being done differently, reminder re things discussed, identifying links across similar issues".		
	A26: coach and leader taking notes, coach providing key points, leader not abdicating responsibility	**5.17 Record keeping of areas discussed by both coach and leader**	**C/REC L/REC**
	D13: "keeping notes is important"		
	A27: physical environment has to work – not too noisy	**5.18 Physical environment shouldn't be a barrier**	**C/PE**
	A30: provides an opportunity to experiment behaviourally	**5.19 Coaching facilitates behavioural experimentation**	**C/E**

	A31: provides an opportunity to develop new skills, eg project management	**5.20 Coaching facilitates the development of new skills**	**C/E**
	B5: coach being transparent about how they work in coaching sessions might be useful	**5.21 Be transparent about coaching approach**	**C/TR**
	B12: "Janice in my head", "helpful reminder of things that help me/good thing".	**5.22 Impact of coach outside of coaching sessions**	**C/IM**
	C11: is this coaching or mentoring? Leader defined this as: "coaching – you give me the skills, mentoring – you are a sounding board."	**5.23 Coaching or Mentoring?**	**C/CM**
	D8: enabling raising of self awareness about changes in behaviour	**5.24 Coaching enables leaders to be more self aware on specific issues**	**C/E**
Other Factors in the Coaching Experience 6: Other factors in the coaching experience which hinder the transfer of learning	A3: "Is that something you have introduced to torment yourself?" A7: "So is this another thing you are doing to yourself then?" The FP had not noticed an area for learning which had been identified by the leader. A19: is the research diary causing over reflecting?	**6.1 Over Analysis/Reflecting can be a barrier to learning**	**L/RE**
	A4: announced learning from the coaching at a team meeting and what changes were being put in place, "Major	**6.2 Reflecting on the Best Processes for Putting**	**L/SH**

	panic".	**Learning into Practice Outside of the Coaching Environment**	
	B2: covert transfer of learning rather than overt, not having open discussions with line manager about learning gained from the coaching sessions. Coach/researcher felt that it may only be appropriate to share work related learning. Feedback provider suggested taking some time in monthly management meetings to discuss any learning but only if the leader felt it was "natural" for them to do so. Feedback provider sessions gave space for things to emerge, opportunity to stand back and be more reflective. "Creative dialogue" Feedback provider said: "helpful that we have discussions where we can jointly remind ourselves of that".	**6.3 Open sharing of work related learning with line manager as felt appropriate by the leader**	**L/SH**
	C1: possible negative or positive effect on customer relationship through feedback provider sessions	**6.4 Be aware of possible negative impact on relationships through reflective learning processes**	**L/F**
	C3: not taking into account the organisational context. Peer feedback provider said: ".. it's not just about whether you're a good manager it's whether the organisation is allowing you to be a good manager." Peer also said: "the rest of the organisation has got to change with you or be willing to change", and "not necessarily just about how you change but how you get other people to change as well .....".	**6.5 Taking the organisational context into account in the learning process**	**C/O**
	C5: not taking responsibility for your own actions. "So maybe I don't have to change but the organisation and my	**6.6 Facilitating learners to take responsibility for their**	**C/E**

	line manager has to."	own actions and development	
	A17: no coaching experience may slow down the 'getting to know each other' phase at the beginning of the relationship.	**6.7 Different coaching process for learners with no coaching experience**	**C/CL**
	A18: is coaching really about learning?	**6.8 Determine the real purpose of coaching – is it learning?**	**O/PU**
	B7: not letting people have their own new experience by interjecting with opinions	**6.9 Coach to restrict giving their own opinions**	**C/S**
	B8: "not answered a question, gone back to it, kept the thread, might not have been avoiding but might not know the way".	**6.10 Coach in charge of process**	**C/COACH**
	B9: coach to watch body language isn't giving the message that the leader is being judged, "never look as if you are judging".	**6.11 Coach to avoid looking like you are judging**	**C/S**
	D12: being judged by the coach would be a "massive barrier" to learning		
	B11: coach to ensure that personal experience of leaders' colleagues is not brought into the session	**6.12 Self control by coach not to bring in personal experience of leaders' colleagues**	**C/SK**

Relationships Between Factors 7: Relationships between factors which help the transfer of learning	None	None	None
Relationships Between Factors 8: Relationships between factors which hinder the transfer of learning	None	None	None
SUSTAINABILITY OF LEARNING			
Coaching Relationship 9: Coaching relationship factors which help the sustainability of learning	None	None	None
Coaching Relationship 10: Coaching relationship factors which hinder the sustainability of learning	None	None	None
Coaching Tools/Techniques	None	None	None

11: Coaching tools/techniques which help the sustainability of learning			
Coaching Tools/Techniques 12: Coaching tools/techniques which hinder the sustainability of learning	None	None	None
Other Factors in the Coaching Experience 13: Other factors in the coaching experience which help the sustainability of learning	None	None	None
Other Factors in the Coaching Experience 14: Other factors in the coaching experience which hinder the sustainability of learning	A13: leader identified that there may be psychological barriers which slow down the learning process and the ability to transfer/sustain any learning.	**14.1 Coach to tailor the sessions to the needs of the client**	**C/CL**
Relationships Between Factors	None	None	None

15: Relationships between factors which help the sustainability of learning			
Relationships Between Factors 16: Relationships between factors which hinder the sustainability of learning	None	None	None
Identification of Transfer of Learning 17: No change observed	A1: "I haven't been aware of .... any change". A8: "I sort of have my little secrets of my thing that nobody else sees. It's difficult to demonstrate any change in behaviour!" A leader who sees the difference between changes observed by them and changes observed by others. Is the change less viable?	**17.1 How open should the leader be about their learning with colleagues?**	**L/SH**
Identification of Transfer of Learning 18: Change observed	A2: "Have you been trying to .....[change] .... or am I just making that up?...... I have been trying to [change]". A9: some learning transferred which was not the originally intending learning. In this case the intended learning was about role clarity and boundaries and the learning received was about showing colleagues that they are values-driven. A11: example of a positive outcome for an internal customer	**18.1 Unintended learning transferred** **18.2 Be explicit with**	**L/SH** **L/SH**

directly relating to a change of behaviour resulting from learning transferred from the coaching environment. But wouldn't have made the link if this Feedback Provider session had not taken place.	**customers about the learning following customer feedback**	
C8: a customer Feedback Provider has noticed a change in the last few months: "you've started to understand where the win/win situations are for both of us and therefore we've started to work together a bit more". A peer commented that "it's not all about the [leader]".	**18.3 Customer feedback as a measure of learning transfer**	**L/SH**
C10:" You have asserted yourself more" with line manager – peer feedback. Customer feedback: said 'yes' more.		
D1: Feedback from line manager who has notice specific improvements during the coaching timeline (after 3 coaching sessions): "the last three/four months just things have improved immensely" and after one coaching session felt like their relationship had improved.	**18.4 Line management feedback as a measure of transfer of learning**	**L/SH**
D2: Feedback from line manager about "the speed with which things have move on" (after 3 coaching sessions).		
D3: Feedback from leader about changes that they have put in place as a result of work coming out of the coaching sessions, eg improved tone in email communication, improved verbal communication.	**18.5 Self feedback in learning process, from reflective processes during coaching sessions**	**L/SH**

KEY TO CODES IN COACHING MODEL COLUMN (not in bold) AND IN EMERGENT COACHING MODEL (in bold)

C = COACH'S RESPONSIBILITY   **L = LEADERS' RESPONSIBILITY**

P   C/CH = Challenge and Support: 3.6, 5.6   **F**   L/F = Feedback Sessions: 5.5, 5.9, 5.10, 6.4
P   C/CL = Client Centred: 3.7, 5.1, 6.7, 14.1   **F**   L/SH = Sharing of Learning Back in the Workplace: 5.12, 6.3,
P   C/COACH = Coach in Charge of Process: 6.10   17.1, 18.1, 18.2, 18.3, 18.4, 18.5
P   C/E = Enabling/Facilitating Learning: 5.7, 5.13, 5.19, 5.20, 5.24, 6.6 **F**   L/P = Peer Coaching: 5.2, 5.11
P   C/EN: Encourage Practice Back in the Workplace: 3.1, 3.2 **SD**   L/RE: Reflective Learning/Practitioner: 5.3, 5.4, 5.16, 6.1
P   C/I = Identify Measures for Transfer of Learning: 5.14   **SD**   L/REC = Record Keeping: 5.17
P   C/IM: Impact of Coach: 5.22
P   C/N = Not Therapy: 4.2
CLC C/O = Organisational Context Taken into Account: 6.5
PE   C/PE: Physical Environment: 5.18
R   C/R = Relationship: 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6
P   C/REC = Record Keeping: 5.17
P   C/S = Sharing Experience to Facilitate Learning: 3.4, 6.9, 6.11
SD   C/SK = Skills: 6.12
P   C/CM = Coaching or Mentoring?: 5.23
P   C/T = Tools/Techniques: 3.3, 3.5, 3.8, 3.9, 3.10, 3.11, 3.12, 3.13, 4.1
P   C/TR = Transparent about Coaching Approach: 5.21

SD   Reflective Learning/Practitioner: research diary and coaching supervision

O = OTHER (NOT IN MODEL):

O/PU: Purpose of Coaching: 6.8
O/SI = Simultaneous Coaching of Line Manager: 5.15
O/SP = Coaching can Speed up Learning: 5.8

DATA ANALYSIS NOTES - ACTION RESEARCH CYCLE ONE

Researcher – Janice Cook FRSA MSc (HRM) FCIPD

Project Title - Coaching for Leaders: a collaborative action research study of the effect of coaching on the transfer and sustainability of learning in the UK voluntary sector

DATA COLLECTED

1   Transcribed notes from Feedback Provider Sessions (one per client learner – 4 in total)
2   Direct observation notes made by coach/researcher during Feedback Provider Sessions and discussion with client learners immediately after the Feedback Provider Sessions (one set of notes per client learner – 4 in total)
3   Research diaries kept by the client learners and the coach/researcher during the first three coaching sessions (one per client learner and one for coach/researcher – 5 in total)
4   Notes made by coach/researcher during a discussion about the client learner's research diary and the coach/researcher sharing key points from their research diary. Both the client learners' and the coach/researcher's points are included in these notes (one per client learner – 4 in total).

DATA ANALYSIS CODING

RESEARCH CATEGORIES

Using the research aims and objectives, the following coding categories were created for the thematic analysis process for action research cycle one. Whilst this organises the data to directly relate to the aims and objectives of the research it does not restrict any emerging themes or patterns, it simply provides a robust structure against which any emerging themes can be itemised. The inclusion of "Other Factors in the Coaching Experience" enables all identified themes to be included.

This structure is used for each of the four action research cycles to enable a consistent approach to the data analysis at each of the four stages.

TRANSFER OF LEARNING

Coaching Relationship
1: Coaching relationship factors which help the transfer of learning
2: Coaching relationship factors which hinder the transfer of learning

Coaching Tools/Techniques
3: Coaching tools/techniques which help the transfer of learning
4: Coaching tools/techniques which hinder the transfer of learning

Other Factors in the Coaching Experience
5: Other factors in the coaching experience which help the transfer of learning
6: Other factors in the coaching experience which hinder the transfer of learning

Relationships Between Factors
7: Relationships between factors which help the transfer of learning
8: Relationships between factors which hinder the transfer of learning

SUSTAINABILITY OF LEARNING

Coaching Relationship
9: Coaching relationship factors which help the sustainability of learning
10: Coaching relationship factors which hinder the sustainability of learning

Coaching Tools/Techniques
11: Coaching tools/techniques which help the sustainability of learning
12: Coaching tools/techniques which hinder the sustainability of learning

Other Factors in the Coaching Experience
13: Other factors in the coaching experience which help the sustainability of learning
14: Other factors in the coaching experience which hinder the sustainability of learning

Relationships Between Factors
15: Relationships between factors which help the sustainability of learning
16: Relationships between factors which hinder the sustainability of learning

In addition, the following two coding categories emerged during the data collection process:

Identification of Transfer of Learning
17: No change observed
18: Change observed

This information may help inform the timeline on transfer and sustainability of learning as the research study progresses. It may identify emerging themes and may help the coach/researcher reflect on a sense of time when the fieldwork is completed.

Key Definitions

TRANSFER OF LEARNING: leader transferring their learning from the coaching environment to outside of that environment
SUSTAINABILITY OF LEARNING: learning sustained during the months of coaching and for five to six months beyond
COACHING PROCESS: the journey of the individually needs-led coaching session
COACHING RELATIONSHIP: the interaction between the coach and the leader

DATA SOURCE AND EXTRACTS

There are four collaborative researchers working with the coach/researcher. These four collaborative researchers have been anonymously referred to as: A, B, C and D in the data analysis and only the coach/researcher knows the specific identity of each. The numbers which appear after the letter coding directly refers to a section of a transcript relating to that particular individual. This ensures a strict cross-reference between transcript and emerging themes, although the individual experience is not the focus of this research but the emerging themes from across the board. This is simply a starting point before the data is analysed across the board, themes emerge and a coaching model is created from these emergent themes.

EMERGING THEMES

This section of the data analysis report outlines the themes which are emerging from the data as it is gone through line by line. These themes are then brought together to form the emergent coaching model. These themes are created out of the experience of the collaborative researchers and the coach/researcher.

THEMATIC ANALYSIS CHECKLIST (Braun & Clarke, 2006)
ACTION RESEARCH CYCLE ONE

PROCESS	NO.	CRITERIA	COMPLETED
TRANSCRIPTION	1	The data have been transcribed to an appropriate level of detail, and the transcripts have been checked against the tapes for 'accuracy'	**YES** Transcription verbatim, digital recordings checked and printed scripts annotated with any errors (minor)
CODING	2	Each data item has been given equal attention in the coding process	**YES** Same process for each data item
	3	Themes have not been generated from a few vivid examples (an anecdotal approach), but instead the coding process has been thorough, inclusive and comprehensive	**YES** All relevant data identified from a line by line analysis for each data source Diaries checked
	4	All relevant extracts for each theme have been collated	**YES** Collated under the coaching model codes
	5	Themes have been checked against each other and back to the original data set	**YES** Check completed
	6	Themes are internally coherent, consistent and distinctive	**YES** Have made the distinction between the coach and the client learner as agents

ANALYSIS	7	Data have been analysed – interpreted, made sense of – rather than just paraphrased or described	**YES** Themes and codes identified
	8	Analysis and data match each other – the extracts illustrate the analytic claims	**YES**
	9	Analysis tells a convincing and well-organized story about the data and topic	**YES**
	10	A good balance between analytic narrative and illustrative extracts is provided	**YES**
OVERALL	11	Enough time has been allocated to complete all phases of the analysis adequately, without rushing a phase or giving it a once-over-lightly	**YES** Data revisited a minimum of three times for each cycle
WRITTEN REPORT	12	The assumptions about, and specific approach to, thematic analysis are clearly explicated	**YES**
	13	There is a good fit between what you claim you do, and what you show you have done – ie, described method and reported analysis are consistent	**YES**
	14	The language and concepts used in the report are consistent with the epistemological position of the analysis	**YES**
	15	The researcher is positioned as *active* in the research process; themes do not just 'emerge'	**YES** Collaborative action research study in which the researcher is researching their own coaching practice

DATA SOURCES – ACTION RESEARCH CYCLE ONE

LEADER REFERENCE	DATA SOURCE	PAGE NUMBER	EMERGING THEMES REFERENCE
LEADER A	FP	5, 32	17.1
	FP	6, 33, 34, 35	18.1
	FP	14, 30 x 2	6.1
	FP	16 x 2	6.2
	FP	25 x 2	3.1
	FP	27	4.1
	FP	40, 64 x 2, 65	5.2
	FP	54, 55	18.2
	FP	55	5.3
	FP	62	14.1
	FP	65	5.6
	FP	69	5.5
	FP	70	5.7
	D	1	6.7
	D	1	6.8
	D	1	6.1
	D	1	4.2
	D	1 x 2, 2 x 3	3.4
	D	1	5.16
	D	2	3.5
	D	2	3.6
	D	2 x 2, 3 x 3	3.7
	D	3, 4	5.17
`	D	3	5.18
	D	3	5.19
	D	3	5.20
LEADER B	FP	13	5.8
	FP	34, 35, 37, 39, 40, 43, 44, 45	6.3
	FP	39	5.9
	D	1 x 2, 2 x 1	3.4
	D	1	5.21
	D	2	3.6
	D	1	6.9
	D	2	6.10
	D	2	6.11
	D	2, 3	1.1
	D	3	6.12
	D	3	5.22
	D	3	3.8
LEADER C	FP	14	5.10
	FP	14	6.4
	FP	28, 30 x 2, 31	5.11
	FP	37, 85 x 2	6.5
	FP	45	5.12

LEADER REFERENCE	DATA SOURCE	PAGE NUMBER	EMERGING THEMES REFERENCE
	FP	47	6.6
	FP	47	5.13
	FP	52	5.14
	FP	60, 63, 69, 95	18.3
	FP	66, 67, 96	3.2
	D	1	3.4
	D	1	5.23
	D	1	5.3
LEADER D	FP	2, 5, 25	18.4
	FP	32, 38	18.5
	FP	51, 52	3.3
	FP	65, 66 x 2, 68, 69 x 2, 70, 72	5.15
	D	1	5.5
	D	3	5.4
	D	3	5.24
	D	3 x 3	1.2
	D	3, 4	3.4
	D	3	6.11
	D	3, 4	3.9
	D	3	5.16
	D	3	5.17
	D	3	1.3
	D	4	1.4
	D	4	1.5
	D	4	1.6
	D	4	4.2
	D	5	3.3
	D	5	4.1
	D	5	3.10
	D	5	3.11
	D	5	3.12
	D	5	3.13
	D	5	3.6
	D	6	5.12

DATA SOURCE CODES
FP = Feedback Provider Session
D = Diaries and Diary Sharing Session