

In What Ways Does Coaching Contribute to Effective Leadership Development?

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to examine the contribution that coaching makes to the development of the quality of leadership in Tribal Group plc. The case study research is based on eight semi-structured interviews of senior leaders and describes how coaching is contributing more to the development of personal qualities, personal skills and behaviours of individual leaders than it is to team building and strategic thinking. Findings suggest that in the case organisation, coaching is making a positive contribution to leadership recruitment and retention, stronger corporate working, the securing of more complex contracts, and better management of risk. Coaching is making a particularly valuable contribution at key career transition points, when leaders face new and/or complex challenges, and when the coach is perceived to have directly relevant professional experience as well as good coaching skills.

Keywords: leadership, coaching, leadership development, leadership capacity, career transition, benefits.

Introduction

The quality of leadership is widely seen as critical to the success of an organisation. Huczynski and Buchanan (2007, p695) boldly state that “leadership appears to be a critical determinant of organisational effectiveness” whilst Handy (1999, p118) believes “the leadership of groups within organisations is always going to be a vital ingredient in the effectiveness of organisations.” Even relative sceptics such as Bolden (2004a), who claim there is relatively little evidence to support this view, nonetheless concede that the evidence that does exist generally supports a positive causal relation.

Given these findings, it seems logical for organisations to invest in leadership development. Bolden’s (2005) summary research into the impact of leadership development shows a complex picture. Effectiveness is associated with opportunities for feedback, discussion and supportive management processes that ensure that development related activities “fit” with other HR and business strategies.

Bolden (2004a, p28) also believes that research has demonstrated that the “qualities of openness, empathy, integrity and self-awareness are coming to the fore and demand a more participative leadership style.” Goleman’s (2000) analysis of Hay McBer’s research on leadership in the education sector emphasises the need for individuals to manage their own emotions and the emotions of others. Bolden (2006)

proposes that leadership development should become more focused on experiential and reflective learning, potentially fertile areas for coaching. Handy (1999) reinforces this view through his belief that individuals can improve their leadership abilities if organisations pay more attention to the coaching role. In light of this research, major national organisations such as the National College for School Leadership (Suggett, 2006) are making substantial investments in coaching related initiatives. Many private sector organisations are doing the same.

This study explores, in the context of one organisation, the nature of the contribution which coaching makes to effective leadership development and so to effective leadership itself.

Background

This research was undertaken in the context of Tribal Group plc. Tribal is a provider of professional services to the UK public sector. It was established in 2000 and has grown through a series of over 50 acquisitions, organic growth and bid wins to become a £250m turnover business employing over 2,000 staff. Tribal is continually exploring a range of ways of strengthening its leadership capacity and capability.

As Tribal has grown, so has its investment in the HR function, including the development of a range of leadership development initiatives. However, leadership development still largely takes place at the business unit level. Coaching is one such activity. Within Tribal's central government focused consultancy practice, coaching is well established whilst it is totally absent in other Tribal consultancy businesses, such as that focusing on the health sector. In other Tribal businesses, coaching opportunities have been taken up by individual business leaders, but not as part of a business unit wide programme.

This study will explore why coaching has become established in some Tribal businesses and not in others, what the impact has been in the former, and how coaching might make a wider contribution to the development of the organisation. If coaching is to make a contribution to the development of effective leadership, coaches will need to be clear about the way coachees perceive the meaning of leadership, the challenges that leaders face and the capabilities and competences they need to be effective.

Methodology

This qualitative, interpretive study used a case study approach. This reflects its philosophical assumption that reality is subjective and multiple and the study therefore aimed to reveal and analyse these perceived realities. My epistemological assumption was that the strongest evidence would be found by getting close to the relevant business leaders and listening to their voices in both oral and written form.

Yin (2009, p8) sets out three conditions that influence the selection of a particular methodology and the circumstances that favour the use of a case study approach. The first is the type of research question being posed. In his view, the “what” question being posed to explore the phenomena in this study is well fitted to an exploratory case study approach. The second is “the extent of control of behavioural events” (Yin, 2009, p11). The experiences and perspectives revealed by this study were beyond my influence or control, again supporting the use of case study. The third condition for use of a case study is a focus on contemporary as opposed to historical events. This study, through its in depth investigation of contemporary phenomena and within a real life context, certainly met this condition.

An embedded multiple case study design was developed (Yin, 2009). This was because, whilst Tribal is a bounded system (Creswell, 2007) with shared business objectives, the businesses which make up the Group still have considerable autonomy in areas such as their approach to leadership development (although there is a Group programme) and the use of coaching. It was therefore necessary to explore the issues at the business unit level. I was aware of the cautionary advice offered by Yin that it is important to keep a focus on both the business unit and the organisation as a whole. Creswell (2007) stresses the importance of exploring an issue across more than one site, using cases which are clearly identifiable, and the importance of selecting representative sites. Yin (2009, p61) believes that “the analytic benefits from having two or more cases may be substantial.”

Using purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2007), I identified two business units as representative of the types of businesses in Tribal. In selecting these businesses I was mindful of the view of Marshall and Rossman (2006) that it is preferable to focus on settings and actors than on events. One business is a consultancy business focused on government departments whilst the other provides a wider range of services to a range of clients in the education sector.

Whilst the case study approach enabled me to explore the phenomenon in the bounded context of Tribal Group I was aware that this might be at the expense of an ability to generalise. However, the two businesses on which this study focuses are representative of broader categories of business. Also, the in-depth exploratory case study approach enabled a rich exploration of the links between conceptualisations of leadership, leadership development and the role of coaching (Mason, 2002). Finally, the theoretical insights drawn from the study can be tested for their ability to generalise by other researchers in other contexts.

As an experienced coach and a founding member of the organisation I sought to do all I could to be fully aware of my biases and underlying assumptions, especially any confirmation bias about the positive impact of coaching. I therefore adopted an “active and reflexive” (Mason, 2002) role in data collection.

A strong emphasis was placed on collecting data through semi-structured interviews. Whilst this reflected my epistemological assumptions it was somewhat at odds with the view that a good case study requires triangulation of evidence from

various sources: “the case study inquiry relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion” (Yin, 2009, p18). To counter this limitation I carefully identified the eight respondents, whose roles and gender are set out in Table 1 below, to enable triangulation to be done by gathering evidence from a range of perspectives.

Table 1 – Roles of Interviewees

Tribal Group	Business A	Business B
■ Chief executive (m)	■ Managing director (m)	■ Operations director (m)
■ Corporate director of HR (reports to chief exec) (f)	■ Senior consultant coachee (reports to MD) (f)	■ Managing director (reports to operations director) (f)
	■ Independent coach (of the senior consultant) (m)	■ Director of HR (reports to corporate director of HR) (f)

Findings

Conceptualisations of Leadership

The study analysed the factors that influenced participants’ conceptualisations of leadership. It showed that by far the most powerful influence were key individuals in a leader’s career or wider life. Participants observed the impact of these individuals on others (and learnt from both positive and negative impacts). Sometimes these individuals were observed from a distance (even by reading biographies or watching films) and were not personally known to them. Value was placed on the ability to mobilise others to achieve shared goals. Sometimes they were close colleagues or people they had met. Where this was the case they were often people who made the participant feel special. This feeling of specialness could come from fleeting encounters as well as long standing relationships. This suggested that people are constantly seeking sources of inspiration from others and that experiencing effective leadership, even vicariously, is something that people ascribe a great value to. Interesting, not one participant had ever systematically reflected on the learning they had accumulated from these experiences. The nature of coaching provides a potentially powerful context for promoting such learning.

The second most reported influence was career experience. Most participants had worked in a variety of organisations and were ready to reflect on the effectiveness of the different leadership styles and cultures they had encountered. Six participants had been with Tribal during a period of rapid growth and change. They were able to discuss how the leadership style and culture within Tribal had itself changed over time. Again, they had learnt from both positive and negative experiences.

The third most significant source of learning about leadership was feedback on the impact of their own style, although this was in short supply. Where constructive feedback had been received it was greatly valued. Because all had been successful in their careers they all, quite reasonably, assumed that their own approach to leadership was valued by others. Because the feedback received was slight, they were not always clear about the elements of their leadership style that were given value. A

combination of swift and relevant feedback was highly valued. This finding implies the need to equip colleagues with a framework for, and skills in, giving feedback on personal impact.

Only one participant referred to learning about leadership from theoretical perspectives and only one had completed a formal course at a business school. This was somewhat surprising given the high value consultancy services offered by Tribal and the qualifications and careers of the participants. None indicated any interest in utilising such sources of learning in the future. In contrast, a heavy emphasis was placed on the importance of learning through experience.

The Importance of Context

All participants acknowledged the importance of context for leadership style. The research identified six significant contextual variables.

(i) *The type of organisation.* For example, Tribal provides education services to prisons and it was clear to those involved in such work that the leadership style best fitted to a custodial environment differed from that required in a consultancy business. For consultancy businesses in particular, it is important to fully understand the leadership culture and style of the client organisation and key client-side individuals, as effective working will depend on this. A key marketing strategy is the ability to demonstrate an alignment of leadership styles and an understanding of client objectives.

(ii) *The size of an organisation.* Tribal has moved from a collection of small companies led by founders to a more corporate entity. All participants understood this had implications for leadership style, such as the need to move from transacting business through informal relationships within a specific office location to more formalised roles and accountabilities across a geographically dispersed organisation.

(iii) *The economic climate.* At the time of the research, the economic climate was uncertain and market conditions were challenging. Many Tribal leaders were facing the implications of this context for the first time.

(iv) *The business context.* As the public sector looks to the private sector to provide solutions to more complex challenges (e.g. where once Tribal provided skills for life education services to prisoners they are now been asked to contribute to wider crime reduction strategies) the leadership challenge itself becomes more complex.

(v) *The nature of the immediate task.* Participants acknowledged that leadership style must vary from task to task. An individual may, within an hour have to adopt an influencing style with a large audience, a style that emphasises clear feedback with an underperforming colleague, and a visionary style to lead a strategy debate.

(vi) *The personal dimension.* Participants understood that different people require motivation in different ways. This has personality as well as ethnicity and gender

dimensions. Leaders need to be able to understand where different people are coming from. For one participant, this insight came relatively late in life. (*"I woke up to it at 45 or 47 when I suddenly realised that people's views of the world are so different"*). This vignette reminds us that it is easy to make assumptions about people's ability to empathise and their understanding of the implications of diversity.

The Implications of Context

Participants were able to identify the implications of these general contextual variables for the nature of leadership within Tribal. The market location of Tribal, as a private sector organisation providing professional services to the public sector, was perceived by participants as a significant challenge in itself as leaders must be comfortable and convincing in both sectors. Such organisations are relatively new and the particular leadership style required to be effective on the public/private sector boundary is, to my knowledge, un-researched. Table 2 uses an analysis of interview data to summarise participant's perceptions of the implications of the changing context of Tribal's work for their leadership style.

Table 2: The Implications of the Changing Context for Leaders in Tribal

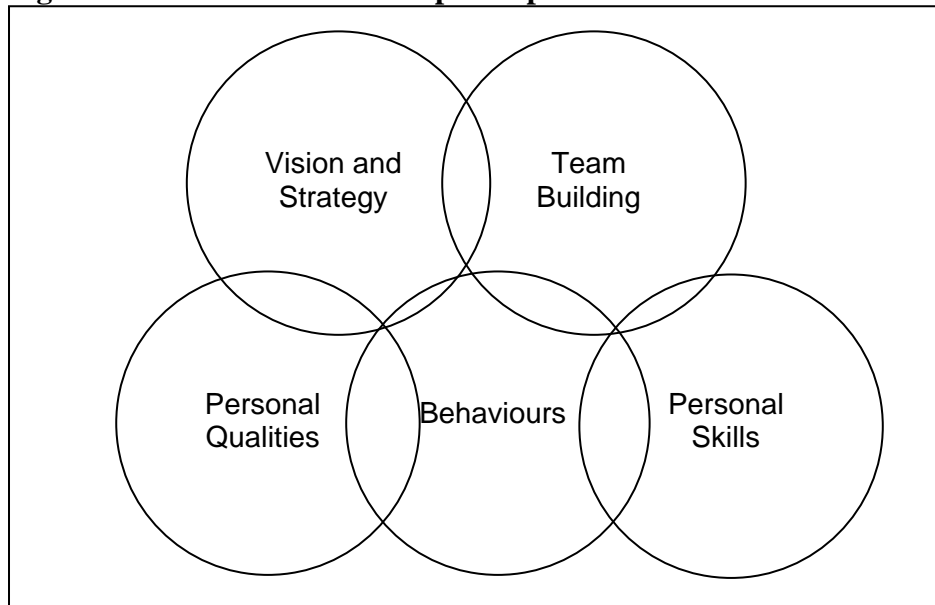
"Old" Tribal context	Current Tribal context	Implication for Leadership Style
Clients want single service solutions	Clients want complex solutions	More collaborative working
Buoyant public sector – strong focus on quality	Public sector spending restrained – strong focus on value for money and cost reduction	More commercial approaches required with stronger focus on cost
Key leadership figures are owner managers with relatively few stakeholders (internal focus)	Key leadership figures are corporate leaders	More team working and acceptance of need to influence range of stakeholders (corporate focus)
High status accorded to domain expertise	High status accorded to mix of domain and commercial expertise	Leaders need to move beyond their comfort zone
Small organisational units on one site	Large organisational units geographically dispersed	Influence becomes more important than control
Leadership focused on owner managers	Leadership more widely distributed	Relationship management and communication becomes more important
Leadership style seen as un-discussed common sense	Leadership style recognised as important and on the agenda	More reflection about impact of style becomes important

How Leadership was Conceptualised in Tribal

All participants were able to differentiate leadership from management and were clear that Tribal's continued success depended on the quality of its leaders. They identified several hundred features of effective leadership which were analysed and

classified into the five areas of competence diagrammatically represented in Figure 1 below as the Tribal Leadership Competence Framework.

Figure 1: The Tribal Leadership Competence Framework



This Framework was constructed from an analysis of the interview data and has not been subject to review by participants. It is acknowledged that the Framework is context and time specific. Whilst it has features in common with more generic frameworks, to obtain the most from a case study approach, it was decided to derive a framework from the evidence rather than to impose a framework from the theory. This also reflected the participant's emphasis on learning from experience rather than theory. All had built up their own conceptualisations of leadership from their experience with little, if any, influence from theory. Despite Bolden's critique of leadership competencies (Bolden, 2004b) it was decided that such an approach was well matched to Tribal's stage of development. Such an approach, in the short term at least, permits discussion and debate and establishes a much stronger base for medium term development than does the existing, somewhat chaotic, approach. One of Bolden's criticisms, that competencies pay insufficient attention to context, can, on a meta-level be applied to Bolden's own somewhat universalistic position.

Whilst the research identified five areas of competence, it is clear that these are not discrete and that, in practice, they all influence and overlap with each other. This is demonstrated diagrammatically in Figure I by representing the competences as interlocking circles. Any classification of leadership competences is arbitrary. In this case, the findings reflect the analysis of the data. It is acknowledged that, should the Framework be taken further, more debate and refinement will be required. In arriving at the five areas, the following considerations were taken into account.

- There was a clear consensus about, and conscious reference to (in the literature, interviews and Tribal documents), the importance of a leader providing vision and purpose.

- Given that the interview data showed that participant's main source of learning was from key individuals it was not surprising that behaviours were seen as important. Participants place great emphasis on individual's whose behaviours appeared to them to consistently exemplify a clear set of values (reflecting Quinn's (2005) work), behaviours which affirmed a person's individuality, behaviours which encouraged questioning and debate, and a readiness to openly admit mistakes (reflecting Ancona's (2007) concept of the incomplete leader).
- The above behaviours require leaders to possess a range of personal skills. Participants placed a very high value on particular personal skills with those most frequently referred to being influencing, motivating, communication, relationship building, listening, empathy, and ability to give critical feedback.
- The participants had very high expectations in relation to personal qualities. The most highly prized and frequently mentioned were trustworthiness, integrity, honesty, a clear set of values, commitment, determination, consistency and energy. This competence echoes some of the early work on traits summarised by Handy (1999) but gives a much greater emphasis to more humanistic and moral qualities and is less based on what might be termed the heroic male stereotype. Whilst emotional intelligence was referred to by one participant, it was not a concept that had influenced the thinking of the others, although its concerns can be readily indentified above.
- Although team building could be regarded as a skill, it has been separated out as a discrete area of competence as it was frequently referred to and, in the current context of Tribal, was seen as critical to Tribal's response to the increasingly complex demands of its clients. This illustrates how context can influence conceptualisations of leadership at a particular point in time.

Overall, participants reflected Bolden's (2004a) conclusion that effective leadership is essential to an organisations success, is hugely complex and demanding, and that it can be improved if it is systematically developed.

The Importance of Leadership Development

All participants agreed that it was important for Tribal's continued success that the organisation more systematically equipped its leaders for the challenges they face. Recent restructuring has placed a new cohort of leaders into key roles and several are struggling. *"I know there are quite a number of us who at times are struggling with what is the role"*, and, in another area of Tribal, *"those taking on leadership responsibility are struggling a bit to understand what their role is in the business"*.

This combination of a complex market context, a new cohort of leaders and the particular stage Tribal had reached in its development had resulted in a widespread view that the time was right for a more co-ordinated approach to leadership development.

The Ingredients of Effective Leadership Development in Tribal

Participants identified six issues which would need to be addressed if an effective leadership development programme was to be established.

(i) *Strengthening the appraisal process.* At the time of this study, almost two thirds of staff had either had no appraisal or did not feel it had benefitted them. Given the centrality of appraisals to the identification of development needs this was probably the major constraint on effective leadership development in Tribal.

(ii) *Strengthening the quality of feedback.* Participants reported they had received little feedback on their work throughout their careers. However, virtually all participants valued what feedback they had received, even if it dated back to school days. The relative absence of feedback and the weak effectiveness of the appraisal process meant that an important source of data for needs analysis was relatively thin.

(iii) *Development of a customised and individualised approach.* Participants were clear that the context of Tribal required a customised approach to leadership development. Participants also believed that leadership development must be individualised, especially for the most senior leaders.

(iv) *Developing domain and commercial expertise.* This was seen as an important issue in Tribal. Whilst the differing needs of technical and commercial staff may be common to many organisations, participants believed it was emphasised in Tribal as, in general, the domain leaders have a public sector background and the commercial leaders a private sector background. This was particularly of concern to the participants who were HR specialists. In the view of one such participant, those with “*domain or technical expertise don’t have the human or leadership element to take the business forward*” and that this was “*because they are comfortable*” within their specialism. Status often accrues to domain expertise and this was seen as limiting commercial leaders from realising their own potential.

(v) *Developing leadership competencies.* Where leadership competency frameworks were emerging, those involved found this promoted self-awareness through a discussion about how individuals perceived themselves compared to the perceptions of others. In Ulrich and Smallwood’s (2007) terms, such developments are key to the development of a Tribal leadership brand.

(vi) *Developing an Overall Approach.* All participants supported the need for a coherent, overall approach which, ideally, consisted of the elements referred to above. Participants wanted to see a mix of customised courses responding to patterns of need and other, more individualised activities.

Participants Experience of Coaching

The research found that the most frequently referred to positive features of coaching were:

- The value of a critical friend who was impartial, having no vested interest;
- An opportunity to talk things through, discuss vulnerabilities and emotions, and make mistakes;
- A opportunity to reflect, to explore options and consequences, and to think outside the box;
- A coping mechanism in a complex world;
- An opportunity to explore how to respond to challenging people and/or tasks;
- A place to identify and affirm strengths and identify and address personal inhibitors;
- An opportunity to learn and use new tools and techniques.

Interestingly, no participant referred to the formal setting of development aims and goals. This mismatch possibly reflects the different starting points of the commissioned coach and the participant coachee. The former can present coaching as part of a wider, entirely rational, process of medium term development whereas the coachee is more likely to emphasise the exploration of the immediate challenges they face.

Participants had a range of views as to why coaching appears to becoming increasingly popular. These were relevant as they signposted the particular contribution that coaching can make to leadership development. The research identified nine broad themes that summarised participant's perceptions.

- (i) The majority of participants were very critical of the value for money offered by major courses and programmes. This was interesting as a common stated reason for not introducing coaching is its cost, suggesting that coaching is seen as an add-on to other initiatives rather than a replacement for them.
- (ii) Participants believed coaching offered a way of managing their role in an increasingly fast changing and complex business environment. The opportunity to have time to regularly reflect in a structured way was greatly valued.
- (iii) Participants valued the opportunity to reflect on how to manage their behaviours in an increasingly diverse social context, often reflected in the composition of leadership teams themselves.
- (iv) A recognition that the way professional services are provided and the way individuals expect to be managed must be increasingly personalised. This requires greater attention to understanding the motivations and emotions of others.
- (v) The increasing importance being placed on the personal development agenda.
- (vi) The increased emphasis on work life balance. It is noteworthy that this perspective was only referred to by female participants.

(vii) Organisations are getting flatter. Leaders are spending more time with their peers and having to make decisions that have significant implications for others. A coach was seen as a trustworthy person they can explore the implications of this with.

(viii) As the services required by Tribal's clients become more sophisticated there is more need to work across business unit boundaries. Leaders are increasingly asked to work outside their comfort zone with colleagues they do not know and who have different professional backgrounds.

(ix) There is a view that "old styles" of leadership have proved ineffective and, in particular, have inhibited open discussions of risks and concerns. The confidential nature of coaching enables leaders to surface concerns about behaviour and risk that would be more difficult to address head on through line managers.

The Contribution of Coaching to the Development of Individual Leaders and to the Leadership Capacity of the Organisation

Participants were asked to identify evidence of the tangible benefits of coaching for the leadership development of individuals and for the development of the leadership capacity of Tribal as an organisation. Every single participant felt able to do this although several sensibly added caveats such as "*whether (the recognised benefits) are directly as a result of the coaching or not, the timing seems to suggest (it) is as a result of the coaching experience,*" and "*it would be wrong to suggest that all (the recognised benefits) was because of coaching, clearly it is a result of a whole series of interventions, but coaching clearly has its part to play in it*". This is important as some of the research on the impact of coaching, such as that by Suggett (2006), starts off from the point of view of an enthusiastic advocate relatively blind to the complexity of identifying the specific contributions of particular interventions in challenging environments. In making their observations, participants were drawing on their reflections of the direct benefits to themselves and to their observations on the benefits to colleagues. Bearing the above caveats in mind, Table 3 below summarises participants' perceptions of the benefits that involvement in coaching had brought to the leadership development of individuals and to strengthening the leadership capacity of the organisation itself.

These perceived benefits are shown in the left hand and right hand columns respectively. The middle column repeats the five competencies of the Tribal Leadership Framework described above and links, not made by participants, are suggested between these competencies and the perceived benefits. A particular benefit is only referred to if it was mentioned by three or more participants.

Table 3: The Perceived Benefits Of Coaching To Individuals And To The Organisation

Perceived Benefits to the Development of the Individual	Tribal Leadership Competence Framework	Benefits to the Development of the Organisation
	Vision and Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Better organisational development ▪ Better value for money
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improved personal skills and behaviours 	Team Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Better corporate working ▪ Better retention of good staff ▪ Strengthened recruitment position
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More considered work-life balance ▪ Better decision making 	Behaviours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improved performance ▪ Better management of risk
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improved inter-personal skills ▪ Better career planning 	Personal Skills	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased confidence ▪ Enhanced self-awareness 	Personal Qualities	

The Contribution of Coaching to the Development of Individuals

This research identified six areas of benefit that participants believed coaching had brought to individuals. Using Leedham’s (2005) coaching pyramid benefits model these benefits represent a mix of inner and outer personal benefits.

(i) *Increased confidence.* This was referred to by all participants. This finding matches previous work by Leedham (2005) who describes confidence as the most widely recognised "inner personal benefit" of coaching. Increased confidence is a foundation of improved leadership.

(ii) *Improved personal skills.* This was referred to by a significant majority of participants. Improvements to communication and influencing skills were readily identified. Continually improving personal skills is a key concern of leadership development.

(iii) *Enhanced self-awareness.* This refers to both a better awareness of an individual’s strengths and areas for development as well as how behaviour in particular contexts could have unintended consequences. These observations reflect Kampa Kokesch’s (2002) research which identified becoming more aware of the impact of your own behaviour as one of four areas of benefit from coaching.

(iv) *More considered work-life balance.* As referred to earlier, this was a benefit perceived by female participants who were reluctant to discuss the challenges of being

a mother of young children with their line managers. This benefit of coaching has not been specifically identified in previous research.

(v) *Better career planning.* Coaching was seen as particularly powerful at times of career transitions, helping newly promoted leaders to understand their new role and the personal implications of the role for themselves. Again, this area of benefit reflects Leedham's (2005) finding that help with career and gaining promotion was the second most commonly identified benefit of coaching for individuals.

(vi) *Better decision making.* The majority of participants identified how coaching had enabled them to systematically consider a range of options and, more generally, adopt a more thoughtful approach to decision making. Several participants talked of using coaching to check the alignment of their decisions with their stated values.

The data showed a differential contribution of coaching to the development of the five areas of leadership competence set out in the Tribal Leadership Development Framework. This is summarised in Table 4 below.

Table 4: The Relative Contribution Of Coaching To The Five Identified Areas Of Leadership Competence

Tribal Leadership Competence	Relative Contribution
Vision and strategy	Little evidence that coaching is making a contribution. Generally more focused on immediate challenges rather than medium term strategy.
Team building	Some evidence that coaching is contributing to the organisations capacity for team working
Personal qualities	Good evidence that coaching is making a contribution. Specific areas include identifying strengths, inhibitors, vulnerabilities and increasing self-awareness.
Behaviours	Good evidence that coaching is making a contribution. Specific areas include better decision making, self-management, management of difficult situations, better career planning and management of work-life balance, and active use of new skills and techniques.
Personal skills	Good evidence that coaching is making a contribution. Specific areas include better coping mechanisms, dealing with difficult colleagues and clients, increased confidence, dealing with the implications of change, and working outside the comfort zone.

These findings broadly reinforce those of McGovern et al (2001), Kampa Kokesh (2002), Leedham (2005), Passmore (2006) and Suggett (2006). Participants described how coaching was mainly used to address immediate challenges. In the author's experience, heavy use has been made of coaching to assist with strategy and visioning especially when these were the pressing issues of the moment. Nonetheless, it is still surprising that such little use is made of coaching for this purpose although the majority of participants referred to coaching's utility in improving problem

solving and decision making, clearly skills closely related to strategy formation. if not visioning.

All of the above benefits can potentially be seen as accruing to the development of the organisation as well as to the development of individuals within it. However, this research distinguishes between the two because this is how the evidence was framed by the participants themselves.

Passmore et al (2006) believe the benefits of coaching can be identified at the individual, team and organisational level. The views of the participants tend to focus on the first and last of these, with relatively few comments being made that explicitly linked coaching to improved teamwork, even though the same participants highlighted the importance of the team building component of the Tribal Leadership Competence Framework. There is a similar contrast between the emphasis the participants place on the Framework competence “vision and strategy” and an almost complete absence of any reference to observed benefits of coaching that relate specifically to this competence. Table 4 above retrospectively suggests what these links might be, although these are not links explicitly made by participants. Of course, at the time of the interviews, the Framework described above did not exist.

These findings could be related to the fact that coaching was still relatively new to Tribal and, because of the way it was procured, it appeared to focus on immediate leadership challenges rather than medium term strategic issues. This is likely to be reinforced by the nature of coaching itself which permits the coachee to set the agenda.

The Contribution of Coaching to the Development of the Leadership Capacity of the Organisation

The research also identified six areas of benefit that participants believed coaching had brought to the leadership capacity of Tribal as an organisation. This is the area that Leedham (2005) describes as “business benefits”. These benefits can be regarded as contributions to the overall leadership capacity of Tribal and are as relevant to an assessment of the impact of coaching on leadership development as a concern with benefits that accrue to individual leaders. It is an area where the evidence about the role and impact of coaching is rather thin and less secure when compared to that on the impact of coaching on individuals.

(i) *Strengthened recruitment.* This was a benefit identified by both HR participants and all participants in one business. The ability to recruit highly competent new leaders feeds directly into an organisation’s overall leadership capacity. Several participants clearly understood that the availability of coaching is an added-value feature that can positively influence the number of high quality people who wish to work for Tribal.

(ii) *Better retention of good staff.* The argument developed in (i) above can also be applied to retaining good leaders. The ability to retain good leaders is a significant

benefit to the reputation of the business, to business continuity, to securing maximum return from investment in leadership development, to maintaining the leadership capacity of the organisation and to avoiding the very considerable costs, financially and in terms of diminished and unstable leadership capacity, associated with recruitment from the open market.

(iii) *Better corporate working and organisational development.* One participant noted “*they are becoming more flexible, there is more networking*” whilst another notes that an “*increased awareness of other preference types had benefitted the effectiveness of project teams.*”

(iv) *Better management of risk.* This is an area that participants had given particular thought to in light of the recent global recession. It was grounded in a view that autocratic leadership styles “*do not allow people to raise concerns or talk openly about risks*”. In the case study consultancy business, whilst the content of individual coaching sessions was confidential and no comments were attributable to individuals, feedback on general areas of concern gathered by the team of coaches enabled the senior leaders to address these matters before they had a negative impact. This benefit was identified by a minority of participants in the most senior roles and linked coaching to the broader development of leadership capacity within Tribal.

(v) *Better value for money.* Earlier in this paper, reference is made to participants who were sceptical about the value for money offered by major courses and programmes. In contrast, coaching was seen as offering good value for money. This case is strengthened further when its positive impact on recruitment and retention is taken into account.

(vi) *Improved Performance.* This was seen to be multi-faceted. The positive impact on individuals and team working is referred to above. The impact on dealing with poor performance was also observed. For example, the increased confidence and decision making skills of one individual leader had resulted in all poor performers being removed from her business within nine months. A final area was an analysis of recent contract wins which resulted in one participant concluding “*they were winning very different types of contract because the MD was using a wider range of leadership styles, and drawing in people from across the organisation to develop new ways of working and new services and products. This was specifically because the leader had adjusted and shifted their leadership style.*” This was a widely recognised benefit that demonstrated the intimate link between the development of the individual leader and the development of the organisation.

The research shows that the participants had a realistic view of the contribution of coaching to Tribal’s overall approach to leadership development. Table 5 sets out what this contribution can be.

Table 5: The Contribution Of Coaching To An Overall Programme Of Leadership Development

Ingredients of Effective Leadership Development	Contribution of Coaching
Strengthened appraisal process	Existing role for coaching in Tribal. Preparing for appraisal process as per current practice in business A.
Strengthening the quality of feedback	Existing role for coaching in Tribal. Potentially significant role for coaching – self-reflection, analysing feedback, dealing with inhibitors, clarifying strengths and development needs
Development of both domain and commercial expertise.	Minimal role for coaching in Tribal. Done through courses, secondments, projects, and workshops rather than coaching.
Development of a customised and individualised approach	Existing role for coaching in Tribal. A core feature of coaching.
Development of Tribal leadership competencies.	Minimal role for coaching in Tribal but could be informed from aggregated feedback on needs from coaching sessions building on practice in business A
Strengthening talent management	Minimal role for coaching in Tribal. Done through discussions between MDs and HR based on former's general perceptions of expertise.

There was a general view that these benefits are not inevitable and are associated with certain features of good practice.

Securing Benefits

Participants identified seven features of good practice.

- (i) Having a choice of coach;
- (ii) The coachee making a commitment to learn from their coaching;
- (iii) The coachee understanding the nature, purpose and potential of coaching;
- (iv) The skills of the coach. Particular value was placed on a coach's ability to swiftly develop trust and empathy, active listening skills, honesty, and the quality of their questioning and challenging skills;
- (v) Easy access to, and the well timed availability of, coaching;
- (vi) Coaching being seen by all parties as a developmental rather than a remedial intervention;
- (vii) That coaching would be available at several career points. These are typically seen as being on entry to Tribal (where the emphasis might be on strengthening personal skills); at career transition points such as taking on the first senior leadership role (where the emphasis might be on self-awareness of personal qualities, behaviours and team building); and for the most senior leaders (where the emphasis might be on leadership style, strategy and vision).

There were also clear views about the experience and background of the coaches. The majority of participants believed that a coach with directly relevant experience was more likely to provide valuable insights. This view may well be related to the fact that coaching in Tribal is usually activated by the coach at a time of particular challenge and often takes the form of a personalised consultancy. This is an area where coachees from particular professions and coaches with general skills frequently, and not surprisingly, have different perspectives. Coachees often sought a mix of mentoring and coaching. This is an issue that needs to be openly discussed and resolved at the time a coachee is choosing their coach.

Timing of Involvement in Coaching

Given that coaching is likely to remain a relatively rationed resource, it is important to clarify if there are times when involvement is likely to be more effective than others. The research identified three such times.

- (i) At key career transition points associated with moving to a new role with more authority (this is associated with entry to Tribal and/or promotion);
- (ii) On taking on a new role outside an existing comfort zone where new challenges will be faced (this is usually associated with a new project);
- (iii) On facing a new or complex challenge in an existing role (often associated with an event such as a re-organisation).

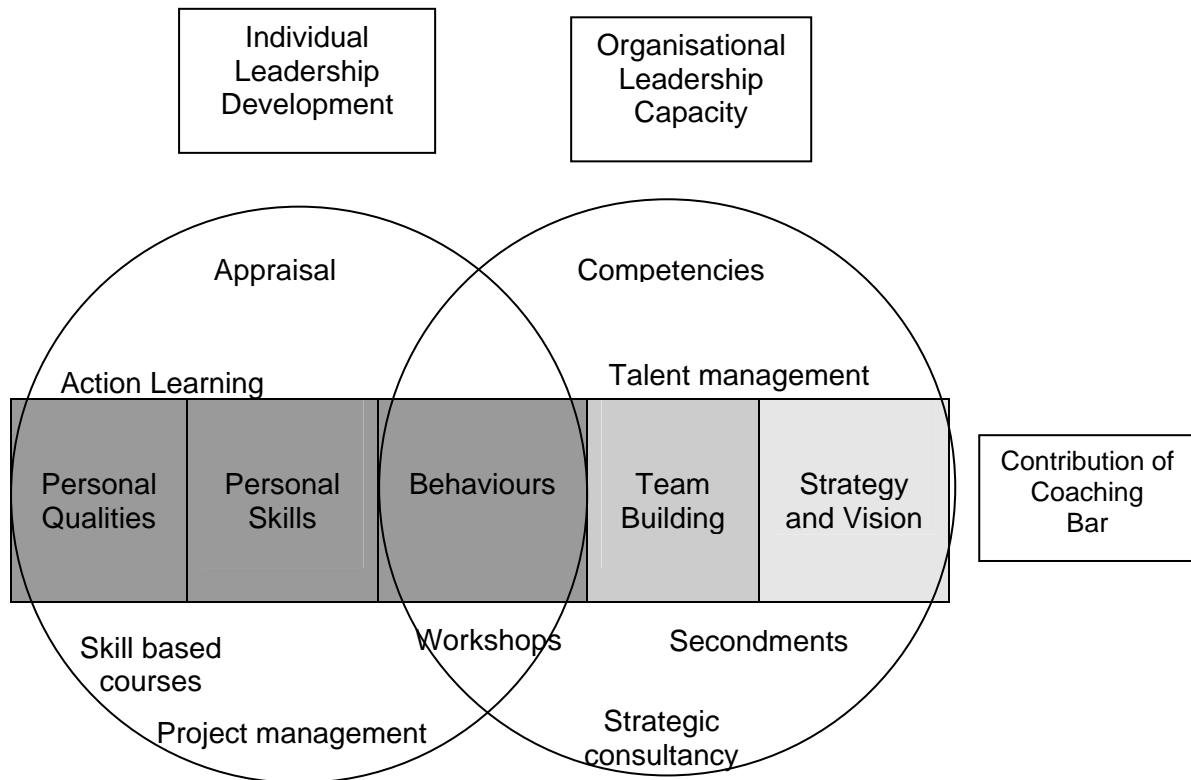
These findings lend support to the views of Knights and Poppleton (2007). Coaching offers an individualised approach to leadership development which can provide support and challenge well matched to a leader's needs during periods of intense learning.

Conclusion

This research shows that the contribution of coaching to leadership development can be identified at both the individual and organisational level. At the former, it demonstrates how coaching can develop the leadership competence of individuals. At the organisational level, it demonstrates how coaching can make a contribution to developing the leadership capacity of an organisation.

Figure 2 conceptualises this contribution. The overlapping circles show that the leadership development of the individual is linked to the development of the organisation's leadership capacity. The "contribution of coaching bar" illustrates that coaching has a contribution to make to both phenomena and that, in Tribal, this contribution varied across the five identified leadership competences. The other activities shown within the circles show that coaching is part of an array of approaches to developing leadership.

Figure 2: The Contribution Of Coaching To Individual Leadership Development And The Overall Leadership Capacity Of Tribal



Key : Relative Contribution of Coaching

	Good evidence		Some evidence		Little evidence
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Previous research throws more light on the leadership development of the individual than the leadership capacity of an organisation, possibly because it is focused more on general populations than leaders in particular organisations. The case study approach enables the latter and, as a result, provides a range of new insights.

Reflections on Methodology

The case study approach proved to be a good basis for collecting rich interview data although a limitation was the availability of a restricted range of other data sources. The fact that the participants knew the other participants in their respective businesses helped the triangulation of the data and meant it did not rely entirely on self-perceptions of benefits. This was made richer by the involvement of men and women, and business and HR leaders who brought differing perspectives to the phenomena. The diversity of roles and gender of the participants brought even

more benefits than anticipated. Lack of information about the roles and characteristics of the individuals involved is lacking in other related research.

Although this was not considered at the research design stage, the semi-structured interviews proved to be well matched to the skills of a coach. An audit of a researcher's wider personal skills might usefully be integrated more generally into the research design process. Similarly, it is likely that the construction of the Framework itself could have benefitted from wider discussion and further iterations that would have sharpened the analysis of the number of competencies and the relationship between them.

Too many studies concerned with the impact of coaching are either undertaken by uncritical coaching enthusiasts (Suggett, 2006) or associated with the marketing of coaching services (McGovern et al, 2001 and Kampa Kokesch, 2002). If coaching is to receive the professional status it seeks there needs to be more objective research into its benefits.

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