Effect of a quality of life coaching intervention on psychological courage and self-determination

Devorah F. Curtis, Graduate College of Mind-Body Medicine, Saybrook University, San Francisco.

Lisa L. Kelly, Graduate College of Mind-Body Medicine, Saybrook University, San Francisco.

Contact E-mail: dcurtis@saybrook.edu

Abstract

This study utilised a multiple case study design, grounded in self-determination theory, which examined changes in motivation and psychological courage throughout an 8-week quality of life coaching intervention. Eight nonclinical adults participated in six one-hour tele-coaching sessions. Sources of data included a pre-assessment survey, a pre-post questionnaire, field notes, and post-session interview transcriptions. The coaching process included six telephone sessions, use of the profile reports, and HeartMath resources. The qualitative cross-case analysis describes how integrative life coaching supported participants' expression of psychological courage and facilitated shifts toward autonomous motivation.

Key Words: coaching, courage, self-determination theory, values, quality of life, motivation

Introduction

The need or desire for a lifestyle transition can be motivated by an external event, such as the loss of a job, or it can be provoked by a series of painful emotions such as boredom, loneliness, anxiety, fear, disillusionment, and discontent. Humanistic theorists claim that strong emotions can serve as *organismic triggers* that innately motivate individuals to modify their current life situations when they are burdened by a sense of personal stagnation or unexpected life circumstances (Reeve, 2009). Emotions can also serve as an awakening to review and revise one's goals, values, motivations, and actions (Fajans, 2006). Whether motivated by strong emotions or by unexpected life circumstances, it takes psychological courage to successfully navigate these major life transitions.

There are many broad definitions of courage found in the literature. *Courage* has been defined as an extreme expression of motivation and commitment and is often associated with self-determination, faith, hopefulness, and perseverance when striving toward something of inherent value while experiencing fear (Baumann, 2007; Jablin, 2006). *Psychological courage* is described as "the psychological energy involved

in confronting destructive habits, irrational anxieties and fears, and hearing the truth in daily life" (Putnam, 1997: 2). Hannah, Sweeney & Lester. (2007) state that courageous actions require emotional and cognitive skills, not will alone. Hannah *et al*. (2007) further theorized that building positive emotional skills to reduce associations of fears may be an essential step before demonstrating courageous actions and autonomous motivation.

According to self-determination theory, human well-being is dependent upon meeting the basic human psychological needs of autonomy, relatedness, and competency, and these three needs must be met in order to facilitate psychological courage and value-based actions (Hannah *et al.*, 2007; Kasser, 2002). Self-determination theory may be a practical framework to understand how different individuals express psychological courage and motivation during periods of perceived stress and lifestyle transitions.

Pury *et al.* (2007) reported that few case studies have investigated the emotional, cognitive, and situational influences of courageous actions that people experience in ordinary life. Current research in positive psychology suggests that strengths-based interventions can enhance one's sense of well-being and quality of life because of the internalized motivational factors that elicit people's true values, intentions, and interests (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2006). There has also been very little research that has investigated how positive emotional refocusing affects peoples' motivation, attitudes, and long range behavioral change (Rothman *et al.*, 2004). Consequently, the evidence that supports whether autonomously supportive influences, such as life coaching, can significantly affect individuals' internalization process, psychological courage, well-being, and quality of life is scarce, especially in the nonclinical population (Frisch *et al*., 2005).

The intention of the current research study was to provide a customized, one-to-one quality of life coaching intervention, grounded in self-determination theory, for professional adults in transition, and to study to what extent individual changes in motivation and courage occurred throughout the coaching process. This paper includes a brief literature review of the theoretical constructs of psychological courage, self-determination, and emotional regulation to support the multiple case study framework. The qualitative results from the study are presented along with the discussion and implications for future research.

Humanistic-Existential Perspectives
Humanistic psychology is grounded in the belief that innate human potential can be identified and cultivated. Maslow envisioned the creation of a scientific "positive psychology" that would explore human experience and support the cultivation of human potential (Resnick *et al.*, 2001). Maslow's vision for a positive psychology started with his interest in growth needs, which represent humans at their best—their inherent strengths to understand and confront the dynamics within their lifestyle domains (Resnick *et al.*, 2001). Maslow also emphasized that when people satisfy the essential deficiency needs (i.e., safety/security, love/belongingness, and self-esteem) it is possible for people to move autonomously toward self-actualization (Maslow, 1968).

May (1981) believed that healthy psychological development involves the capacity to endure and adjust to the natural anxiety that is associated with the freedom to act on a sense of values, purpose, and meaning in life versus submitting to the social expectations of the world and familiar routines. Maslow (1970) and May (1975) stated that supportive conditions help people make growth choices that offer them the chance to experience more creativity, courage, love, affection, responsibility, and ego transcendence.

Positive Psychology Perspectives

Positive psychology emerged from humanistic psychology. Positive psychology emphasizes the use of quantitative research methods (Mruk, 2006). The goal of positive psychology is to help people fully optimize their character strengths, competencies, and potential in life by imagining future possibilities as a means to enable human excellence (Gable & Haidt, 2005; Reeve, 2009). Seligman and Peterson created the *Classification of Strengths and Virtues* (*CSV*) *Manual*, which classifies the positive strengths and virtues that enable optimal human development (Seligman *et al.*, 2005). Following the development of the CSV, Peterson and Seligman devised the Values in Action Inventory Survey (VIA-IS) to measure the dimensions of intrinsic character strengths and virtues within individuals. The measurement of the VIA strengths is intended to assess what strengths predominately manifest in consistent behaviors and how other strengths might be developed over time in specific contexts. The VIA system is composed of six core virtues: wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence; and 24 character strengths have been identified to be the psychological mechanisms that drive these core virtues (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Specifically, the virtue of courage is defined as the emotional strength that involves the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of internal/external opposition. The character strengths identified with courage include bravery, integrity/honesty, perseverance, and zest/vitality (Peterson & Seligman, 2004: 29-30).

Character strengths may also share features of other virtues, and it is important to recognize the social contexts that foster the expression of one's personal strengths (Pury & Kowalski, 2007). Jablin (2006) claimed courage is the core universal virtue that can manifest other character strengths (i.e., love, bravery, integrity, persistence, forgiveness, self-regulation, and vitality), which may be critical to overcoming perceived psychological barriers, such as emotional and social stressors (Pury & Kowalski, 2007). Joseph and Linley (2005: 269) asserted that a "person's characterological strengths, meaning and purpose in life, and psychological maturity" are related to one's psychological well-being. Thus, it may be stated that development and psychological well-being are the outcome for which people courageously encounter intra/interpersonal challenges—and the process requires self-awareness, autonomous motivation, and coherent actions (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Self-Determination Theory

Self-determination theory suggests that (a) behavior is implicitly reinforced by experiences and associations; (b) people naturally strive to be effective within their environments; and (c) individuals are internally regulated by different types of motivation (i.e., amotivation, extrinsic motivation, and intrinsic motivation) that align on a spectrum and may fluctuate from least to most self-determined (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

For example, *amotivation* is understood as behavior that often lacks focus, purpose, and meaning. If people do not understand the significance of participating in an activity or relationship, it is unlikely they will be engaged to perform in an optimal manner (Vallerand & Ratelle, 2002). *Extrinsic motivation* is associated with four different types of regulation: external, introjected, identified, and integrated. These types of extrinsic motivation fall along a continuum of *internalization*. The more internalized the extrinsic motivation the more autonomous the person will be. *Intrinsic motivation* is driven by innate pleasure, interest, and challenge, and is also associated with enhanced performance, greater self-control, self-esteem, and psychological well-being (Koestner & Losier, 2002; Sheldon & Kasser, 2001). The source of intrinsic motivation and behavior is the desire to meet the individual's psychological needs. Self-determination theory purports that human beings have three psychological needs that call to be met to achieve optimal

psychological health and well-being. These universal and innate needs are: autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

Autonomy

Deci and Moller (2005) claimed that the needs for relatedness and competency are necessary to increase intrinsic regulation; however, autonomy is the fundamental need that can overcome controlling introjections. Autonomous and integrated motivation reflects people's deepest values and beliefs. Through autonomy, people regulate their actions in alignment with their core values and felt needs. An autonomous orientation enables people to be open-minded to new experiences and aware of learning opportunities; to regulate and tolerate emotions like sadness, fear, and anger rather than avoid or deny them; and modify behaviors to align with their congruent goals and purpose (Branden, 1994; Hodgins & Knee, 2002). Successful integration can be achieved when people feel that they have opportunities for choice and reflection, the support of others, as well as the understanding as to why it is important to commit to difficult activities during times of perceived stress. On the other hand, people will likely demonstrate behaviors associated with controlled and introjected motivation (i.e., anxiety, high levels of stress, and dissatisfaction) when learning environments offer structure without providing autonomous support within high priority lifestyle domains (Deci & Moller, 2005; Koestner & Losier, 2002).

In addition to fulfilling the need for autonomy, individuals have an innate need for acceptance so they may modify their behaviors to increase their chances for belonging and relatedness. When this happens, people may experience fluctuations in their perceptions of self-esteem and energy because they may be jeopardizing their sense of values in order to fit in with the desirable social group (Vohs & Ciarocco, 2004). Consequently, when behaviors are motivated by what others may think of them rather than honoring their true desires, they may experience negative emotions such as insecurity, anxiety, and inter/intrapersonal pressure. Although forming relationships is virtuous, the underlying reasons in this example tend to resonate with introjected motives which may inhibit a person's sense of true self-esteem and autonomous motivation (Kernis & Paradise, 2002). Conversely, having a strong sense of autonomy can motivate someone to take courageous actions. According to Pury *et al*. (2007) courageous actions reflect individual readiness to: (a) initiate the process, (b) show vulnerability and confront fears, (c) reflect on personal values and goals, and (d) understand potential consequences of actions based on values other than social expectations.

Types of Regulation Associated With Extrinsic Motivation

Self-determination theory proposes that through the process of internalizing extrinsic motivations people assimilate social regulations and values and accept them as their own, thus engaging in self-determined behavior (Deci & Ryan, 2000). When this internalization process is incomplete, these values and beliefs may remain external and the resulting behaviors of the individual will not be self-determined. Extrinsic motivation ranges along the continuum from being controlled (by intrapersonal and/or interpersonal pressures) to autonomous (self-regulated) motives. The controlled type of extrinsic motivation is associated with low self-esteem, feelings of anxiety and other negative emotions (Baard, 2002). Autonomous motivation is closely related to the humanistic-existential concepts of self-actualization and psychological courage. Through autonomous motivation people learn to internalize unfamiliar or discomforting situations with open-mindedness rather than feeling pressured or defensive (Rogers, 1961). Typically, autonomously oriented individuals are generally aware of their needs and feelings, resilient when situated in controlling environments, and tend to be discerning about how they expend their time and energy

(Deci & Ryan, 1985). Reeve (2009) comments that all people will experience fluctuations in these types of regulation; however, the strength of self-control depends on learned behaviors.

Psychological Courage and Identified Regulation

In order to overcome powerful introjections that often hinder people's ability to differentiate their needs from idealized social expectations, there will likely be an important phase of personal growth that involves self-reflection, awareness, self-control, responsibility, and commitment. Identified regulation, the extrinsic form of motivation on the self-determination spectrum is understood to be the energizing source of momentum that people need to endure challenges or boredom as they persevere toward meaningful extrinsic goals (Burton *et al.*, 2006). Perseverance, a character strength aligned with the virtue of courage could be the motivation that enables people to utilize psychological courage as they regulate negative emotions in an effort to follow-through on their identified values and interests (Burton *et al.*, 2006; Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Self-Regulation

When unpleasant distractions or emotions interfere with ongoing progress, people must learn how to utilize self-regulation skills in order to remain committed to their most important priorities and goals (Sheldon, 2002). These self-regulation skills are the building blocks of psychological courage that can provide individuals with the inherent strengths of self-control while pursuing longer-term priorities. Self-regulation may be the key to enhancing self-determination as it helps individuals engage in self-awareness and perseverance (Sheldon, 2002). Self-regulation theories assume that if people are willing to practice the discipline of a positive mindset and self-control, they can overcome self-limiting reactions in response to life's challenges (Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Pennebaker, 1990). To assist clients as they learn and develop these healthy skills, many therapists and life coaches integrate humanistic, cognitive-behavioral, and strengths-based interventions from positive psychology that are often used in counseling and psychotherapy (Grant & Cavanagh, 2007; Magyar-Moe, 2009: 73-74).

Life Coaching Practices and Outcomes

Life coaching is an integrative process that can help people discover and act on their core values, as well as learn how to balance work/life priorities, and experience greater quality of life (Green *et al.*, 2007; McIntosh, 2003). As a multi-disciplinary, theoretical framework, the philosophy of life coaching is beckoning researchers and practitioners worldwide.

Green *et al.* (2006) conducted the first randomized controlled study that evaluated the effectiveness of a life coaching group program that utilized a cognitive-behavioral, solution-focused approach. This 10-week protocol involved 56 adults from a nonclinical population. The intervention was a structured program (i.e., Coach Yourself) that consisted of a full-day workshop followed by nine weekly, one-hour group meetings (Grant & Green, 2001). Two psychologists facilitated the group sessions where they taught the participants about theories and techniques. Participants then paired off in a peer-to-peer coaching format for 15-20 minutes and reversed roles as coach and client. They had the opportunity to develop goals and discuss progress following the prescribed training manual. By the final week, the findings revealed increases in goal striving, subjective well-being, psychological well-being, and hope (Green *et al.*, 2006).

These results parallel Grant's (2003) exploratory study of the effectiveness of life coaching outside of the clinical and organizational environment. This 13-week study involving 20 post-graduates with a mean

age of 35 years was based on the self-help training program (Coach Yourself) that incorporated cognitive-behavioral clinical and counseling psychology, brief solution-focused therapy, and self-regulation techniques (Grant, 2003). Individuals met in a group for 10 weeks of 50-minute coaching sessions. The solution-focused therapy encompassed a constructivist, humanistic approach that centers on the clients' intrinsic strengths and finding ways to identify new meanings and solutions rather than focusing predominately on problems. This process taught people to learn how to think about their goals, practice self-regulation, evaluate their progress toward goals, and create new action plans. Outcomes were measured by improvements in effect size and *t*-tests on self-report scales (i.e., depression/anxiety and stress, quality of life inventory, and self-reflection/insight) (Grant, 2003).

In conclusion, psychological courage may be the virtue that people need to further develop when they experience transformational change in their personal and professional lives. Self-determination researchers speculate that in order to fully understand how people are motivated within different social contexts, it is important to devise qualitative studies to explore how specific factors strengthen courage and internalized motivational regulation when people encounter significant life transitions. As psychological courage is believed to be an emotional and cognitive skill that can be facilitated and learned, the literature suggests that humanistic and positive psychology methods for an integrative lifestyle coaching framework may be very beneficial for mental health practitioners to incorporate into their current practice. In addition, self-determination theory has not been widely applied in the fields of clinical and coaching psychology and the process of facilitating autonomous forms of motivation and courage remains undetermined (Vansteenkiste & Sheldon, 2006). Thus, conducting qualitative and outcome-based case studies within the field of applied coaching psychology adds credibility to the evolving profession of life coaching and to the field of positive psychology. The findings may facilitate the design of meaningful interventions that life coaches can offer their clients as they help individuals build the positive emotional skills needed to demonstrate courageous actions in daily life.

Multiple Case Study Methodology

The research utilized a multiple case study design to evaluate eight professionals who self-identified as being ready for life change and personal development. The research questions included:

(1) To what extent is psychological courage an emotional and cognitive skill that can be strengthened through a quality of life coaching methodology?
(2) How does psychological courage affect individual differences in motivation?

To answer these questions, the researcher used a multi-theoretical framework to construct each individual case to be presented in a cross-case analysis. Multiple sources of evidence (i.e., surveys/questionnaires, researcher notes, and semi-structured interview) captured the relevant data for each individual case study.

Research Design

The researcher partnered directly with the participants in one-to-one integrative quality of life tele-coaching sessions throughout the 8-week study. This integrative quality of life coaching model is based in self-determination theory and seeks to foster autonomy, relatedness, and competency by acknowledging the role of body, mind, and spirit in navigating challenging transitions and fostering life satisfaction. This approach supports the participants' lifestyle change process by helping them identify future goals via self-

assessments, and engage in the process of self-discovery, self-awareness, emotional regulation, and action planning.

Participant Recruitment

The recruitment strategy was a convenience sampling, nonclinical, one-to-one tailored approach. Potential candidates were solicited through (a) counseling networks; and (b) prior human resources contacts. The candidates were contacted via an email describing the research strategy. The inclusion criteria for this study targeted professional adults who were contemplating or experiencing a major professional transition and were interested in learning about stress management techniques. Exclusion criteria included those individuals interested in marriage/family counseling or who were seeking personal therapy for clinical depression/anxiety. Eight people, between 28-60 years of age, were selected based upon their commitment to the protocol. Each participant received and signed an informed consent that described protections for confidentiality and would release them from the project if they chose to disengage.

Research Setting

The length of the study was eight weeks and the data were drawn from six coaching sessions: one two-hour initial session and five one-hour sessions, followed by a final 60-minute interview. The data were gathered via telephone conversations, the research instruments, and field notes. Telephone consultation sessions were scheduled bi-weekly according to the availability of the researcher and participant.

Research Instruments

Multiple sources of data collection were used to capture descriptive information for the participants: (a) online Values in Action survey, (b) pre-post Quality of Life questionnaire, (c) supplemental self-reflection documents, (d) semi-structured phone interview, and (e) researcher field notes. The researcher prepaid for the pre-post test assessments and educational materials prior to the study.

Values in Action Inventory of Strengths Survey (VIA-IS)

This is a self-reported online survey that each participant completed before the first consultation session. The participants were given a code to access the survey through the VIA Institute on Character website. The survey included 240 questions that required approximately 30 to 40 minutes to complete. This survey was selected to help participants identify their intrinsic character strengths and reflect upon their value system. These profile reports were used as a coaching tool and the ways in which the participants experienced their character strengths are included in the qualitative analysis and the interpretive final report. The VIA-IS is reported to have "adequate internal consistency reliability with alphas greater than .70 reported for all scales and test-retest reliability by correlations of .70 or higher over four-month testing intervals" (Magyar-Moe, 2009: 47). The test-retest correlations are consistent across various nations despite cultural, ethnic, and religious differences (Seligman *et al.*, 2005: 412).

Quality of Life Inventory (QOLI)

The QOLI was developed by Frisch, and is available through Pearson Assessments (Quality of Life Inventory, n.d.). This is a 32-item positive mental health paper/pencil questionnaire that required approximately five minutes for each participant to complete. The questionnaire includes 16 life domains that are briefly defined. Participants were asked to describe how important—ranked on scale from 0-2—certain parts of their life are and how satisfied—ranked on scale from (-3) to (+3)—they are with each domain. The

quality of life scores range from very low, low, average, and high based on the weighted scales of the participants' answers (Frisch, 1994).

According to leading positive psychologist researchers, this assessment is an empirically valid positive psychology tool with significant test-retest and internal consistency reliability (Frisch, 1994; Frisch *et al.*, 2005), and studies to support the predictive validity are promising and ongoing (Biswas-Diener & Dean, 2007). Researchers from the National Institute of Mental Health purport that the QOLI is a useful and practical assessment tool for coaching and clinical purposes when focusing on life balance and personal growth opportunities for adults (Frisch, 2006, pp. 57-61).

Semi-Structured Interview

A semi-structured interview was used in the final phone consultation to capture themes that were relevant to self-determination theory, personal values, and psychological courage. The participants provided consent to have the interviews audio taped and transcribed by a third party professional transcription service.

Coaching Interventions: Experimental Work

Each participant was given a copy of the book *Transforming Stress: The HeartMath Solution for Relieving Worry, Fatigue, and Tension* (Childre & Rozman, 2005). Participants used this educational resource to (a) acquire basic information about the mind-body reactions to stress and (b) learn how HeartMath techniques are used to facilitate self-regulation, as well as to develop the emotional skills to enhance psychological courage. The participants were encouraged to read the book, identify the techniques that they wanted to learn about, and then practice the different activities as their time permitted.

The emWave Personal Stress Reliever (PSR) is a home trainer hand-held electronic biofeedback device that was provided by the researcher for clients to use between training sessions. This device can detect heart rhythms through a finger or ear sensor that records low (red), medium (blue), and high (green) coherence feedback by changing colored lights and sounds (Culbert, 2007). The colors and sounds are used to help users of the PSR become aware of physiological shifts as they are focusing on their heart and mental images. Participants were encouraged to use this devise according to their needs. This was not used to measure changes in the final data.

VIA-IS and QOLI profile reports were used as a coaching tool to facilitate the participants' reflective and action-oriented processes. The researcher also recorded field notes during every telephone consultation. The notes captured the participants' qualitative responses from the surveys, questionnaires, reading material, and daily practices.

Research Analysis

An interpretive analysis, cross-case synthesis was used to prepare the final written report. *Cross-case synthesis* is a technique used in multiple case study analysis that consists of at least two cases (Yin, 2003: 133). A meta-matrix system displayed in a large word table was used to efficiently organize the themes identified across all of the qualitative data points from each individualized case. The cases captured the descriptive short quotes, QOLI satisfaction pre-post-intervention scores, and the assigned codes that relate to psychological courage, type of motivational orientation and regulation, VIA strengths and virtues, and psychological needs. This method of analysis allowed the researcher to interpret whether the different cases shared similar patterns of personal courage dependent upon one's type of motivational orientation and

regulation, and to describe how the coaching intervention influenced the participants' experiences of personal change (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2003).

The data were organized and coded in different word tables for each specific case and the coded cases were compared to each other. A post-intervention qualitative analysis was conducted to determine the top seven strengths most frequently expressed throughout the intervention. The pre-post assessment QOLI scores were not quantitatively analyzed. The results were used to facilitate participants' reflection and awareness about their high priority life domains and goals, which were separated by personal and professional context. The changes from baseline scores were integrated within the qualitative analysis and discussion section of each individualized case report. The information was coded to identify (a) the hypothetical motivational orientation (i.e., impersonal, controlled, and autonomous); (b) type of regulation (i.e., external, introjected, identified, and integrated); and (c) possible deficient psychological need (i.e., autonomy, relatedness, and competency).

The six sessions of field notes and final transcript were organized by session number into two different charts to separate the professional and personal contexts. Examples of ordinary courage within the narrative data were analyzed according to the descriptive definitions of "a courageous mindset" and the VIA character strengths of courage (i.e., honesty/integrity, bravery, zest, and perseverance) (Hannah *et al.*, 2007: 130; Peterson & Seligman, 2004: 29-30). The quotes were also coded with the associated psychological need deficiency (i.e., autonomy relatedness, and competency) and type of motivational regulation (i.e., external, introjected, identified, and integrated). Multiple tables were created to present the results for the individual cases, and cross-case analysis, through which the shifts in the participants' type of motivational regulation could be identified.

Results

The results of this study demonstrate that psychological courage is a cognitive and emotional skill that can be strengthened for eight healthy adults who were experiencing personal and professional lifestyle transitions through a quality of life coaching intervention. The findings also demonstrate how psychological courage is internalized and how it affects individual differences in motivation. Finally, the study described how a coaching intervention, grounded in self-determination theory can affect an individual's sense of personal autonomy, relatedness, and competency.

The top seven VIA character strengths from the participants' VIA profile reports are associated with those virtues of wisdom and knowledge, transcendence, humanity, and justice (see Table 1). Specifically the traits of love, open-mindedness/judgment, love of learning, curiosity, gratitude, and appreciation for beauty/excellence suggest that each person approached the intervention with a positive outlook and level of readiness to learn and receive information. The bottom seven VIA character strengths are associated with those virtues of temperance, transcendence, and justice. In particular the strengths of self-regulation, self-discipline, hope, and purposefulness/meaningfulness indicate that each person had a need to learn how to express emotional control, focus, and self-discipline while managing perceived stressors. Finally, the qualitative post-assessment of the top seven VIA strengths represent courage (honesty about one's values and needs and willingness to confront incongruent attitudes and behaviors), temperance (ability to maintain self-control and focus), wisdom/knowledge (acquiring information and generating new meanings), and transcendence (hope) as the core virtues expressed at the end of the study.

Pre-Assessment Top 7 VIA Strengths Combined	Pre-Assessment Bottom 7 VIA Strengths Combined	Post-Assessment Qualitative Top 7 VIA Strengths Combined
Open-Mindedness / Judgment (W/K)	Self-Regulation (ER)	Self-Regulation (ER)
Love of Learning (W/K)	Modesty/Humility (ER)	Honesty/Integrity (C)
Appreciation for Beauty/Excellence (T)	Zest (C)	Bravery (C)
Curiosity (W/K)	Religiousness/Spirituality (T)	Zest (C)
Gratitude (T)	Teamwork (J)	Love of Learning (W/K)
Love (H)	Hope (T)	Open-Mindedness / Judgment (W/K)
Fairness (J)	Prudence (ER)	Hope (T)

KEY: W/K = Wisdom/Knowledge; ER = Temperance; C = Courage; T = Transcendence; H = Humanity; J = Justice.

Table 1. Most Frequent Cases Aligned With Top/Bottom VIA Strengths

A Shift in Motivational Orientation and Quality of Life Satisfaction

Data were gathered from field notes and coded to monitor any possible shifts in motivation during the coaching intervention. The pre-post QOLI profile reports were also used to attempt to identify any shifts in life satisfaction in a number of life domains such as work, relationships, goals, and self-esteem. Figure 1 shows the pre-post assessment QOLI scores for each case (C1-C8).
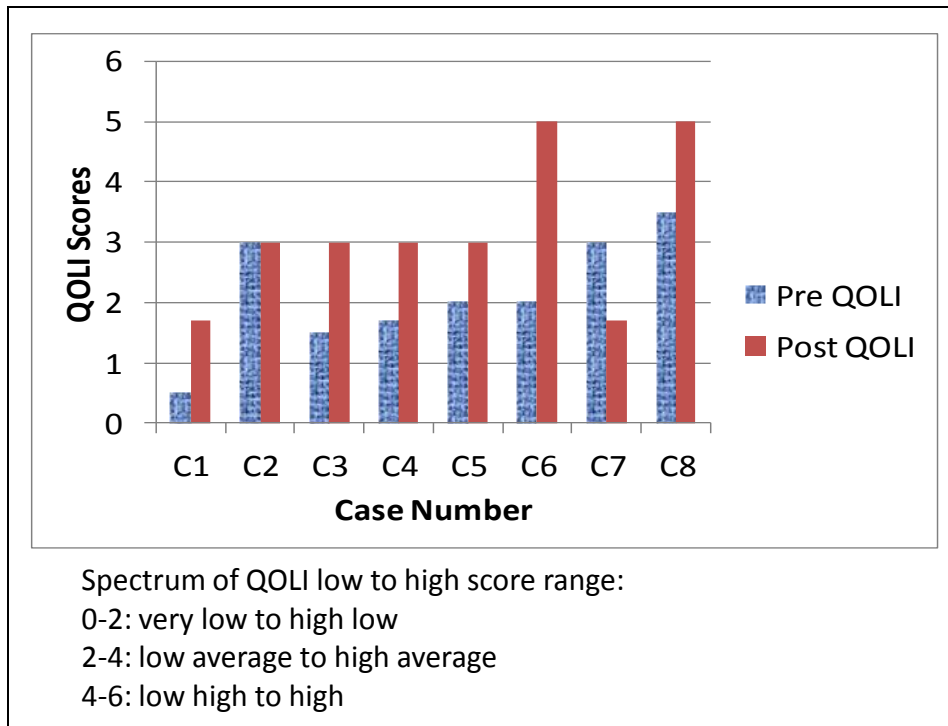
Figure 1. QOLI Pre-Post Intervention Scores

The change in scores illustrates how each participant's perception of his or her quality of life shifted throughout the intervention, which was intentionally designed to support the clients' motivational needs and to establish an environment that allowed each person to identify his or her innate potential for optimal growth. As such, the coaching framework, utilizing self-determination theory, was effective in generating subtle, observable changes in participants' subjective experiences pertaining to their life satisfaction. These changes in satisfaction may in part be due to the shift that occurred for seven out of the eight participants from extrinsically motivated action to more autonomous motivation. These results are summarized as follows:

1. Psychological courage is a cognitive and emotional skill that can be strengthened over an eight-week, six session integrative quality of life coaching program. A courageous mindset is formed from specific character strengths and developed through the internalization process;

2. The internalization process is cyclical and involves: (a) self-awareness, (b) emotional regulation, (c) self-responsibility, (d) commitment; and (e) self-determination. The ongoing cycle of self-awareness and emotional regulation leads to self-responsibility and commitment, which strengthen psychological courage leading to increased self-determination as shown in Figure 2.

3. Psychological courage is the energy that shifts controlled types of motivation along the spectrum of self-determination from controlled forms of motivation to autonomous forms of motivation. This shift in motivation can influence people's perception of quality of life.
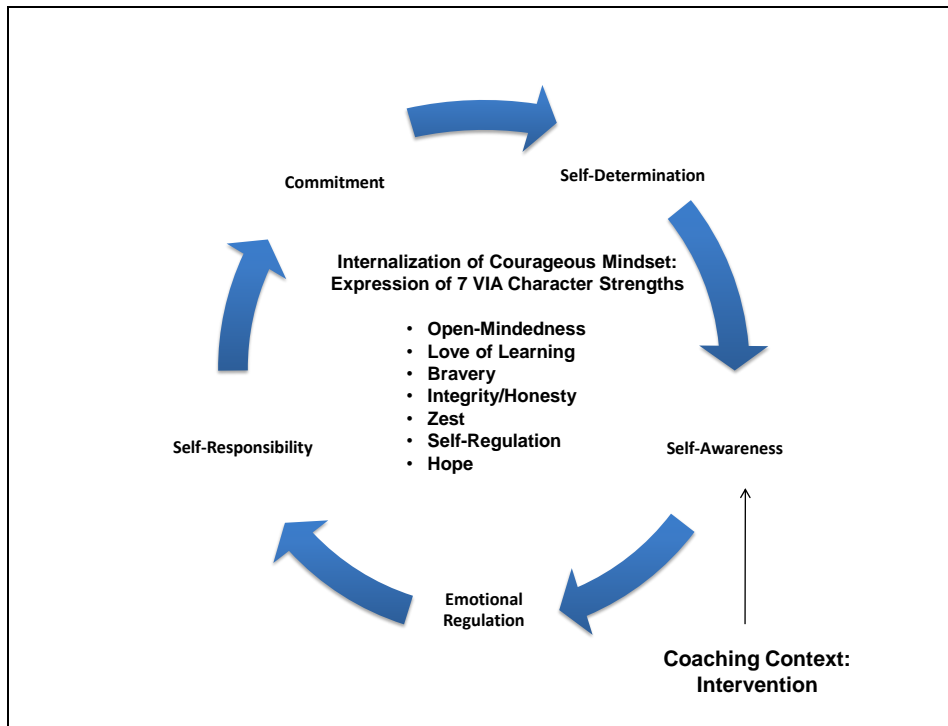
Figure 2. Internalization Cycle and Expressed VIA Strengths

The Strengthening and Internalization of Psychological Courage

The participants' self-expressed VIA strengths were used to examine to what extent is psychological courage an emotional and cognitive skill that can be strengthened through self-awareness, self-regulation, and action. Throughout the coaching intervention it was found that participants most frequently expressed the VIA character strengths of open-mindedness/ judgment, love of learning, curiosity, gratitude, and appreciation for beauty/excellence suggesting that each person approached the intervention with open-mindedness, interest, and willingness to learn. The qualitative post-assessment of the top seven VIA strengths expressed at the end of the intervention showed a shift in the top strengths of participants toward open-mindedness, love of learning, bravery, integrity/honesty, zest, self-regulation, and hope (all character strengths associated with the virtue of courage). This shift in the top VIA character strengths reflect a strengthening of a courageous mindset as a result of the coaching intervention.

The Cyclical Internalization Process of a Courageous Mindset

Supporting people's autonomy, relatedness, and competency through the coaching model, facilitated the individual's internalization of their psychological resources which consisted of their values (VIA) and character strengths (refer to Table 1). In theory, the internalization process was initiated at the stage of self-awareness and mobilization of the VIA strengths such as open-mindedness. As illustrated in Figure 1, the internalization process begins by employing the character strengths of open-mindedness and a love of learning, followed by the mobilization of the virtue of courage (which includes the character strengths of bravery, zest, integrity, and honesty). The character strengths of hope and self-regulation are employed in

overcoming fear, and envisioning a positive outcome. These seven character strengths work together to manifest a courageous mind-set. It is this courageous mindset that drives self-determination. The process is cyclical and frequently begins at self-awareness, and is followed by emotional regulation which leads to self-responsibility, increased commitment and increased self-determination. At the point of self-determination clients have identified with their values (they have internalized them) and are prepared to take action to follow through on their commitment. They recognize that a challenge still remains but they now feel equipped to persevere. Having internalized their core character strengths, they have access to them as a resource to address the psychological challenges they face and to support them in courageously moving forward toward positive action and increased well-being.

Discussion of Findings

In Curtis's (2011) study, the context of the coaching relationship and the implementation of positive psychology assessments provided the participants with tools that highlighted dimensions of each person's intrinsic character strengths/values and high priority lifestyle domains. The researcher had the ability to tailor the motivational intervention based on the participants' profile summaries and what they wanted to learn, experience and achieve within the eight weeks. All participants were encouraged to familiarize themselves with the different resources and choose to work with the materials that were most interesting to them in terms of life satisfaction. The tele-sessions were also designed to enable participants to generate awareness and insights within a place where they had the ability to flex a certain degree of control and feel supported at the same time. The participants perceived all of the tools to be valuable sources of information that supported their need to (a) receive feedback and support; (b) discover purpose and meaning; (c) re-establish priorities; and (d) observe progress in their self-development. Most importantly, they relied on the conversations and individualized attention they received during the tele-sessions. The consistent feedback reinforced the information that was provided in the profile reports and HeartMath materials.

The results of this study relate to Fredrickson's (2009) theory of positivity that describes how positive emotions such as interest, pride, gratitude, and inspiration initiate the upward spiraling of directional energy, which, in turn, can generate open-mindedness, creative problem-solving, hopefulness, and purposeful action. Positive emotional refocusing was a productive way for individuals to contextualize the source of stress (e.g., fear, impatience, and anxiety) and visualize hopeful expectations to prepare for action. According to hope theory, cultivating positive emotions may be another source of energy that can sustain people's abilities to persevere through challenges (Lopez *et al.*, 2003).

Successful integration in this study meant that participants had to recognize and confront introjections that perpetuated contingent motives and emotional barriers such as oppression, fear of failure, perfectionism, guilt, and anger within their work or personal situations. Participants exercised strengths of courage, wisdom/knowledge, temperance, and hope when they honored their value needs and flexed emotional control by tolerating existential fears and ambiguity, integrating new information, and imaging new possibilities. Not only did they strengthen personal courage and emotional control, but remained open-minded and less defensive when confronting negative attitudes and habits.

All of the participants acknowledged and took ownership for self-defeating thoughts and emotions while witnessing their gradual progress and development. They also experienced greater self-acceptance, confidence, self-esteem, self-discipline, and self-determination. Consequently, the participants' behaviors

manifested seven cognitive and emotional VIA strengths that characterize a courageous mindset, which directly reinforced the internalization cycle and final themes. Each person learned how to identify or fulfill his or her needs by practicing emotional regulation techniques and choosing to respond differently to perceived stresses associated with personal and/or professional priorities. This in turn, activated specific VIA strengths that facilitated the shift in motivation and congruent goal pursuits.

Particularly, during the first few sessions, C1, C3, and C4 did not have the emotional awareness and discipline to identify how their ordinary choices and behaviors connected with their innate values and strengths, priorities, and overall life direction. Once they cycled through the internalization process they demonstrated consistent progression toward integration and self-development. C7 was aware of her long-term priorities; however, she lacked the emotional discipline to curtail her insatiable curiosity. She needed to establish boundaries around her relentless energy and high need for freedom as a sacrifice to pursue her future developmental goals. Identification in this vignette resulted in frustration, impatience, and sense of entrapment. Even though her financial needs were met and people recognized her creative talents at work, she had little energy to commit to the focus of pursuing her Ph.D., her ultimate goal. The challenge for her was to resist creative temptations as well as battle the infinite social and financial demands of her overall lifestyle. Without the strengths of self-regulation, prudence, and perseverance (i.e., emotional control and commitment) she tended to spiral downward which decreased her vigor, creativity, and overall perception that life was meaningful and fulfilling. It was also very difficult for C7 to submit to the academic requirements and receive feedback because she believed this interfered with her creative expression. She identified these internal conflicts by session six in which she perceived her quality of life decreased.

C2, C5, C6, and C8 were very self-aware concerning their level of energy and life direction, but battled the emotional turbulence of self-doubt and fears of failure. This group of individuals developed an exceptionally high level of performance expectations, but did not feel valued or recognized for their efforts, nor did they receive constructive and frequent feedback from supervisors and/or significant others. Essentially, their sense of self-worth and life direction was dictated by contingency factors because their needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competency were most likely not fulfilled. Because they did not have the emotional competency to break away from constant ruminations and mental judgments, they stunted their own authentic expression of character, actualization process, and quality of life. These results are similar to empirical studies within the academic and political domains that explicate how controlling environments can lead to learned helplessness, stress, anxiety, and lower life satisfaction (Koestner & Loiser, 2002). Once these individuals implemented the various coaching tools in their personal and professional domains they too showed onward progress of internalization despite implicit/explicit factors that interfered with their needs for recognition, achievement, and pleasure.

Over the course of eight weeks, the participants developed a heightened sense of awareness about how they might attain work/life balance and greater fulfillment. Clarifying priorities and practicing self-regulation helped each person commit to specific goals by acting on their core values. Participants experienced increased vitality as they shifted from controlled to autonomous types of motivation; however, each person had to (a) be open-minded and aware of new learning opportunities; (b) practice emotional regulation to tolerate emotions like sadness, fear, and anger rather than avoid or deny them; (c) discern their values and goals from the people who influence them at work and/or home; (d) make responsible choices to re-align their priorities; and (e) honor their ongoing needs for self-development. Therefore, internalization

was reinforced as participants psychologically battled their way through negative attitudes and/or habits in pursuit of congruent goals and interests.

Summary and Conclusions

This integrative quality of life coaching intervention, grounded in self-determination theory, successfully addressed the research inquiry: To what extent do individual changes in motivation and psychological courage occur throughout an integrative quality of life coaching process? As such, this strengths-based approach provided each person with a high level of autonomy, support, and structure, which amplified each individual's potential for optimal growth.

Tailoring the coaching modalities empowered each person to discover personalized ways to enhance his or her quality of life over the course of eight weeks confirming the theoretical findings that psychological courage is a cognitive and emotional skill that can be strengthened over time, and that a tailored coaching context that facilitates autonomy and relatedness is more important than the prescribed tools and techniques. Additionally, the HeartMath biofeedback trainings and bi-weekly coaching sessions helped people go beyond open-mindedness by identifying certain emotional habits that inhibited them from acting with confidence and self-determination, leading to the successful outcomes of the intervention. Consequently, each person had to step out of his or her comfort zone and develop cognitive and emotional strengths of psychological courage through concerted discipline and practice. It is important to note that personal growth and internalization were not simple processes for the participants. Individuals had to initially cultivate characteristics of a courageous mindset in order to generate the emotional energy to overcome negative beliefs and move toward what they inherently valued; that a courageous mindset is formed from specific character strengths and developed through the ongoing cyclical internalization process; and that the psychological courage is the energy that shifts controlled types of motivation along the spectrum of self-determination.

The self-determination dynamics embedded within the coaching model fostered autonomy, relatedness, and competency in all eight participants. By supporting the meeting of these basic needs, the coach empowered the participants to fully engage in the internalization of a courageous mindset process of (a) self-awareness, (b) emotional regulation, (c) self-responsibility, (d) commitment; and (e) self-determination. Successful internalization of a courageous mindset provided each participant with the ability to navigate the challenges of their lifestyle transition with more ease and with an increase in a sense of fulfillment.

To expand this integrative study, researchers and practitioners who are interested in exploring how the psycho-dynamics of courage, motivation, and emotions influence self-determination and quality of life outcomes might collaborate and design additional case studies. Potential ideas to consider include (a) evaluating post-intervention change processes after 6 months and 1 year to capture longitudinal data; (b) replicating the methodology to validate the constructs and cultivation of a courageous mindset and internalization; (c) comparing the effectiveness of this type of intervention to other life coaching and strengths-based interventions, (d) evaluating whether this methodology describes the psychological process that underlies transformational change processes, and (e) incorporating pre-post psychological well-being scales to measure autonomy, relatedness, and competency fulfillment as people participate in an integrative quality of life coaching partnership.

The findings of this study contribute to the field of applied coaching psychology by demonstrating the overall effectiveness of utilizing a self-determination framework through an integrative quality of life coaching intervention. This method theoretically supported the internalization process of motivation, and the cultivation of courage in a nonclinical adult population who experienced a life transition.

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Devorah F. Curtis, PhD. is a faculty member and the Director of Mentoring of the Graduate College of Mind-Body Medicine at Saybrook University. A board certified coach, she works in private practice in integrative life coaching and faith counseling to facilitate clients' learning and self-development.

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Lisa L. Kelly, PhD. is a faculty member and the Director of Instructional Excellence for Saybrook University's Graduate College of Mind-Body Medicine. She is a board certified coach and has published research on the lived experience of altruism and helping behavior.