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A RIPPLE EFFECT FROM LEADERSHIP COACHING:

UNDERSTANDING THE REACH OF COACHING IN ORGANISATIONS

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A ripple effect from leadership coaching: understanding the reach of coaching in organisations

ABSTRACT

Companies today need to draw on the whole organisational team for the energy, ideas and collaborative approaches that bring sustainable organisational success in an interconnected world. Leadership and organisational studies increasingly support this endeavour by considering relational and interconnected approaches. However the leadership coaching literature tends to adopt a hierarchical approach focused on individuals and teams at the helm of organisations.

A ripple effect is the metaphorical focus of the study drawing attention to an interplay of influences in an organisation following a leadership coaching initiative. This initiative is the starting point for this in depth organisational case study which is interested in drawing out the human dimension of organisational life. Multiple methods - interviews, anecdote circles and a company questionnaire - are used to explore patterns of influence flowing from leadership coaching in a small-medium sized enterprise (SME).

Thematic network analysis of the experiences of participants in this study produced three categories of findings: personal needs, perceptions of leadership and cultural concerns. Each category is made up of competing influences that signify spectrums of opportunity for learning and development. From this investigation an holistic model of a ripple effect is developed showing the flow from specific coaching outcomes that blend business and human aspects.

The concept of *reciprocal learning space* captures the scope for learning and change by uncovering competing influences that represent the variety of responses to coaching outcomes. An holistic framework for *organisation focused coaching* offers a practical contribution to coaching by setting out a route to identifying reciprocal learning space and helping to address wider organisational needs.

It is argued that remaining in a hierarchical, leader centred mode limits the potential reach of coaching in organisations. This study offers a new integrated approach to coaching that signifies the potential to reach much more widely into organisations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

> *The way organisations manage people and the culture they create plays*
> *a fundamental role in their employees' ability to drive the business.*
> (Boatman and Wellins, 2011, p45).

There is a growing awareness that organisations need to reach beyond their top teams for the energy and ideas required to thrive in today's dynamic, competitive environment. Accordingly holistic concepts of leadership that emphasise interconnectedness (Uhl-Bien, 2006; Senge *et al*, 2008) and innovation (Boatman and Wellins, 2011) are becoming increasingly relevant for organisational development. However, whilst leadership coaching has become an important strand of leadership and organisational development, it has yet to make a significant shift from a leader centred approach towards a more integrated concept of leadership, or to offer many perspectives on the relationship between coaching and the deeper needs of the whole organisation. Consequently much has been written about leadership coaching from a hierarchical, leader centred perspective emphasising a coaching style of leadership, leadership capability in individuals (Anderson and Anderson, 2005; Goldsmith and Lyons, 2006) and with a focus on the coach/coachee relationship (Silsbee, 2008). Associated with this predominantly individual centred view, a consistent challenge for the coaching profession in an organisational context has been to demonstrate the impact of coaching (Passmore and Fillery-Travis, 2011) and the Return on Investment (ROI) 'attributable to the coaching, as distinct from other factors'. (McGovern *et al*, 2001, p3).

Whilst an individual centred perspective on leadership coaching has produced important insights there have recently been specific calls for greater understanding of the wider reach and contribution of coaching in support of organisations (Hawkins, 2008; Coutu *et al*, 2009). In this regard coaching with 'interculturism' in mind (Rosinski, 2003), creating a coaching culture (Clutterbuck and Megginson, 2005), and coaching the leadership team from a systemic perspective (Hawkins, 2011) represent important shifts in the agenda for coaching. However an emphasis on individuals and top teams remains evident and the leadership coaching literature tends to couple this tendency with a focus on large corporate environments.

A gap therefore appears to exist between the agenda for leadership coaching and the wider reaching and interconnected agenda for leadership and organisational development. It seems that whilst leadership coaching studies take a predominantly hierarchical perspective of leadership, studies on leadership and organisations have engaged more fully with concepts of a relational and systemic nature. Consequently leadership coaching studies appear to underemphasise holistic aspects at a time when organisations require help with challenges that demand a more interconnected

approach: employee engagement, collaborative working and moving from dependent to interdependent leadership cultures. This suggests that a discourse in the coaching literature that stays with hierarchical notions of leadership is incomplete in scope and that greater understanding of the potential reach of leadership coaching into the interconnected world of organisations would be beneficial.

There is a need therefore to explore what happens in organisations as 'wholes' as the result of leadership coaching outcomes in order to understand if coaching can be a tool for generating a wider spectrum of changes. Based on the tentative theoretical proposition that natural patterns of influence exist in organisations, and in tune with a systemic perspective that emphasises interconnectedness, a 'ripple effect' seems to be a suitable metaphor to draw attention to the potential of coaching as an organisational intervention. This metaphor might help to extend the view of what we currently understand the opportunities for coaching to be. Accordingly this study uses a single organisational case to investigate the patterns and influences that may be discerned in an organisation after leadership coaching has taken place.

Organisations have tended to use 'leadership coaching' and 'executive coaching' interchangeably as the coaching profession itself often uses these terms synonymously. Where a distinction is sought, leadership coaching is variously seen as a way of discovering an authentic style of leadership (Lee, G. 2003); helping clients to engage in 'self–analytic activities' (Kets de Vries *et al*, 2007, p.li); advancing individual careers and seeing the coach's role as an 'expert on leadership' (Riddle, 2009, p6). Unsurprisingly, since coaching is at root an individual centred activity, the perspective is one of personal change albeit with the goal of advancing 'the organization's overall business objectives' (Stokes and Jolly, 2010, p252).

In my experience the request for leadership or executive coaching often involves working with high potential individuals in transition towards senior leadership positions. Alternatively leaders in role may seek support and guidance in the face of important organisational goals. Leadership coaching assignments also typically involve learning to address personal growth challenges and individual targets aligned with organisational aims. Leadership coaching may also help to improve the relationships among individuals in teams. The coach will often have been chosen according to organisational experience, coaching credentials and personal chemistry with the client. In keeping with a leader centred approach, the lens through which leadership coaching is viewed in the literature tends to be at the coach/coachee end of the spectrum with outcomes for the body of the organisation more tentatively shaped. However less attention has been given to empirical evidence on the experience in the body of organisations where

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leadership coaching has taken place. Accordingly I suggest that taking an organisational viewpoint is a starting point for understanding the reach of leadership coaching.

1.1 Aims

The aim of the study is to understand the existence and nature of a ripple effect from leadership coaching and hence the potential reach of coaching in relation to important leadership and organisational concerns. To meet this aim the study looks beyond the coaching experience of individual leaders and explores an associated organisational experience. The choice of a case study strategy is in keeping with this aim. The intention is to make a threefold contribution: to leadership and organisational coaching theory, to both professional coaching and organisational development practices and to suggest future research avenues for exploration. These objectives are in tune with a recent study involving 140 leading coaches and five expert commentators discussing a level of 'fuzziness' around the scope of coaching engagements and the benefits of coaching (Coutu *et al*, 2009, p92) and suggesting a call for more evidence based findings on the reach of coaching. For these reasons I believe an empirical study of a 'real world' situation following the coaching of leaders that looks deeply into the organisational space for an integrated understanding of human and business aspects might be of interest to coaching, leadership and organisational development professions.

1.2 Case study approach

A case study of a single small/medium sized enterprise provided an opportunity to explore real life events in the under researched setting of a growing small/medium sized enterprise (SME) (Grant and Zackon, 2004; Gray, 2007). The chosen organisation was a professional accountancy firm employing c.70 people where organisational team members needed to respond to shifts in culture and business direction generated by the coaching of their leaders. From a business perspective tangible change was represented by the communication of new financial targets to meet a challenging growth plan. A noticeable change at the human level was the associated call for participation from all to meet this goal. For the purpose of confidentiality the company is given the pseudonym 'Quantum'.

Quantum comprised several characteristics that made it a good choice for this investigation: the opportunity to discern specific change in a manageable context; a clear starting point and timeframe within which coaching occurred; and also due to the rapport and support of the participants. The timing of the coaching at Quantum followed the acquisition of smaller offices and coincided with a pivotal period for the company as

a partner was soon to depart with the associated loss of experience. Accordingly the coaching programme was set at a time when the company was poised for change.

The choice of a single organisation as the case boundary opened up a comparatively under researched area of coaching: the organisational perspective. To do this involved devising an approach that would bring out the different dimensions of organisational experience to create a rich understanding of the integrated whole whilst engaging with the organisation at the level of its 'parts'. Since the study was to investigate 'holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events' (Yin, 2009, p4) a case study methodology was appropriate, where:

> *the qualitative case researcher tries to preserve the multiple realities, the different and even contradictory views of what is happening.* (Stake, 1995, p12).

A single case was appropriate in order to focus on a unique organisational experience as the target of the study albeit drawn from individual accounts (Yin, 2009, p52).

My interest in the research question arises from my own experience of leading organisational teams in a business setting, being involved in many teams, and of coaching within a wider leadership development programme. I have experienced different aspects of 'leadership' ranging from 'super' hierarchical (involving checks and balances) to what I would describe as relational leadership, where enthusiastic and like-minded individuals come together, specifically in a manufacturing/product development context, in pursuit of new ways of thinking and new practical approaches. On occasion I have noticed a disconnection between what individuals in an organisation are trying to do and what the 'organisation' as a whole appears to be trying to do. At times I have reflected on the unpredictable influences of 'leadership' echoing a 'learning dilemma':

> *We never directly experience the consequences of many of our most important decisions.* (Senge, 1990, p23).

In my role as a coaching practitioner I have worked with leaders who have reported perceived influences on their colleagues and teams that have surprised them.

These experiences and reflections have sparked my interest in potentially unforeseen influences occurring more widely in organisations following leadership coaching. My interest therefore has three aspects: a fascination for the nature of leadership; for the influences that may flow from coaching and for the potential scope for learning and development arising from a deeper understanding of the integrated organisational environment. This study engages in these topics by exploring concepts of leadership, identifying influences from coaching outcomes and signalling the potential for learning in the relational space in organisations.

1.3 Focus of the study

My preliminary reading uncovered a collection of metaphors that challenged the traditional view of organisations as one dimensional, manageable entities (Morgan 1997) and also a systems perspective on today's organisational challenges (Senge *et al* 2008). These works prompted me to reflect on the complexity of organisational life and potential influences from leadership coaching which might be more dynamic and unpredictable than previously understood. A 'ripple effect' seemed to capture the unpredictable, human dimension and the potential for flux following the coaching of leaders. I therefore decided to choose this metaphor as my research focus to align with a systems perspective that seemed relevant to the study. This choice of metaphorical focus was an important step at the outset of this study: to draw attention from the perspective of the individual to a whole organisation perspective in relation to coaching leaders.

I was interested in the potential of this metaphor as my research focus to help in understanding organisational life: *"the degree to which that metaphor is seen to capture multiple salient features of organizations and the ease with which the metaphor is understood.* (Cornelissen and Kafouros,2008, p365). At the same time I remain completely open to the existence and nature of 'ripples' which I see as perceived influences from the perspective of individuals in the wider team beyond leaders who are coached. The nature of this metaphor may create a mental image of a series of waves in concentric circles arising from a central 'splash' as the following definition suggests:

> *Theoretically the ripple effect is endless and its impact ripples outwardly as the experienced influences and feelings of connectedness are forwarded to others…* (Moerer-Urdahl and Creswell, 2004, p23).

However the metaphor may also evoke unintentional and unpredictable patterns resonating with the complexities of organisational life. This central metaphor has been related to the 'extended consequences' of entrepreneurial decision-making, which are 'felt by others outside the venture' (Kuratko and Hodgetts, 2008, p95). The metaphor is also the background to a view of employees as 'interwoven threads in a single tapestry' (Harper, 2010, p16). A 'ripple effect' is also associated with complex influences in manufacturing processes where a short-term intervention can have an array of unexpected longer term effects (Goldsby and Martichenko, 2005, p125). In marketing terms, a 'loyalty ripple effect' is characterised by the variety of influences among customers (Gremler and Brown, 1999). From an educational perspective Hargreaves and Fink (2006) use this term in relation to influences between schools. Above all the metaphor emphasises naturally occurring patterns of influence and gives shape and definition to an exploration of an organisation's experience following the coaching of leaders.

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As leadership coaching outcomes are instances of change I have for the purpose of this study regarded specific coaching outcomes as metaphorical splashes of change within a wider continuously changing environment. I am fully aware that the 'ripples' of influence associated with coaching outcomes are inevitably entangled with other sources of influence: economic climate, professional and home life. I did however try to the best of my ability to focus in my investigation on the human dimension of changes following the coaching of leaders, acknowledging at the same time that it is not a full picture of all changes in the organisation.

My focus on a ripple effect draws attention to a gap in coaching studies: real life dynamic experience in an organisation following the coaching of leaders. Accordingly the metaphor lends a new perspective that has led to surprising discoveries about the ambiguities and challenges of organisational life. With the central metaphor in place I then framed my research questions to align with its meaning, to focus the study on the perceived gap in understanding and to also begin to conceptualise the potential contribution of coaching differently. The associated central research question is:

What are the perceived influences that may be discerned in an organisation following the coaching of leaders?

1.4 Literature review

Before outlining my approach to exploring these questions I now place leadership coaching briefly in the context of a collection of literature and signal a requirement for extending thinking about leadership coaching as an integral part of leadership and organisational development.

Important aspects of organisational life aligned with a ripple effect include learning as unpredictable, and related to natural patterns (Argyris and Schön, 1978); cultural perspectives concerned with the underlying assumptions at play in organisations (Schein, 2004); a systems perspective emphasising harmony and connectedness (Bateson, 1972, 2000; Senge, 1990; Charlton, 2008); how 'profound collective change' occurs (Senge *et al*, 2005); and a collaborative approach to organisational life with an emphasis on sustainability and meeting tough, global challenges (Senge *et al*, 2008). In tune with dynamic perspectives on organisations Handy (1993) asserted that:

> *the organization that can adapt to changing situations and requirements is the organization that survives.* (p330).

With an approach that expands the boundaries of organisations, Porter and Kramer (2011) have set out the need to address 'shared value' where the responsibility of organisations extends towards a greater commitment to meeting wider social needs. In combination these aspects provide a picture of organisational life and suggest

organisational concerns that require a different type of thinking from linear modes of inquiry associated with 'scientific management' (Taylor, 1911).

Leadership theory too has moved from attention focused on leaders towards more holistic considerations of the concept of 'leadership'. This discourse has spanned leader centred perspectives as discussed by Armstrong (2009, pp32-33): charismatic (Weber, 1947), situational (Hersey and Blanchard, 1969), transactional (Burns, 1978) and transformational (Bass, 1985) and has moved towards characterising leadership in relational (Binney *et al*, 2005; Uhl-Bien, 2006) and systemic terms (Tate, 2009) emphasising interdependency. Recent studies bring together aspects of interdependency that evoke humanity and generosity of spirit where relationships 'thrive because of genuine caring and mutual vulnerability' (Senge *et al*, 2008, p233) and where leading is characterised as:

> *a social, in-between activity. Leaders, groups, organisations and the environment around them are interdependent. Leaders are not just at the top but in the middle of a complex network of relationships. Living leaders recognise this interdependence and relish discovering what is possible.* (Binney *et al*, 2005, p242).

Indicating a contrast in tone, Anderson and Anderson (2005) relate leadership coaching to the effectiveness of leaders and the achievement of strategic business goals:

> *Coaching is essential in those situations where leaders must be qualitatively more effective and produce results that are more strategic in nature* (p269).

However an emphasis on 'the mix of authenticity, creativity, interpersonal competence and influential impact that is the overarching goal of leadership coaching' (Lee, G. 2003, p2) brings together important strands in tune with the new agendas for leadership and organisational development, whilst retaining a leader centred perspective.

Expanding the perspective, Hawkins (2011) illustrates how leadership team alignment can go further towards meeting the needs of the organisational 'system'. However I would suggest that there remains a need 'to understand the role the system is playing in people's performance' (Tate, 2009, p270) and that this aim is supported by the systemic nature of my choice of metaphor and the organisational perspective of the study.

The central aims therefore of the literature review are as follows:

1)   To explore what is known about themes of interconnectedness and patterns of influence resonating with the metaphorical focus of a ripple effect.

2)   To present a balanced view of a variety of discussions related to the research topic.

3)   To create a platform from which to build on existing knowledge and ideas.

1.5 Method

This study focuses on the experiences of organisational life at Quantum following a coaching intervention that ended just prior to the beginning of the study. Participants fell into two broad groups: leaders who were among those coached and individuals in the wider organisation. As the purpose of the study was not to explore the coach/coachee relationship I chose not to include the external leadership coach in the data collection process. Individuals within the whole organisation were given opportunities to take part voluntarily. I used a multiple methods approach to provide different opportunities for participation:

1)   Individual interviews with randomly selected employees and leaders who were coached (in-depth/one-to-one).

2)   Anecdote circles (rich group dialogue).

3)   A company questionnaire (wide feedback).

Two anecdote circles were conducted to explore experiences rather than opinions (Callahan *et al*, 2006; Carter, 2009). This method offered a unique contribution to the methodology by focusing on experiences discussed in a group setting as opposed to gathering opinions in the manner of a traditional focus group. The questionnaire was designed on the basis of themes that emerged from the interviews and anecdote circles. Company documents provided additional relevant context.

In keeping with my intent to be unknown to my case study organisation, I was not involved in the coaching at Quantum. Therefore I was unknown to the coach and to Quantum just as they were unknown to me prior to engagement with this research project. This enabled me to embark on the study with a fresh perspective on the organisation helped too by the difference in my own organisational experience, which was of a corporate nature. I was therefore able to interpret findings without preconceived ideas of personalities or cultural aspects. I was open to there being no ripple effect: the aim was to describe experiences from the perspectives of many individuals and to interpret those experiences in a truthful manner. Intensive periods of time in the organisation, required by the nature of the multiple methods used, have helped to build a good relationship with participants and to develop trust, which hopefully added to the quality of data received.

The study began in April 2010 directly following the completion of coaching focused on leaders at Quantum. Time spent with a solution focused coach between September 2009 and April 2010 helped to shape their ideas for a new agenda for the business. Maintaining the traditional values of a small company was an important challenge during this period of change. At the time of data collection, the organisation had enjoyed a

phase of business acquisition that had enabled the company to grow from one office and 20 employees to five offices with c.70 employees. This choice of case was intended to offer particular insights associated with the dynamics of a growing smaller company to add to a body of coaching literature that has tended to focus on large companies.

The ethical framework for the study was rigorous in relation to helping maintain anonymity and confidentiality. This approach was helped by focusing on natural dynamics rather than linear relationships and reporting findings as aggregated themes derived from anonymised individual accounts. A tension in the study has involved balancing the nature of the findings (non-linear and based on experiences) with a structured and transparent approach to distilling and explaining findings. To achieve this balance I interpreted findings from interview and anecdote circle data using thematic network analysis, a way of connecting 'basic', 'organising' and 'global' themes (Attride–Stirling, 2001) and seeing deeper patterns and themes. This also allowed me to surface aspects that were explicit in the data ('semantic') and to tap into my interpretation of the data ('latent') by following Braun and Clarke's approach (2006, p84). Company-wide questionnaire data then acted as associated feedback. Findings indicated three thematic levels: a) a personal level b) in relation to leadership and finally c) related to organisational perspectives. Within these thematic ranges, analysis showed key categories of influences characterising a ripple effect from leadership coaching.

1.6 Outline of the study

This study is comprised of eight chapters with the inclusion of this Introduction.

Chapter Two considers a collection of literature in order to establish interconnected and relational aspects in organisational and leadership studies and to discuss the coaching literature in relation to these aspects. The aim has been to draw out themes of relevance to an exploration of a ripple effect from leadership coaching. Viewed together, the categories of literature that form this collection suggest that whilst leadership and organisational studies have increasingly explored more holistic themes, a leader centred approach remains prevalent in the leadership coaching literature.

The collection of literature has also helped to suggest questions and concerns for exploration in this study and is divided into three categories as follows:

1)   Organisational Perspectives

        This section examines the discourse in two areas associated with themes relevant to a ripple effect: a systems perspective and the perspective of organisational culture. In this chapter the hidden aspects of organisations that

suggest natural patterns and interconnectedness are the main focus of the discussion.

2)   Leadership Perspectives

This section explores the progression in the leadership literature from perspectives related to the individual leader, to the leader/follower dynamic and then to leadership viewed as a relational phenomenon. Here the discussion centres on the development of an increasingly holistic view of leadership.

3)   Leadership Coaching

This section discusses the coaching literature beginning with a focus on coaching the leader and continuing with a review of the literature that addresses coaching and organisational aspects. The discussion concludes that very few studies of coaching have considered what might be happening in 'real-life' in organisations following leadership coaching outcomes, particularly in the entrepreneurial world of the SME. Consequently, there is little empirical evidence of what may flow from leadership coaching outcomes from a relational or systemic perspective and therefore of the potential reach and wider contribution of coaching.

Chapter Three describes in detail my methodological approach comprising three distinct elements: interviews (individual perspectives), small group sessions (anecdote circles to share stories) and an online company questionnaire. Multiple methods have enabled the organisational perspective to be examined in tune with the study's metaphorical focus: it could be said that the study explores depths and also reaches widely into the organisation. In this section I discuss my philosophical assumptions in relation to my methodological approach. I also explain the context and specific methods associated with the chosen case, and the development of my three data collection methods indicating the rigorous approach required by the case study methodology. In addition I consider the effect of my presence in the research setting and in relation to analysing the data, the procedures for data analysis, issues pertaining to validity and ethics, and limitations of the case study approach.

Chapter Four provides the relevant case study context to situate the exploration of a ripple effect, discusses how the starting point - the coaching of leaders - has guided and inspired the whole research and explores the key events following the coaching of the leaders.

Chapter Five is the first of three findings chapters and begins by illustrating how the overall themes and essential findings have been generated. The chapter continues with a presentation of the first of three thematic networks underpinning the overall findings.

These thematic networks each provide the basis for a discussion of the findings at different levels.

In this chapter the first set of findings draws on individual perspectives identified in the data. Juxtaposition of anonymised extracts from interviews and anecdote circles helps to provide insights into the dynamic aspects of a ripple effect. Company questionnaire data provides participant 'feedback' from the wider organisation. Competing and reciprocal influences are discerned in the findings and represent an opportunity for a wider reaching agenda for coaching based on uncovering hidden aspects of organisational experience.

Chapter Six provides findings from a leadership perspective and findings from an organisational perspective are presented in Chapter Seven. In each chapter extracts from participants' accounts and from the company-wide questionnaire are again integrated to create a multifaceted picture of a discernible ripple effect. Competing and reciprocal influences are also apparent at these two levels to add to the picture of an organisational experience and a more holistic coaching agenda.

Chapter Eight discusses the findings, presents an holistic model of a ripple effect and introduces the concept of reciprocal learning space as a result. It is argued that findings show the nature of a ripple effect characterised by patterns of influence and where competing influences are discernible. These competing patterns of influence combine to create a rich learning agenda that can be supported by coaching, leadership development and organisational development interventions. With insights from this reciprocal learning space a practice framework for a different approach to coaching is also introduced.

I explain the depths and boundaries of a ripple effect in relation to numerous aspects of organisational experience and discuss the relevance of the metaphor in the light of the findings. Three levels of unique contribution are discussed: theoretical, practical and methodological including the unique contribution of anecdote circles to this study. The implications for coaching and the challenges associated with identifying influences in relation to coaching are also discussed. The main conclusions of the study are presented and limitations are assessed. Suggestions are made for future research and a final reflection on the whole study is presented.

CHAPTER TWO: A REVIEW OF KEY THEMES IN THE LITERATURE

2.1 Background to the review

The copious literature on organisations represents a gradual shift from a mechanistic view (Taylor, 1911) towards a more dynamic and integrated view of organisations as interconnected wholes (Morgan, 1997; Senge, 1990; Senge *et al*, 2008). The extensive leadership literature represents a similar shift from emphasising the qualities and behaviours of individual leaders towards a more integrated concept of leadership as a relational phenomenon (Uhl-Bien, 2006; Pearce *et al*, 2009; Hawkins and Wright, 2009). In contrast, the leadership coaching literature has tended to maintain a focus on individual leaders, the organisational 'top team' or individuals capable of rising up the hierarchical ladder. Accordingly less attention has been given to understanding the reach and wider contribution of coaching from a dynamic and integrated perspective.

This chapter critiques a collection of literature spanning organisational, leadership and coaching perspectives in their corresponding sections below. The aim of the review is to provide a balanced picture of the diverse discussions that make up this collection, to create a foundation from which to explore perceived gaps and to build on previous knowledge. Given the sheer volume of this body of literature the review focuses on themes related to interconnectedness and patterns of influence that seem to be relevant to my research focus.

To conduct this review I began by locating themes in the theoretical and empirical literature on leadership, coaching and organisations, and explored peer reviewed journals, books, articles, conference materials and appropriate Internet resources. Themes closely related to my research topic were found in discussions associated with organisational culture and systems theory, and in the progression towards viewing leadership as a relational phenomenon. However fewer themes could be drawn from the leadership coaching literature where a lack of empirical research into real life experience following coaching was also evident. The gap in the coaching literature seems to accompany a tendency to assume the hierarchical influence of individual leaders with less attention given to the interdependent human dimension of organisational life.

The first section of this chapter discusses ways of thinking about patterns of influence by drawing on cultural and systemic perspectives in theoretical and empirical organisational studies. These organisational perspectives provide a backcloth to the second section which examines the debates and concerns in leadership studies that represent the journey from individualistic to holistic concepts of 'leadership'. This examination of the leadership literature then provides the context for the third section which considers

progression in the coaching literature. This chapter concludes with a summary of concepts drawn from the main bodies of literature explored and a conceptual framework (Figure 2.1) is provided to bring these concepts together.

2.2 Organisational perspectives: culture and systems theory

Over the years organisational theorists have tried to explain what organisations do and how organisations work. The early influence of scientific management theory (Taylor, 1911), as for example highlighted by Morgan (1997, p22), led to an emphasis on efficiency in the workplace and to viewing organisations from the perspective of their parts rather than as integrated wholes. However, since this early perspective, a growing literature has recognised the greater complexity of organisations echoed in the following view: 'organisations are many things at once' (Morgan, 1997, p347). However whilst this view suggests unpredictability and that control of organisations is a limited endeavour it is also aligned with traditional management thinking since less emphasis is placed on how hierarchical leadership might adapt to act on insights presented.

Not only are organisations increasingly regarded as complex entities, they are also seen to be part of an interconnected world. An example has been the recent call to demonstrate 'shared value' associated with improving the relationship between business and society (Porter and Kramer, 2011). In this context cultural and systemic perspectives offer important insight into the hidden patterns of connectedness in organisational life. Key debates seem to centre on a) the capacity to intervene in cultural and systemic aspects of organisational life to improve effectiveness and b) the ability to balance natural, unpredictable features with goal oriented, problem solving aspects of organisations. This section begins by examining the concept of organisational culture and follows with an examination of the debates in the literature on systems thinking.

2.2.1 Organisational culture

A key strand in organisational studies is the embedded nature of culture captured in the following definition:

> *The sum total of what a given group has learned as a group, and this learning is usually embodied in a set of shared, basic underlying assumptions, that are no longer conscious but are taken for granted as the way the world is.* (Schein, 1993, p705).

A more recent definition highlights a potential for different cultures within organisations:

> *Shared perceptions of organisational work practices within organisational units that may differ from other organisational units.* (Van den Berg and Wilderom, 2004, p571).

A striking feature of the literature on organisational culture is the elusiveness of the concept. This is demonstrated by the presentation of 'an embarrassment of definitional riches' described by Brown (1998, p7) including: culture as group behaviour (Jacques, 1952); as a combination of history and strategy (Eldridge and Crombie, 1974); as the 'invisible consciousness' of the organisation (Scholz, 1987), as an 'interdependent set of values' (Kotter and Heskett, 1992) and simply defined as 'how things are done around here' (Drennan, 1992, p3).

Whilst each of these views conceptualises culture as a shared social aspect of organisational life, an alternative view from communications theory regards culture and the organisation as one and the same:

> *Organizational culture is not just another piece of the puzzle, it is the puzzle. From our point of view, a culture is not something an organization has; a culture is something an organization is.* (Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1983, p146).

The similarity across each of these perspectives is the assumption that culture is a subtle phenomenon that pervades the whole organisation. However despite the subtlety of the concept, organisational culture is also seen as a vital component of organisational success:

> *Creating a culture that drives freedom and autonomy can drive business results and differentiate you from the competition.* (Boatman and Wellins, 2011, p50).

The challenge in organisational culture studies therefore appears to be associated with identifying its particular underlying attributes and relating these to the rational work of organisations. To situate culture in the context of meeting organisational challenges a large body of the literature has examined the relationship between culture and change. Fitzgerald (1988) attributes this shift in attention to a changing business environment, which prompts a view of culture as 'an important but neglected lever of positive change' (p6).However by concluding that top management approaches are a starting point for cultural change, he implicitly suggests that culture is responsive to hierarchical intervention .

The logical extension of this assumption of responsiveness is the desire to measure cultural aspects in order to potentially influence them. An example of research that could fall into this category is a large scale quantitative study involving over 60,000 questionnaire respondents linking dysfunctional cultural styles with poor performance (Balthazard *et al 2006).* However whilst findings appear to answer questions and suggest linkages at the component level, they seem less able to improve our understanding of the dynamic aspects underpinning identified links between performance and cultural styles.

A view of organisational culture as responsive to intervention and capable of being quantified tends to oversimplify a complex concept. Meek (1988), for example, questions the extent to which culture is a 'unifying force' that can be 'measured and manipulated' and the use of this concept to address the wide span of organisational concerns (Meek 1988 p454-7).

However, despite the challenges of intervening in cultural change researchers continue to explore cultural dynamics as an 'essential leadership competency' (Latta, 2009, p35). In this regard Latta (2009) uses an ethnographic approach to understand the diverse influences of culture at different stages in a change process in a large organisation. As a result of extensive interviewing and observation in an organisation features of culture were modelled to provide leaders with a tool to improve their awareness of the cultural dimension to managing change. Using feedback loops in the model an interesting aspect is that leadership is viewed in individualistic terms as a 'change agent' , embracing HR and leaders in a organisation, suggesting a blend of systemic and traditional leadership assumptions.

Although it was difficult to find many empirical studies on unpredictable and underlying characteristics of culture, qualitative approaches seemed to open up different perspectives in relation to my research topic. For example, a multiple case study approach to explore managerial interventions into cultural change found that both managers and staff are affected by the unpredictable impact of interventions (Harris and Ogbonna, 2002, p46). Secondly, and from an under reported SME perspective, underlying characteristics of culture were captured in an ethnographic study investigating organisational culture in four small firms. (Haugh and McKee, 2004). This study identifies the prevalence of five shared values: 'survival, independence, control, pragmatism and financial prudence' (Haugh and McKee, 2004, p391). It seems therefore that qualitative approaches, and case study and ethnography in particular, are suited to creating a richer insight into the human dimensions of culture, and improving our understanding of complex, hidden aspects.

2.2.2 Systems theory

Whilst a cultural perspective stimulates thought on the hidden dynamics of organisations, systems theory opens up a view of organisations as being natural, dynamic and interconnected. In stark contrast to scientific management theory, Bateson (1972, 2000) introduced a significant shift from traditional, linear approaches to thinking and presented a worldview that emphasises harmony and interconnectedness, as for example argued by Hawkins (2004, p421). This emphasis was on an approach where 'boundaries no longer coincide with the skins of participant individuals' (Bateson, 2000, p339) and where complex 'feedback loops' are part of the process of adaptive change

where we 'learn to learn' (p274). Bateson's influential thinking is developed in an organisational context by Senge (1990) where 'systems thinking' is described as 'a discipline for seeing wholes' (p68). In distilling Bateson's extensive output Charlton (2008) highlights Bateson's 'fascination with pattern or form and how it develops' (p14), his contribution to environmental sustainability and to the spiritual dimension of interconnectedness:

> *re-finding the "grace" of reconnection between humanity and the rest of the living Earth.* (p8).

However whilst Bateson's views offer a rich basis for thinking differently, it is difficult to translate these ideas of natural patterns into contemporary organisational life. For example, a phenomenological study focused on managers' experiences of learning (Burgoyne and Hodgson,1983) explored Bateson's thinking and raised questions about the practical aspects of a different mindset in a problem solving environment. In this regard an important distinction in systems theory is between natural organisms and the organisation as a 'purposeful system' (Ackoff 1994, p175) with numerous goals and associated processes. To bring clarity to Bateson's profound ideas Charlton (2008) emphasises the 'focus' rather than the nature of systems (p41) and, for example, sees the concept of 'interfaces' between individuals as 'where the action is' (p38).

In the context of systems thinking and 'learning to learn', a progression beyond traditional first stage thinking or 'single loop learning' led to 'double loop learning', a shift that involves unblocking defences used by individuals in order to get to the heart of problems (Argyris 1977, 1991, 2002).Whilst the literature on organisational culture reveals underlying assumptions, values and beliefs that influence organisational performance, Argyris (1991) raises awareness of complex and potentially unhelpful patterns of behaviour that are also potential influencing factors:

> *People consistently act inconsistently unaware of the contradiction between their 'espoused' theory and their theory – in-use, between the way they think they are acting, and the way they really act.* (Argyris, 1991, p103).

Taking these concepts of learning a step further, triple loop learning is associated with 'collective mindfulness' and the process by which 'members discover how they and their predecessors have facilitated or inhibited learning, and produce new structures or strategies for learning' (Romme and Witteloostuijn, 1999, p440). They suggest related questions to help define the progression from single loop to triple loop learning:

> *Are we doing things right? (single loop learning)*
>
> *Are we doing the right things? (double loop learning)*
>
> *Can we participate in making well-informed choices regarding strategy, objectives, etc.? (triple loop learning).* (p452).

However by focusing on performance aspects both Argyris (1991) and Romme and Witteloosstuijn (1999) pay less attention to the collective purpose associated with triple loop learning. In this regard Hawkins (1991) emphasises a spiritual dimension, a sense of purpose and the need to: *"keep some detachment from the focus on the 'How' of changing and also focus on the 'Why'* (Hawkins, 1991, p14).However the relevance of strategic thinking is also acknowledged by Hawkins (1991) illustrating the tension between an implicit leader-centred focus alongside expanding our view beyond organisational boundaries towards embracing the environment. This tension seems to be central to organisational studies which straddle management consultancy whilst exploring the less tangible aspects of the human dimension at work and the wider environment.

In systems thinking a focus on participation and thought processes that embrace patterns rather than linearity draws attention to the human dimension at work and to collaborative working:

> *In today's interconnected, dynamic, global and technically-enabled world, the creation of value and innovation rarely springs from isolated individual endeavours.* (Gratton, 2007, p23).

The human dimension can be seen in the literature on systems thinking where organisations are seen as places of 'inescapable mutuality' (Senge *et al*, 2008, p43) and where collaborative working for a sustainable future is seen to involve 'genuine care' and 'mutual vulnerability' (p233). In the context of leadership, Senge *et al* (2005) allude to the capacity to see beyond the parts to the greater whole:

> *Perhaps the least noticed and most important capacity that sets apart some of the most successful leaders, concerns their capacity to tap into and focus on a larger intention.* (p137).

However just as organisational culture has been adopted frequently as an overarching concept, systems theory seems to insist that everything is interrelated, creating 'an ever-expanding exercise' (Flood, 1999, p70). Such an approach appears to be unhelpful when attempting to address organisational concerns and it is argued that 'ethical judgements' are required to bring necessary boundaries to systems thinking (Flood, 1999, p70). A further challenge is the 'subtle reductionism' felt in systems thinking which appears to reduce 'all "I's" and all "we's" to systems of interwoven "it's"' (Wilber, 2000, p71). Again the limitation appears to be a lack of clarity on how systems thinking might advance understanding of complex relationships. However despite debates about expansiveness in systems theory there seems to be a need for more empirical studies to answer the question: how do we to work at the 'boundaries which connect between two active areas' (Charlton 2008, p38), that is at the 'interfaces' between individuals?

Debates associated with systems thinking also concern the need for more effective communication and practice in organisations (Ackoff, 2006). One difficulty is that we are programmed by language to think in terms of cause and effect (Skarzauskiene, 2009, p107). However based on an analysis of leadership and systems theory it is argued that a systems perspective offers a way of improving leadership by shifting towards an interdependent and dynamic way of thinking:

> *The success of an organisation depends not so much on managing the actions of individuals, but on managing interactions amongst its members.* (Skarzauskiene, 2009, p116).

However such theoretical suggestions that complex systems may be managed from the top are tempered by more sceptical views, for example:

> *The perception that someone "up there" is in control is based on the illusion that anyone could master the dynamic and detailed complexity of an organization from the top.* (Senge, 1990, p290).

Extensive action research has added to this view by providing empirical findings on real life complexity:

> *The complexity encountered in real situations was always much too great to endorse the idea that the world can usefully be taken to be a set of interacting systems.* (Checkland, 2010, p131).

Based on 30 years' research it is argued that a 'soft systems' approach associated with a different way of thinking should be balanced with a 'hard' systems engineering approach when addressing complex challenges arising from differing mindsets in organisations (Checkland 2010 p130). This balanced approach finds resonance in other studies that embrace systems thinking in real world settings. For example, multiple case studies aimed at understanding real life experiences of systems thinking have been associated with positive aspects of 'lean manufacturing' processes (Zokaei *et al*, 2010). In tune with the challenges of fast growing SMEs, systems thinking is also seen as a way to cope with change (Nicholls-Nixon, 2005). These studies have generated empirical data to improve understanding of systems thinking in 'real life' situations where the organisation may be conceptualised as:

> *a dynamic, open system where learning is the core competence underlying innovation, growth, and sustainability.* (Andreadis, 2009, p5).

In combination, cultural and systemic perspectives offer important insight into the hidden complexity of organisational life. The interrelated nature of these organisational aspects helps to shift the mindset from cause and effect and tangible aspects to natural patterns and underlying aspects of organisations. Whilst there is a need for qualitative studies to explore the underlying dynamics of organisations the literature offers numerous theoretical insights into organisational culture as an aspect of change management and

the relevance of systems theory to new thinking in organisations. A key debate appears to be the extent to which these dimensions are part of 'top down' organisational strategies or a natural part of more collaborative ways of working.

In the next section the journey from individualistic concepts of leadership towards understanding leadership as a relational phenomenon is discussed.

2.3 Leadership perspectives

This study considers leadership coaching as the initial metaphorical 'splash' or catalyst for potential influences in an organisation. However consideration of influences that may flow from leadership coaching depends on the view taken of leadership. This section approaches the discussion in three phases to explore the shifts in the discourse towards more relational leadership concepts that reflect changes in thinking about influence. I begin by exploring views on leadership from an individualistic perspective and look at the associated discussion on the influence of leaders towards others. I then examine debates associated with the leader/follower dynamic, before moving to the literature on integrated and relational perspectives where leadership begins to be seen as a relational phenomenon. This journey in the literature represents a progression towards a more expansive view of leadership that starts to suggest room for a less individual centred approach to coaching leaders.

2.3.1 Leadership and leaders

Early leadership studies were interested in the qualities and behaviours of successful individuals and had a tendency to view leadership as residing in individuals with distinctive characteristics. Where leadership is focused on individuals, Armstrong (2009, p32) divides perspectives into four broad categories. These categories are 'situational leadership' associated with appropriate adaption of leadership style (Hersey and Blanchard, 1969); 'transactional leadership' associated with a rational approach to tasks and rewards (Burns, 1978); and 'charismatic' (Weber, 1947) and 'transformational leadership' (Bass, 1985), related more closely to human emotions and influencing others. Similarities across these perspectives are their basis in theoretical argument and preoccupation with the traditional view that leadership resides in the influence of individuals in authority. However despite a need to explore these categories in real life to understand the complexity of the concepts they each provide an important angle on the meaning of leadership.

Attempts to distinguish between 'management' and 'leadership' amplify the differences between rational, linear activity in the management sphere and activity suggesting a emotional component in the leadership sphere (Table 2.1).

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Table 2.1 Comparisons between management and leadership

(adapted from Kotter, 1991 cited by Armstrong, 2009, p9).

A deceptively simple definition implicitly blends management and leadership aspects:

> *Management is 'the art of getting results through people'.* (Parker Follet, 1924, cited in Armstrong, 2009, p9).

The distinction between leadership and management is also made fluid by placing leaders on a spectrum between 'visionaries' and 'busy bees'. (Kets de Vries, 2006, p196). To be visionary is often associated with the charismatic element of leadership that 'sweeps people off their feet' (Kets de Vries, 2006, p199). The influence of charismatic leadership is linked with 'emotional contagion' defined as 'the sharing of emotions' (Barsade, 2002, p664) and associated with positive emotions in organisations (Walter and Bruch, 2008, p25). Influence is also related to the view that organisations 'tend to reflect the personalities of their leaders, particularly when power is highly concentrated' (Kets De Vries, 2004, p193). In this regard Kets de Vries spotlights the sometimes irrational human behaviour that sits alongside the rational processes of organisations.

Two papers draw attention to the necessity for influence to be based in thoughtful engagement with followers. In the first (Baldwin and Grayson, 2004), the ability to influence is associated with 'presenting sufficient reasons to achieve people's voluntary support for carrying out a task' (p9). In the second, (Jackson and McDermott, 2009), a range of metaphors associated with educational leadership builds a picture of the potential for influence to create a positive environment, introduce a moral dimension, engage with individuals' priorities and provide inspiration (Jackson and McDermott, 2009 p35-38). Whilst these author's discussions are derived more from personal experiences than empirical findings, they draw important attention to the role and responsibility of leaders and their potential influence.

The dominant view appears to link charismatic leaders with positive organisational change. However by drawing on historical case studies of two separate series of events Levay (2010) argues that negative influences may flow from 'charismatic' leaders who resist change. The implication appears to be that apparently attractive leadership styles can also hinder organisational sustainability. Furthermore 'risk-aversion' and the 'self centredness' of leaders are linked to organisational decline - hypotheses tested using a large scale questionnaire of CEOs and senior executives (Carmeli and Sheaffer 2009). Unsurprisingly the results link these traits to negative outcomes for organisations as a whole. Interestingly both of these studies illustrating unhelpful aspects of leadership involve distance between the researchers and the research subjects. Levay's historical case studies involve the distance of time whilst Carmeli and Sheaffer's use of quantitative survey data involves distance between the researcher and the researched.

In strong contrast to concepts of leadership that display fascination with charismatic qualities Binney *et al* (2005) emphasise the authenticity and quiet influence of the ordinary leader and the 'courage and willingness to be an authority in the presence of others' (p183) and assert that:

> *Charisma exists between people in particular moments and circumstances and is not the quality of one individual.* (p18).

By embracing the view that leadership resides among 'ordinary' people, Binney *et al* (2005) indicate the potential for a more gentle influence. Correspondingly a 'quieter' type of leadership involves a 'kind of pushing-back' on the system (McFarland (2001 p5),an understated approach to extraordinary leadership challenges (Badaracco 2003 p5) and strengthens organisational culture through quiet intelligence (Mintzberg 1999). Although the above papers are conceptual rather than empirical research , they offer perspectives on the subtle influence of leadership that is based on wisdom rather than authority.

The nature of influence can therefore be seen as positive or negative in relation to charismatic leadership and quietly authoritative in terms of 'ordinary' leadership. To broaden the debate transformational leadership is related to creating an environment where others can flourish. In this regard four key aspects apply: 'idealised influence' (new ways of thinking), 'inspirational motivation' (engagement focus), 'intellectual stimulation' (encouraging inventiveness) and 'individualized consideration' (bringing out the best in others) (Avolio *et al,* 1991, p13), each aspect being a positive influence on others. However whilst these discussions begin to suggest interconnectedness between leaders and followers the traditional view of the individual leader persists where attractive personal attributes are associated with the 'transformational' leader.

A conceptual framework detailing the 'reciprocal influences' between transformational leadership and organisational context provides a tentative theoretical bridge between individual and interconnected perspectives (Pawar and Eastman 1997). However this framework too is anchored in the dominant view that leadership and influence resides in individuals and their capacity to 'harness' or 'confront' contextual aspects (p100).

Elsewhere a literature review observes a tension associated with influence where transformational leadership combines 'a collective organizational interest' with reward mechanisms and performance management (Tourish *et al*, 2010, p54). However there appears to be lack of qualitative studies that explore more fully the ambiguity associated with inclusivity and 'managing' others in real life.

However to associate leadership wholly with influence on others is viewed as problematical since this avoids seeing leadership in collaborative contexts (Drath, 2008, p21). This represents a shift in the debate away from the influence of individuals and more towards a collective view of leadership although the discussion is based on personal insight rather than empirical evidence. This view is found to be particularly helpful in a tough business climate where 'adaptive leadership' (Heifetz *et al*, 2009) is:

> *a daily opportunity to mobilize the resources of people to thrive in a changing and challenging world.* (p69).

Here leadership is described as an 'improvisational and experimental art' (p65). This progression in the literature signals fresh perspectives on the mutuality of relationships among people in organisations. However empirical evidence to support these discussions in the management literature is noticeably lacking. The next section looks at a further progression associated with insights into the nature of the leader/follower dynamic.

2.3.2 The leader/follower dynamic

A heroic view of leadership presupposes that people generally look up to authoritative leaders. However the personal experience and expectations of employees has been changing over recent years in relation to social diversity (Kegan, 1994); conditions for self-development and authenticity (George *et al*, 2007); having a 'voice' in the organisation (Senge *et al*, 2008); happiness and opportunities for 'flow' experiences (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997); adult development and the fit between cultural demands and mental capabilities (Kegan, 1994); and integrating personal, interpersonal and external perspectives (Wilber, 2000). Debates associated with the leader/follower dynamic tend to suggest a disconnection between leaders and followers.

Changes in employee perspectives on working life find a parallel in changing perspectives on the leadership required in today's dynamic business environment. For

example, two articles discuss a more integrated approach to the leader/follower dynamic suggesting a rebalancing in the literature. In the first, by drawing on wide experience of coaching in different organisational settings, Sandler (2009) offers a view of the important aspects of leadership behaviour in relation to followers. These aspects are 'prompt and considered action'; 'honest and consistent communication'; 'emotional connection' and 'inspiration' (pp32-33) linked to the ability to help 'staff deal more effectively with difficult experiences' and also with 'loyalty and trust' (p35). In the second (Sutton, 2009) explores challenges for leaders in relation to followers when business conditions are particularly difficult which include the need to provide conditions for employees that speak of 'predictability, understanding, control and compassion', and aspects related to the prospect of 'employees' deep loyalty' (Sutton, 2009, p49). In different ways these examples of the requirements of leadership both emphasise emotional aspects of the leader/follower dynamic and the potential for negativity when times are tough. However in each case the perspectives lack the input of views from those in organisations experiencing the leadership of others.

It seems that the concepts of 'emotional intelligence' (Goleman, 1996) and 'emotional contagion' (Barsade, 2002) offer important insight into what might be occurring at the level of emotions in the dynamic space between individuals. However in the first case emotional intelligence is more associated with enhancing leader's behaviours rather than deepening understanding of organisations as integrated whole systems. In the second case emotional contagion, 'tested' in a laboratory experiment, (Barsade, 2002) isolates the components of a complex emotional 'ripple effect' from wider contextual features, again presenting more of a component view rather than an holistic perspective.

Changing employee expectations and modern day requirements of leadership begin to suggest a more complex and increasingly mutual leader/follower relationship. Interestingly mutuality is not seen to be universally embraced where it is suggested that followers may prefer hierarchy and linear processes and may even create barriers to collaborative thinking and a more distributed approach to leadership. In this context they may call for the leader's plan and for the leader to 'show the way' (Kegan, 1994, p322). Drath (2003) seems to suggest a paradox associated with a desire for connectedness and an expectation from authoritative leaders.

> *Individuals long to be part of a bigger picture that connects them to a larger purpose. This is what they expect leadership to accomplish.* (p3).

However, a concept of leadership where followers depend on a dominant person 'not just for direction, commitment and adaptation but also for their sense of meaning and belonging' is viewed as limiting (Drath, 2001, p8). It is argued that leadership is a matter

of 'interpersonal influence' where: 'the leader's voice becomes a *compound* voice that includes the voices of followers' and where 'new leaders can emerge as conditions change' (Drath, 2001, p9). This view is also supported by a call to diffuse leadership more widely in organisations (Mintzberg, 2004). The collective and interrelated aspects of this concept of leadership provide a platform for examining leadership as a relational phenomenon.

2.3.3 Leadership as a relational phenomenon

It has been shown that the influence of individual leaders from various perspectives has been at the heart of leadership studies. More recently concepts of leadership that consider reciprocal aspects of the leader/follower dynamic begin to offer a view of the relational space between 'leader' and 'follower'. These concepts include 'servant leadership' emphasising the needs of followers (Greenleaf, 2002) and 'authentic leadership' emphasising awareness of one's own values and those of others (Avolio and Gardner, 2005). However the separateness of leaders and followers remains an aspect of these concepts of leadership.

A development in conceptualising leadership is found in 'shared leadership' defined in integrated terms as a:

> *dynamic, unfolding, interactive influence process among individuals, where the objective is to lead one another toward the objective of collective goals.* (Pearce *et al*, 2009, p234).

A global study of changes in leadership philosophy indicated:

> *a definite shift toward viewing leadership as a shared group process that happens throughout the organization by means of interdependent decision making.* (Martin and Calarco, 2006, p22).

An important distinction to make is between 'shared 'and 'distributed leadership'. In this regard terms are defined clearly by Fitzsimons *et al* (2011): 'shared leadership' is associated with a 'reciprocal influence process' whilst 'distributed 'leadership is linked to the 'interactions between leaders and followers and the organizational context' (p319). However questions arise where these concepts seem to be in tension. For example, an article raises an important question associated with 'shared leadership': how do we address the increased responsibility of leaders for the leadership of others? (Laskow, 2003). Similarly, extensive survey data from managers' perspectives (Kouzes and Posner, 1990) describe an expectation of authoritative leadership behaviours as part of the 'reciprocal process' of leadership (p29). Hence shared leadership retains a sense of the separateness of leaders and followers. Dominant assumptions about accountability and authority seem to challenge thinking about reciprocal aspects of shared leadership.

A different more fragmented view of shared leadership is found in comparative case study research in an educational setting where 'influence' and 'inclusion' are perceived differently according to assumptions about roles in a shared leadership process (Foster 2005,p50). Hence the complexity of the concept of shared leadership seems to suggest a need for further research based in real life experience.

Studies on leader member exchange (LMX) offer important insights into understanding leadership as a relational phenomenon and sphere of influences. Firstly, a large survey of a population in China links reciprocal and social features of LMX and the individualistic nature of transformational leadership and suggests that a blend of these aspects can enhance followers' performance (Hui *et al* 2005). Secondly, an extensive US-based survey produces findings that highlight differences in leader-follower perceptions of LMX (Cogliser *et al* 2009*)*. These findings are helpful in identifying the complexity of LMX yet remain based in individual perspectives. However qualitative studies that bring to life the dynamics of interaction among individuals appear to be lacking.

Leadership culture represents a further progression towards thinking about leadership as a relational phenomenon and is associated with assumptions made about leadership and the way leadership is perceived in organisations. In a recent empirical study of successful organisations leadership culture is identified as being 'dependent; independent or interdependent' according to assumptions relating to conformity, achievement and collaboration (Palus, 2009, p5-6). However the argument that senior leaders have an important role in influencing culture seems to involve a dilemma: the term 'strategic influencer' draws attention to the leader's strategic role in wider cultural change whilst seeming ambiguous about the scope of control over cultural aspects (McGuire *et al*, 2008,p6). Alternatively, empirical research shows that a change in culture is possible where leaders provide support for people who do volunteer and participate in the early stages of change (Rooke and Torbert, 2005, p76). Hence individual leaders are shown to have a role by helping to create desirable leadership cultures through positive behaviours (Schein, 2004; Nally, 2006; Hawkins and Wright, 2009).

Relational leadership then offers an important shift in thinking about leadership from an holistic perspective. This concept captures the energy associated with leadership as 'occurring in relational dynamics throughout the *organization*' (Uhl-Bien, 2006, p655) and arises from a realisation that 'we know surprisingly little about how relationships form and develop in the workplace' (p672). In an article describing a period of consultancy in a large corporate, Hawkins and Wright (2009) add the dimension of 'endeavour' to characterise leadership as a relational phenomenon in the following way:

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Leadership is not located within leaders, but resides in the relationships between leaders and followers in service of a joint endeavour, or between leaders, stakeholders or partners and a mutual endeavour. Without these elements all being present, there is no relationship. (p17).

By indicating the relational 'space' between individuals, relational leadership creates a bridge between discussions on individualistic leadership and perspectives on organisations that emphasise interconnectedness. A further consultancy based view (Palus *et al* 2003) describes a multi dimensional leadership programme focused on the top tiers of a corporate firm. The strength of the approach is the combination of methods including dialogue and storytelling. However post programme survey respondents illustrate the tensions associated with reaching beyond the top tier of an organisation. In this context it is suggested that a relational approach requires a different developmental mindset in order to:

view connections among individuals, collectives and connections among collectives as targets for development. (Palus *et al*, 2003, p28).

Uhl-Bien (2006) brings together concepts of leadership that reside in individuals ('entity' approach) and distinguishes these from the social dimension of leadership ('relational approach'). However the theoretical discussion is less informative on ways of exploring 'relatedness'. A framework integrating individual and relational aspects is provided 'to direct attention and focus on potential questions' (p668). However the difficult question of 'shared responsibility' (p664) is left unexplored. There is a sense of hesitancy about defining relational leadership, particularly in relation to the involvement of individuals in a phenomenon that at the same time sits outside the individual. Therefore it is difficult to see how we might translate the concept into everyday life. However the theoretical study achieves a shift in focus from 'individual' and 'process' to 'relationships' and 'experiences' of leadership. In contrast to these theoretical insights, abovementioned practical insight based in consultancy practice emphasises action rather than deeper exploration. The ground left for further research appears to relate to understanding more fully the complexities of a relational concept that deals with interfaces between individuals rather than individuals themselves.

In this section it can be seen that leadership studies have continued towards a more holistic conceptualisation of leadership that is related to understanding the dynamic nature of human relationships. Insights have expanded my view of leadership and have also encouraged a wider focus from the duality of the leader/follower dynamic to a view that leadership might reside among relationships anywhere in the organisation.

This review now continues with an examination of coaching literature, giving particular focus to executive and leadership coaching studies, and signals appropriate comparisons with the progression in the organisational and leadership coaching literature.

2.4 Leadership coaching

Leadership coaching and executive coaching are terms used interchangeably in the coaching literature, each tilted towards individualistic concepts of leadership. In this regard leadership coaching is related to developing effective leaders in line with the strategic direction of organisations (Anderson and Anderson, 2005). Major issues and debates are linked to the dominant view in coaching that leadership resides in individual leaders. Hence the tendency is to view coaching as a way of increasing the capacity of individuals to improve organisational effectiveness. However this view takes less account of unintended consequences from coaching outcomes and the implications of assuming causal links between individuals and organisational success.

This section critiques the coaching literature in two sections: coaching and leaders and then coaching in organisations to address wider organisational aspects. The discussion focuses on the progression in the coaching literature related to helping with leadership and organisational concerns and suggests that few empirical studies address holistic approaches to coaching in organisations.

2.4.1 Coaching and leaders

Leadership coaching is typically offered to top executives and talented individuals aspiring towards senior organisational roles. Aligned with this practice an individualistic approach to leadership coaching exists in the literature that resonates with an individual centred perspective on the coaching process as:

> *intended to foster the on-going self-directed learning and personal growth of the coachee.* (Grant and Cavanagh, 2004, p11).

Contrasting with the progression in viewing organisational life and leadership in holistic terms, the leadership coaching literature has tended to emphasise improving the performance and behaviours of individual leaders by adopting approaches developed by a number of practitioners including Whitmore (2002), Downey (2003) and McLeod (2003).

Whitmore (2002) emphasised personal efficacy through coaching 'the person' in his seminal work inspired by Galwey's concept of the 'inner game' (1986), an approach that offered effective techniques for overcoming self imposed barriers to effective tennis performance. Sports psychology is similarly linked by Orlock (1996) to a structured

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approach to excellent individual performance with less attention drawn to collaborative effort. By drawing on Bandura's perspective on self-efficacy (1997), Moen and Allgood (2009) also emphasise an individual centred approach to executive coaching. By conducting a survey of 127 senior executives relating to the outcomes of a one year coaching initiative in a large corporation, the study concluded that coaching has the capacity to increase leadership self-efficacy in executives. However the focus stays with a traditional assumption in executive coaching that leadership resides in individuals leaving less room for a more systemic perspective. In a more recent interview Sir John Whitmore discussed how the coaching agenda is changing from an individual performance orientation to embrace spiritual development and the desire for meaning and purpose in life: fostering 'wisdom in leaders, not just cleverness' (Kauffman and Bachkirova, 2008, p14). Whilst this view highlights the breadth of the coaching agenda at the individual level, it is less clear from the coaching literature how coaching reaches into the relational space among individuals.

Individuality is also emphasised through the importance placed on the coach/client relationship, strengthened through the coach's understanding of psychological processes. Specifically, coaching psychology is defined in the following terms:

> *Coaching psychology is for enhancing well-being and performance in personal life and work domains underpinned by models of coaching grounded in established adult and child learning or psychological approaches.* (Palmer and Whybrow, 2007, p3).

By drawing extensively from individual psychology, coaching inevitably emphasises individual outcomes albeit in the context of organisational aims:

> *Offering the benefits of psychology to people and organisations wishing to make the most of the resources that lie within the individual.* (Palmer and Whybrow, 2007, p xviii).

Applications of coaching psychology are extensive and include reframing perceived barriers to personal growth (Kegan, 1982); unconditional positive regard (Rogers, 2004); developing human strengths and competencies (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Seligman, 2002) and identifying helpful and unhelpful patterns (Berne, 1964). More recently, assumptions made in coaching psychology that the world is characterised by linear processes are being challenged with implications for coaching that tries to squeezes linear outcomes from ambiguous and chaotic situations (Cavanagh and Lane 2012). However the lens remains at the coach/coachee end of the spectrum with a call for coaching psychologists to more fully engage with the complex themes in the client's story (p13).

Coaching the development of leaders' competence in emotional intelligence is also a way of helping individuals to 'lead life successfully' (Goleman, 1996, p43) and is an

important step towards helping develop positive relationships. The five domains of emotional intelligence are 'knowing one's emotions', 'managing emotions', 'motivating oneself', 'recognising emotions in others' and 'handling relationships' (Goleman, 1996, p43). However again, the approach is from the individual perspective rather than from within the system containing the individual.

Leadership coaching that emphasises the authenticity of the developing leader integrates the 'personal journey (awareness and insight)' and the 'practical journey (behavioural competence)' of the coachee with suggested benefits for the individual and the organisation (Lee, G., 2003, p17). Here emphasis is placed on authenticity as a critical feature of the influencing relationship between leaders and others:

> *Acts of influence must be grounded in self-awareness, confidence and creativity, and their engagement with others must empower and motivate. (*Lee, G., 2003, p7).

However the attention on the individual leader continues to associate coaching with earlier conceptualisations of leadership and has the tendency to mask a view of the potential reach of leadership coaching. The blurring of the terms 'executive 'and 'leadership' coaching also emphasises an individualistic concept of leadership and contrasts with the more complex and integrated agendas represented in leadership and organisational studies. It is this contrast that underpins a challenge for this study since exploring a 'ripple effect from leadership coaching' requires that we see leadership from an interconnected perspective, a view underemphasised in the coaching literature.

2.4.2 Coaching and organisational aspects

Leadership coaching in the wider context of organisations involves consideration of the one-to-one coaching relationship and team coaching in the context of the whole organisation. The previous discussion on the emotional aspects of the influence of leaders encourages the view that coaching individual leaders to achieve competence in emotional intelligence can produce benefits for the wider organisation. Suggested benefits are a more participative environment and improved employee engagement (Maddocks, 2009).

Two different examples of literature that seek to move coaching in a wider direction indicate some prevalent debates in coaching. Firstly empirical research drawing from interviews and surveys, and also citing examples from practice, draws positive conclusions regarding the relationship between coaching and organisational sustainability (Outhwaite and Bettridge 2009). The research, from the perspective of senior managers, emphasises 'interior aspects' rather than 'scientific aspects' and presents insights into the types of coaching that might enable sustainability to be

addressed by leaders and teams. However a linear perspective is evident in the language: 'interconnected causes and solutions to the many challenges' (p77) and the study is less clear on coaching , for example, in the relational space to explore strengths and concerns from a whole organisation perspective.

Secondly, and from a systemic perspective, an article draws extensively from psychological perspectives and uses coaching stories from personal experience to emphasise the role of the coach/coachee relationship. (Orenstein 2002). Here the focus is widened by suggesting the need for a flexible coaching repertoire to make sense of the organisational 'system' with the assumption that the 'system' can be understood within the coach/client relationship. The question arising from these articles, whether linking coaching with sustainability or looking into the organizational system alongside the client is this: how does the coach uncover the interconnected nature of the organisational system?.

Just as leadership coaching literature tends to focus on those at the top of organisations, so too does the literature on team coaching defined as:

> *direct interaction with a team intended to help members make co-ordinated and task-appropriate use of their collective resources in accomplishing the team's work.* (Hackman and Wageman, 2005, p269).

At the heart of team coaching is the understanding that individuals bring different characteristics to team life and that 'one cannot predict the functioning of a team by knowing its members separately' (Kets de Vries *et al*, 2007, p53). As teams develop over time, different coaching interventions are appropriate according to whether the focus is on 'effort' at the outset, 'performance strategies' or 'reviewing and learning from 'experiences' (Hackman, 2005, cited in Messick and Kramer, 2005, p131-2). It could be expected that each of these insights into team coaching should relate to a view that teams are interconnected social systems with the capacity to evolve over time. What is striking in the literature on coaching in organisations is the lack of translation of these insights into understanding the bigger team: the organisation. It seems that once coaching is placed in the organisational arena we begin to see productivity, competence and performance as important rather than human interconnectedness. As such coaching becomes associated more with the business dimension. Could this be associated with a dominant concern in the profession associated with demonstrating tangible value?

Systemic approaches benefit organisations by creating the opportunity for learning and dialogue in teams (Clutterbuck, 2007, p145) and by developing 'collective transformational leadership' to improve how the team 'performs and relates to the wider system in which it operates' (Hawkins, 2011, p152). These approaches address the

ability of teams to relate both within the team boundary and outside the team. Whilst these perspectives tend to maintain an executive focus, team coaching appears to offer a bridge between individual coaching and the wider organisation.

From a systemic perspective, Mase and Ober (2010) introduce a coaching agenda with the following elements:

> *Larger systemic forces impacting our client's ability to achieve his/her goals, an external/internal system interacting.*
>
> *Forces impacting our coaching interaction with our client, two internal systems interacting.*
>
> *Forces impacting me as a coach, self as a system.* (p3).

This systemic approach enables the coach and client to work with interconnectedness whilst remaining with the one-to-one emphasis in coaching. Similarly O'Neill (2007) focuses on both the client and the coach as part of a social system, conceptualised as an 'interactional field'. In a descriptive case study of a coach/coachee relationship Day (2010) cites the influence of Bateson when seeing the coaching relationship itself as the 'pattern that connects' and draws attention to the interconnectedness of the coach, coachee and organisation. These approaches to coaching from a systemic perspective emphasise the subsystems that include the coach and begin to take coaching into a more interconnected direction. However, by also emphasising the coach/coachee relationship the coaching agenda remains at the individualistic end of the spectrum rather than forging a route into the relational space of organisations.

As a catalyst for new ways of thinking and acting in support of longer term organisational aims, coaching is increasingly appreciated as a strategic component of organisational sustainability (Senge *et al*, 1999, p562). In this regard the concept of creating a coaching culture begins to shape a view of a wider agenda for coaching in relation to organisational performance (Clutterbuck and Megginson, 2005). Whilst the emphasis on leaders and managers as champions and role models is noticeable in the approach to creating a coaching culture, this is integrated with a systemic approach 'where we learn our way into change, rather than driving our top-down vision through the organisation'. (Clutterbuck and Megginson, 2005, p66). This approach, beginning with the senior team, resonates with the thrust of transformational leadership concerned with creating the conditions in which others can flourish (Avolio *et al*, 1991, p13). As such the attention is focused on individuals rather than at the interfaces between individuals and a hierarchically based approach is assumed.

From a different perspective Rosinski (2003) takes an individual centred coaching agenda more widely into the interconnected organisational domain by blending coaching

with an understanding of interculturalism to strengthen relational aspects of organisational life:

> *By integrating the cultural dimension, coaches will unleash more human potential to achieve meaningful objectives. Likewise, enriched with coaching, intercultural professionals will be better equipped to fulfil their commitment to extend people's worldviews, bridge cultural gaps and enable successful work across cultures.* (Rosinski, 2003, p xviii).

In combination Rosinski (2003) and Clutterbuck and Megginson (2005) offer ways of working with individuals to create influences more widely. However in this context a paradox exists that is explored in a recent qualitative case study (Evans, 2011) and is associated with coaching at the individualistic level in the pursuit of organisational change. This empirical study focused on a coaching programme among managers in a public sector organisation and involved observation and semi structured interviews. With a focus on organisational culture, the study discerned positive shifts in management style, accountability and organisational climate whilst pointing to:

> *the uncertainty over the extent to which individual (sic) can influence others within the complex and interconnected environment of an organization.* (Evans, 2011, p80).

This recent study identifies a gap in the coaching literature in relation to making more explicit the link between coaching as an enabler for change and the complex and integrated nature of organisational life.

2.5 Summary

This review has examined a range of literature that discusses interconnected and relational aspects in organisational and leadership studies and considers the coaching literature in the light of these aspects. The aim of the review has been to draw out themes of relevance to an exploration of a ripple effect from leadership coaching. A conceptual framework (Figure 2.1) brings together the key concepts and principles in relation to my research topic and draws attention to the associated gaps. These aspects are from an organisational perspective: the natural, unpredictable patterns of life that confound attempts to exert control in organisations; from a leadership perspective: debates spanning accountability, hierarchical influence, interconnectedness and the nature of the interfaces among individuals; and from a leadership coaching perspective: an emphasis on hierarchy, individual efficacy and a tendency to place the coach/coachee relationship centre stage. Viewed together the categories of literature

Figure 2.1 Conceptual Framework

B) Leadership perspectives

Leadership and leader

Focus on authority

Variety of influences/emotional aspects

Hierarchical influence

C) Leadership coaching

Coaching and leaders

Focus on leader's efficacy/impact, emotional intelligence/authenticity and ROI interest

Hierarchical focus

infuses

A) Organisational perspectives

Organisational culture

Shared values/assumptions

Intervention for change and unintended outcomes

Underlying patterns

Systems theory

Shift from linear to holistic thinking

Organisational learning linked to strategy

resonates

Leader/follower dynamic

Accountability/duality/ mutuality

Interconnectedness

Leadership as a relational phenomenon

Shared/cultural insights

Focus on interfaces

Coaching in organisations

Executive coach/coachee and team outlook on system and culture

Gaps in previous literature in relation to research topic

A) Multi dimensional studies of patterns of experience after change from whole organisation perspectives

B) Empirical studies of the nature of interfaces between individuals throughout 'real life' organisations

C) Empirical studies to understand the interconnected human dimension in organisations – and from small/medium sized enterprise perspectives

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discussed in this chapter suggest that whilst leadership and organisational studies have increasingly explored themes that extend beyond individuals towards interconnectedness and dynamic aspects, the coaching literature tends to emphasise an individual centred approach.

In conducting this review it has been evident that empirical research into areas that could be described as 'at the interfaces' of organisational life (shared leadership, relational leadership, cultural and systemic theory) is lacking in contemporary real life studies. This is perhaps due to the challenges associated with exploring dynamic, integrated aspects requiring multi dimensional interpretative approaches. However insights into the underlying complexity of organisations, particularly where attempts are made to integrate business and human dimensions of working life, seem to resonate with my research topic.

Organisational studies widely explore cultural and systemic concepts in relation to contemporary organisational challenges. Leadership studies have expanded the concept of leadership beyond the 'charismatic' and 'heroic' individual to understand the nature of leadership as a phenomenon residing among relationships. In this context very few studies of coaching have considered what might be happening in 'real life' in organisations following the coaching of their leaders, particularly in the entrepreneurial world of the SME. Consequently there is little empirical evidence of what may flow from the coaching of leaders from a relational or systemic perspective and therefore of the potential reach and wider contribution of coaching. Accordingly this study draws on integrated perspectives found in the organisational and leadership literature to explore the existence and nature of a 'ripple effect' and the potential reach of coaching. In the next chapter I present my methodological approach to exploring discernible influences that may be characterised as a ripple effect following leadership coaching.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This chapter focuses on the methodology for the study in relation to the central research question:

What are the perceived influences that may be discerned in an organisation following the coaching of leaders?

The related subsidiary questions are:

What is the nature of any perceived influences?

What, if anything, has changed that may be connected to a different approach in the company?

What are the implications for coaching, leadership and organisational development?

In this chapter I provide details on the development of three data collection streams: in-depth interviews, anecdote circles and a companywide questionnaire, the effect of researcher presence in the research setting, issues pertaining to validity and ethics, and procedures for data analysis. In addition I indicate some limitations to the case study design.

3.1 Philosophical approach

I share the view that:

> *the world is a complex place where even general laws or common patterns of experience or behaviour are never expressed in predictable or uniform ways.* (Willig, 2008, p88).

My view is therefore that cause and effect are difficult to separate, a belief that is both in tune with the topic of complex patterns and relationships and also with how I conceive my role as a researcher:

> *Constructivist researchers often address the "processes" of interaction among individuals. They also focus on the specific contexts in which people live and work in order to understand the historical and cultural settings of the participants.* (Creswell, 2003, p8).

Accordingly I feel that I am at the social constructivist end of the positivist-constructivist debate or 'paradigm wars' (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998, pp9-11): in essence I believe that experience is 'interpreted' or 'constructed' by the researcher whilst being 'real' to the person having the experience.

Philosophical assumptions are the basis for knowledge claims and therefore relate to choices of methodology (Creswell, 2003, Willig, 2008). My philosophical position is that many realities exist according to the different interpretations of individuals. Drawing from Creswell (2003, p8), my associated assumptions are presented in Table 3.1. I have

therefore developed a methodological approach that aims to combine the rigour and the flexibility required for a study of complex patterns and relationships.

Philosophical assumptions	Implications for methodology
'Reality' is constructed differently by each individual.	Interpretative approach to individual, group and organisational data and to data integration. Collect and analyse data to represent multiple perspectives.
Researcher's 'reality' influences interpretative process.	Maintain sensitivity to personal biases throughout the research process.
Aim is to understand and describe experience.	Focus on qualitative inquiry at individual, group and organisational levels e.g. in-depth interviews, anecdote circles for stories of experiences, and providing opportunities for narrative responses in a companywide questionnaire.

Table 3.1 Philosophical assumptions and implications for methodology

As a case study researcher I was intent on remaining open minded in order to generate rather than test hypotheses**.** Conceptualising my role as 'investigative' and drawing from a view of the case study researcher as that of a 'witness' or 'reporter' (Willig, 2008, p88), I felt that steering the agenda towards a specific hypothesis would hinder the exploration of the topic. My aim has been to ask questions without any assumptions attached to the existence of a ripple effect. I was open to anything else that may emerge and have sought to be responsive to surprise, paradox and emerging problems. In addition I have been mindful of influences other than coaching although specific lines of inquiry have been in mind when framing my questions. These questions have originated from theoretical insights drawn from the literature on coaching, leadership and organisational development and practical insights from my previous business career and from my leadership coaching experience.

3.2 Choice of research strategy

I have chosen to conduct a single organisational case study, an exploratory approach 'in order to investigate a contemporary phenomenon in-depth and within its real-life context' (Yin, 2009, p18). Initially a phenomenological approach appeared to offer a route to

understanding people's experiences by emphasising verbatim accounts of individual experiences. However whilst my study values subjective experiences the aim is to look further than individual perspectives. Since my area of focus involves themes of interconnectedness I required an approach that would illuminate context and reflect the dynamic nature of organisational life. I also wished to avoid the individual centred emphasis that prevails in much of the coaching literature.

Fishman (1999) makes the distinction between a pragmatic case study concerned with programme impact and a hermeneutic case study that emphasises grounded theory. A grounded theory approach that emphasises 'a negotiated consensual construction among stakeholders' (p159) resonates with my beliefs about the way the world works and is preferable in my view to an impact oriented pragmatic approach. However a purely grounded theory approach would be more suited to building a theory of how coaching works, but less suited to a multi dimensional study to understand inter-subjective experience at a particular time in an organisation's life. I therefore concluded that my overriding interest in a particular experience at a particular time and place was in keeping with the assertion that case studies are 'defined by interest in individual cases not by methods of enquiry' (Stake, 1994, p236, cited by Holliday, A. 2001, p17). Accordingly I have chosen an in-depth single organisational case study to investigate a ripple effect from leadership coaching.

3.2.1 Case study strategy

The task of the case study researcher is to:

> *look closely and carefully at the evidence to produce a report that captures the characteristics of the case, within the terms of reference of the study.* (Willig, 2008, p.88).

Yin (2009) sets out a rigorous case study framework 'following a set of pre-specified procedures' (p21). However I am also drawn to the emphasis on versatility found in Robson (2002), Fishman (1999) and Willig (2008) and to an approach that emphasises 'responsiveness to contradictory evidence' (Robson, 2002, p168). I believe that such versatility complements a step-by-step justification of the interpretations made (p171). In contrast to the more positivist overtones of Yin's approach to case study I feel closer to the hermeneutic model suggested by Fishman involving detailed 'thick description' of the context of the 'naturalistic case situation' (Fishman, 1999, p156). Accordingly an approach that emphasises a chain of evidence (Yin, 2009) suggests a level of linearity unsuited to a study where the interest is in patterns, relationships and interconnectedness. In practice my unfolding design opened up opportunities to react to changing events.

As a coaching practitioner I feel inclined towards the humanistic stance, placing the person or 'client' at the heart of the process. However this study conceptualises the 'client' as the organisation. I have therefore built into my design three levels of inquiry to allow multi dimensional findings associated with an organisational experience. I have developed an approach aimed at the investigation of depth, richness and breadth: one-to-one interviews to explore meaning for participants (for depth); anecdote circles (Callahan *et al*, 2006; Carter, 2009) to explore experiences shared among trusted colleagues (for richness) and a qualitative online company questionnaire to give the widest opportunity to contribute individual perspectives (for breadth). This approach accords with the emphasis on rich details regarded as a positive attribute of single case studies (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007, p30).

3.2.2 Gaining access

My aim was to conduct my research at an organisation where I was previously completely unknown either as an employee, consultant or coach to overcome a potential source of bias. This was in the knowledge that the inevitable challenge of researcher bias would need to be managed as discussed later in this chapter. As Fishman (1999) asserts:

> *…by its very nature, the case study draws the researcher into intensive contact with the client and other stakeholders associated with the case. It is not possible – even if it were desirable – to maintain the neutral, detached stance of positivist group researchers who can interact with their 'subjects' in a 'thin' way because typically they only need a small amount of discrete, quantitative data from any one of the large number of individuals they are studying.* (pp170-1).

My focus on investigating the organisational experience following coaching rather than tangible outcomes more readily associated with ROI was explored with diverse organisations and generated a variety of important questions: whether scrutiny of leadership styles was involved, the attractiveness of the study for voluntary participants and how to manage anonymity and confidentiality. Following these useful preliminary discussions I shared my research interest with a colleague who then effected an introduction with a coach involved in coaching leaders seeking to develop their business. My new contact was fortuitously – and immediately – 'on my wavelength' seeing the potential value to businesses and to the coaching profession from a study that looked beyond the immediate dynamic of the coaching relationship and out towards the wider organisation.

After an in-depth discussion my new contact provided the names of two organisations. My choice of an SME was determined by the opportunity to explore coaching in a small but growing accountancy firm where coaching had been enthusiastically embraced by the leaders. Following my initial approach by email to the organisation I was invited to a

meeting where I presented my research outline and shared detailed participant information. Following the exhaustive dialogue I had had with potential organisations I was able to be precise about the purpose of my study, my research objectives and the prospective value for the organisation. This resulted in my introduction to the person who became my counterpart at the organisation and who has since provided invaluable support as a conduit to voluntary participants and as a helpful sounding board. In my experience the challenging process and dialogue prior to choosing the company at the heart of the study has been an essential part of the research journey.

3.2.3 Chosen organisation

My chosen case was a small but growing accountancy firm and to maintain the anonymity of the organisation I have named the company 'Quantum'. I was interested in the distinguishing features of a single case in order to illustrate its 'combination of distinctiveness and relevance' (Fishman, 1999, p168). I was also mindful that the case could in future form part of a multiple case study design to reveal findings from comparing and contrasting organisational experiences – not feasible within the scope of this particular academic timeframe.

The study at Quantum provided an opportunity to explore 'real life' in the under researched setting of a small entrepreneurial company following a leadership coaching initiative. An accountancy setting provided a relatively familiar business context bringing a level of accessibility to the case. Balancing ethics and transparency was a consistent thread for this study and so for the purpose of ethical rigour I have not detailed the precise background to the coaching initiative other than to say that coaching was provided by a professional coach and that the nature of the coaching was solution focused and concerned with helping the leaders at Quantum to grow the business.

A positive feature of the organisational case was its size: the company employs c.70 people spread across four locations. For a single researcher on a relatively short timescale the size and structure combined feasibility with complexity when looked at as a source of individual experiences to create a bigger picture. Further positive features were the openness of the participants, a sense of rapport and the company's consistent support throughout the study. My professional background in both business and coaching meant that I understood and could empathise with the time pressure associated with a profession where the notion of 'time is money' is ever present. Associated with this aspect of the company, all diaries were open for everyone to see the activity in the company: a challenge when arranging confidential meetings that needed to be described as 'extracurricular'. This gave an immediate insight into accountancy culture and the pressure of everyday life in the organisation.

3.2.4 Participants

My aim was to 'to understand the internal dynamics of the case' (Willig, 2008, p17). To meet this aim my unit of analysis was the single organisation, whilst my unit of data collection was at the individual level. Reporting of the findings is at the level of aggregate themes supported by the relevant use of anonymised quotations. Furthermore I report contextual features in keeping with the assertion that 'the various dimensions of the case relate to or interact with its environment' (Willig, 2008, p74).

Researching the organisation from multiple perspectives was a complex feature of the study and involved juxtaposing data from the participating leaders who were coached and from a variety of participants from the wider organisational team (drawn from c.70 people comprising those employed for at least 12 months at the beginning of data collection). An organogram is provided in Appendix I. Additional details are that the organisation was divided in the following ways: 35% male/65% female and at the time of this study 44% of staff were under 35 /56% over 35 years old.

The main focus was on the wider team to investigate the reach of any influences that could be a ripple effect from the coaching of the leaders. Initial interviews with the leaders were then aimed at understanding their perspective on any discernible influences following their coaching. Further interviews with the leaders investigated themes that had emerged and were also aimed at understanding the dynamics of a ripple effect that I was noticing during the course of data collection.

To define the participant groups I will use the term 'leader' to refer to the leaders in this study who were coached, 'Ted' and 'Don' when referring to the leaders individually, then 'wider team' to refer collectively and 'team member' to refer individually to the research participants from Quantum's team beyond the leaders. Each participant for interview was given a pseudonym. Key participant details are provided in Table 3.2 relating to age and length of employment. Due to the relatively small size of anecdote circle groups and to the collective nature of the data I have provided details at 'team' level. Since the focus of the study is the organisational experience following their leadership coaching programme I have chosen not to invite the participation of the coach.

Interview participant (pseudonym)	Age: Under 35 yrs at May 2010	Age: over 35 yrs	Length of employment: under 5 yrs at May 2010	5-10 yrs	over 10 yrs
Joan		X	X		
Luke	X		X		
Sally	X		X		
Geoff		X			X
Adam	X			X	
Paul	X		X		
Robert		X			X
Catherine		X		X	
David		X			X
Brian	X		X		

Anecdote circles	Age: Under 35 yrs at May 2010	Age: over 35 yrs	Length of employment: under 5 yrs at May 2010	5-10 yrs	over 10 yrs
Circle One females		X		X	
		X		X	
		X	X		
Circle One males	X		X		
	X		X		
	X		X		
Circle Two females		X	X		
	X			X	
	X				X
Circle Two males		X			X
	X				X

Table 3.2: Key details – interview participants and anecdote circle groups

3.3 Multiple methods

This study has involved multiple methods to bring an appropriate multifaceted aspect to the investigation. In this section each method is explained in detail to help facilitate replication of the study.

The research used three methods of data collection: in-depth interviews, anecdote circles and a qualitative company questionnaire. This approach provided the flexibility needed to explore a ripple effect at different levels of organisational experience. With this range of investigative approaches I was able to tilt myself at different angles to the case to produce different levels of interpretation. My approach resonates with aspects outlined by Fishman (1999): flexibility, building 'strong relationships that are imbued with mutual trust and respect' and combining a range of factors including working collaboratively and operating at the discretion of the participating client (p151).

The period of this study followed the end of coaching in March 2010. Data collection to uncover different dimensions of organisational experience (Table 3.2) involved:

- in-depth face-to-face individual interviews in May 2010 conducted with male and female participants in the 20-50 age group from across teams and hierarchical boundaries,

- interviews with leaders in June 2010, and follow up interviews with leaders in February (T), March (D) and June 2011 (T),

- anecdote circles in October 2010, and

- an online company questionnaire in December 2010 to obtain a breadth of responses resulting in 30 responses (50% response rate).

Interview schedules are attached in Appendix II (for team members), Appendix III (for initial leaders' interviews) and Appendix IV (for follow up leaders' interviews). Interview questions, anecdote circle 'triggers' and leaders' questions are provided in Appendices V, VI and VII respectively. I then approached data analysis by producing aggregate themes to capture patterns and relationships that provided answers to my central and subsidiary research questions.

Date	Samples	Methods
May 2010	Cross-section of the wider team (10 interviewees).	Face-to-face in-depth interview.
June 2010 and February/March 2011	Participants Ted and Don	
June 2011	Participant Ted	
October 2010	2 groups from the wider team (1x 5 and 1x 6 participants).	Anecdote Circle.
December 2010	60 members of the wider team (30 responses).	Online company questionnaire.

Table 3.3: Data collection phases

3.3.1 In-depth interviews

Between May and June 2010 I conducted 12 confidential in-depth interviews each audio-taped with the individual permission of all voluntary participants. Interviews were conducted with 10 team members and with two leaders. An initial communication was sent from the Managing Director of Quantum to introduce the purpose of the research to all staff and to signal that I was soon to be inviting voluntary participants. A copy of the communication is attached in Appendix VIII.

Prior to this interview phase I shared relevant Participant Information Sheets with my counterpart at Quantum for information and discussion. Following this I was provided with a list of potential interviewees in the wider team representing different roles and locations. I assigned numbers to the names of potential participants from different locations and then chose participants by picking alternate numbers in categories that represented the different hierarchical and geographical levels of the organisation. Hence I chose 50% of the group provided to me, which ensured that my counterpart would not know which individuals had been selected. After this I sent out invitations for voluntary participation by individual email in line with my commitment to confidentiality and anonymity. In addition to an Interview Guide each invitation was accompanied with a detailed Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form (copies attached: Appendices IX and X). I placed importance on interviewing sufficient numbers to help ensure anonymity when reporting aggregate themes. I also emphasised that people could

contact me for further information and two participants requested follow up details. Age, gender and ethnic background were not accentuated but diversity was a feature of the eventual sample population.

Prior to the individual interviews I shared pilot questions with my counterpart to check language and comprehensibility. I also conducted a pilot interview by telephone (not audio-taped thereby avoiding unnecessary confidential data) with a volunteer suggested by my counterpart and who subsequently agreed to take part on the clear understanding that no obligation was necessary. The purpose of the pilot was to conduct an additional check on organisational language, to look at any potential ambiguities, to practice question structures likely to elicit experiential responses and to look at the logical sequencing of questions. Immediate feedback after the telephone interview suggested changes associated with language more suited to the organisation and making the thrust of some questions less abstract. The detailed nature of the Participation Information Sheets provided at each stage helped to answer questions people might have and gave the opportunity for follow up questions.

Separate to the team members' interviews, four leaders were invited to take part in the study, and of this group Ted and Don were willing to participate on a confidential basis. The aim of these interviews was to understand the leaders' perspective on any influences they might have discerned as a result of their coaching experience. In June 2010 one-to-one confidential semi-structured interviews were conducted and focused only on the experiences and observations of Ted and Don in relation to discernible influences following their coaching. As with the team members' interviews, Participant Information Sheets (Appendix XI), Interview Guides and Consent Forms (as above) were provided.

In addition to the specific communications and documents shared with participants I briefed the company on the purpose and nature of steps in the research process in June and then in November 2010. This was done by devising communications which were endorsed by the Managing Director and which were administered on my behalf by my counterpart to the whole organisation. Accordingly I was able to maintain transparency and trust between myself and Quantum. To avoid the assumption that any ripple effect that might exist would flow in a linear direction from the coaching outcomes, Ted and Don agreed to follow up interviews in February/March 2011 so that I could investigate their experience of any discernible influences in their organisation and uncover whether any influences that might exist had affected them in any way.

Alongside this series of in-depth interviews I introduced anecdote circles to uncover aspects of organisational experience from the perspective of small, intimate groups. The

approach to preparing and conducting anecdote circles is presented in the following section.

3.3.2 Anecdote circles

The focus of the anecdote circle groups was on collecting experiential anecdotes. I had originally planned two data streams: to follow a series of one-to-one interviews with an online company questionnaire to bring depth and then breadth to the study. However preliminary analysis of interview data produced some complex, occasionally emotional, and unexpected themes suggesting that further investigation in a group setting might add important rich data.

As stories and anecdotes tap into underlying emotions, I looked for a way of eliciting stories from volunteer participants that was practical and meaningful. I considered different approaches: firstly using the company's internal communication process to make a direct request for stories on an anonymous and confidential basis; secondly to arrange for people to voluntarily contribute stories by setting up post boxes in offices and thirdly to ask for stories at the end of the questionnaire. However further investigation into techniques for capturing stories suggested that a facilitated process would enhance the quality of such data. Drawing from Callahan *et al* (2006) and Carter (2009), I concluded that anecdote circles offered a way of understanding the subtle and unpredictable nature of organisational life in a way that complemented interview and questionnaire data.

Interestingly Callahan *et al* (2006) emphasise that anecdote circles are an intervention that creates change. However my emphasis was on reflecting 'the messiness' and revealing 'insights one could never predict from the outset' associated with organisational experience (Callahan *et al*, 2006, p5). In his ethnographic study Carter appears in tune with the systemic perspective at the heart of this study being interested in 'serendipitous outcomes that interventions have created' (p86).

The limitations of this method are firstly that it is difficult to generalise from the inevitably unique conversation of the group; secondly I may achieve little data should my facilitation and/or the dynamic of the participating group be flawed for any reason; thirdly it is difficult to reach saturation given that more anecdote circles will potentially yield even more unique and insightful data if the circle works well (Carter, 2009, p95). However I was not hoping to achieve saturation and was mostly interested in adding a dimension to the data that complemented the depth and breadth obtained from the interviews and questionnaire. Unlike the focus group method, which is associated with collecting of opinions, anecdote circles are aimed at connecting with participants' emotions in order to generate stories. For this reason the challenge associated with

conducting anecdote circles was to consistently encourage participants towards sharing examples rather than views.

In preparation for the two anecdote circles and to ensure that I focused on process alone, I conducted a pilot circle with volunteers to collect stories on a theme of interest to Quantum team members but outside the scope of this study. The value of the pilot came from experiencing the challenge of standing back to allow the flow of conversation that produced shared experiences. Following the pilot I then selected groups of people who 'got on with one another' as this was crucial to creating the necessary relaxed atmosphere. In order to do this my counterpart provided me with six groups of close colleagues from around the company. To choose at random I numbered the groups, placed the numbers on pieces of paper and chose two groups of six people at random. Fortuitously these groups were very different in character, which subsequently added to the richness of the data.

After the interview phase of data collection it appeared that I had become known and trusted in the organisation and people seemed keen to join in the anecdote circles. I sent out invitations and suggested dates with Participant Information Sheets and Consent Forms (Appendices XII and XIII) to the twelve prospective participants. One person needed to decline resulting in participation by over 10% of the company, a proportion in line with recommendations in Callahan *et al* (2006). Sessions were held at lunchtime during the working day, and to create as relaxed an atmosphere as possible I provided an array of light snacks. All participants completed consent forms and, prior to each session, agreed to being audio-taped.

As the sessions were groups of people who were already bonded I felt a sense of being allowed to 'pierce their veil' as participants shared stories ranging from tragic to highly amusing. It was impossible for sessions to stick to telling anecdotes the whole time simply because it is not the way people chat when relaxed. I noticed that people wanted to share opinions in my presence perhaps as a way of 'letting off steam' in a safe and confidential environment. However drawing from the learning in the pilot session I encouraged people to share experiences using adjective laden questions that tapped into their feelings. Themes drawn from interview data, and theoretical insights and questions from my own experience informed the content of the anecdote circle questions.

During these sessions I was struck by how fond people were of one another, and how they looked after others' emotions. The sessions felt just like a supper party despite being held in the middle of a working day with me acting as party hostess. My experience of facilitating these events was that participants seemed to enjoy them and I suspect they also gained valuable insights into their own working life from hearing

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colleagues' tales. A particular benefit of this method was that it offered a cost effective and time effective way of reaching more deeply into the organisational experience.

3.3.3 Online company questionnaire

Conducting an online company questionnaire was the most structured and distant of the three research methods. I framed my questions in line with my central research question, drawing themes from analysis of the interview and anecdote circle data, from key themes in the literature, from my own organisational experience and also from hunches I had about questions that needed asking. After clustering these themes I crafted questions that would work in the more controlled questionnaire environment and carefully phrased questions to suit the business environment. The aim of the questionnaire was to provide respondent validation by either corroborating or contrasting with the verbal data to enhance the credibility of the findings (Appendix XIV).

By the time of designing the questionnaire I had become familiar with many organisational team members and consequently had an array of characters in my mind when formulating the questions. However I also knew that I was trying to reach those who had so far declined to be involved and those with little time to spare. I recognised that contradictory individual organisational experiences would exist and that these multiple voices needed to be represented in the research. For this reason I saw the questionnaire both as a feedback loop in relation to the interview and anecdote circle phases and as an opportunity for as many people as possible to express themselves in narratives following specific questions. The online questionnaire had similarities with a structured interview but in this case was more practical in allowing me to potentially reach the whole organisation.

To strengthen the validity of the study I designed questions that probed further into themes generated in the earlier phases of data collection. I chose Survey Monkey as the vehicle for administering the questionnaire having successfully tested this method in 2009 as part of the Professional Doctorate programme activity. Before launching the questionnaire I obtained feedback on my questions from my Director of Studies, my second supervisor and then piloted the online version of the questionnaire with two employees at the organisation to check for content, logical sequence of questions, and usability. To avoid any inconvenience for Quantum staff I checked that the link to the online questionnaire worked with my Director of Studies before sending this via email with an attached Participant Information Sheet (Appendix XV) to all those members of the wider team at Quantum with over 12 months employment with the company. Participation was entirely voluntary and the design of the online questionnaire ensured the automatic anonymity of responses.

The online questionnaire was 'live' initially for the duration of one week to encourage a quick turnaround of responses and subsequently extended by a further week to allow for those who had taken holidays in the previous period. To aid achievement of a good response rate the questionnaire was launched between two exceptionally busy peaks in the accountancy calendar. However being a successful, growing accountancy firm it was impossible to choose a quiet period. I was also aware that team members had recently been asked to complete a separate annual survey with an external organisation. In addition the study's questionnaire required more than box ticking as narrative responses were sought after some questions. Despite these challenges 30 completed responses were received constituting a 50% response rate.

3.4 Data analysis procedures

The combination of three data collection methods has had a number of purposes: offering different opportunities to participate; building a multi faceted picture of the existence and nature of a ripple effect; and, with the inclusion of a questionnaire, helping to corroborate findings from earlier phases of data collection. In this section I provide an overview to outline sequential and cyclical aspects of the data analysis process followed by details of the stages in the process.

3.4.1 Overview of the procedures

I chose thematic network analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001), a staged analytic process involving increasing levels of abstraction, to distill the team members' interview data and generate the 'global themes' that represent the essential data. One advantage of this analytic approach is in the production of networks of themes that then underpin discussion of the central global theme for the network. In this study three networks were generated from which competing influences were discerned in the data to be discussed in detail in Chapters Five, Six and Seven.

Separately salient themes were identified in the data from the leaders' interviews through an iterative process of listening to the audiotapes, reading and rereading the transcripts and spotting the prevalence of themes and also those that contrasted with the wider teams' data. Finally with regard to the online questionnaire responses it was important to present these data visually to facilitate the process of comparing and contrasting with the data from the interviews and anecdote circles. A feature of this study is that it is challenging to combine the results of these different methods of data collection.

A detailed explanation of the stages in the analysis process now follows.

3.4.2 Stages in the analysis process

Themes identified from all three methods have been integrated in keeping with the commitment to maintain anonymity of participants. It is recognised that some overlap exists as the unit of data collection has been individuals who may participate in more than one data collection. However this overlap is sufficiently small to allow a rich understanding of the topic in a single organisational context. The process of abstraction to the essence of the data (global themes) resonates with the thrust of the study, which is to understand what lies at the heart of a particular phenomenon.

Interviews with the wider team and with the leaders were transcribed in confidence by a third party with the agreement of Quantum. I then familiarised myself with the wider team's data by checking for accuracy against the audiotapes and continued through an iterative process of reading, listening to audiotapes to spot salient and recurrent issues and then generating codes in relation to perceived influences discerned by team members. In order to remain open-minded this was done with no predetermined coding system. Extracts with quotations from the transcripts were grouped to generate codes and preliminary basic themes.

The next stage involved personally transcribing the verbal data from the two anecdote circles that enabled me also to notice differences in the dynamics of each group. Following the same process already used to analyse the interview data, I generated codes and subsequently preliminary basic themes to add to those generated from the interview data. These aggregated preliminary themes, combined with insights from the literature, and also insights based on my personal experience of organisations, then shaped the creation of relevant questions for the company questionnaire. Hence the first stage of thematic analysis resulted in a collection of preliminary basic themes and enabled the questionnaire to be designed and administered. I then returned to the thematic analysis process to continue the journey towards the essential 'global' themes in the interview and anecdote circle data.

With the questionnaire in train the next step in the thematic network analysis was to distill the preliminary basic themes to identify basic themes and organising themes in the interview and anecdote circle data. This involved listening again to audiotapes of both sets of verbal data, re-reading the transcripts, and generating and arranging codes and quotations to produce the second stage basic themes. Once this process was completed I then distilled these basic themes further to create organising themes that represented 'larger shared issues' (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p392). To continue towards identifying global themes, the process involved seeing patterns representing the 'bigger picture' and devising prompts in the form of questions to stimulate my thinking and encourage the shift towards the final global themes: the core 'messages' in the data. I

will provide further details of this process to accompany the presentation of the overall thematic network analysis in my introduction to Chapter Five, the first of three findings chapters.

With regard to the questionnaire, a wealth of data, including narrative detail, needed to be presented visually to spot the prevalence of themes in the overall data and also to discern inconsistencies in comparison with the verbal data. For the visual presentation of the data I gave specific instructions on the required diagrams and charts to a third party who was proficient in Survey Monkey data presentation processes. I agreed a specific confidentiality contract prior to allowing access to the online data via password.

3.4.3 Data integration

The process of data integration had several aspects presented as sequential and cyclical activities in Figure 3.3. The sequence of data collection phases enabled me to familiarise myself with the data over time. The thematic network analysis of the verbal data was also based on a sequence of activities aimed at distilling the data to essential themes (Attride-Stirling, 2001). However in practice the thematic network analysis became a cyclical process involving 'interpretative' cycles to move from familiarisation with the data towards defining essential themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p87). The overall procedures for data analysis involved iterative 'practical' cycles to uncover as much meaning as possible in the interview and anecdote circle data and from the questionnaire data.

DATA COLLECTION PHASES

Wider team's interviews / initial leaders' interviews > Anecdote circles > Questionnaire > Follow up leaders' interviews

ANALYTICAL STAGES

Codes > Basic themes > Organising themes > Global themes

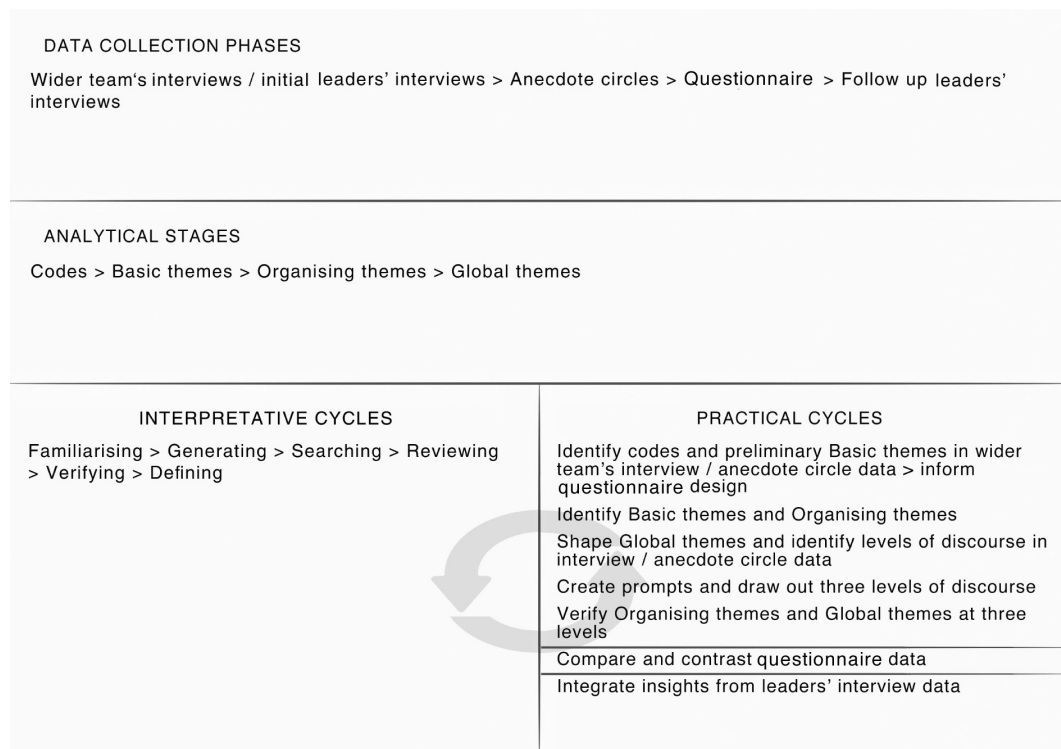| INTERPRETATIVE CYCLES	PRACTICAL CYCLES
Familiarising > Generating > Searching > Reviewing > Verifying > Defining	Identify codes and preliminary Basic themes in wider team's interview / anecdote circle data > inform questionnaire design
	Identify Basic themes and Organising themes
	Shape Global themes and identify levels of discourse in interview / anecdote circle data
	Create prompts and draw out three levels of discourse
	Verify Organising themes and Global themes at three levels
	Compare and contrast questionnaire data
	Integrate insights from leaders' interview data

Figure 3.3: Aspects of the analytic process

In this way thematic network analysis provided the route to integrating team members' verbal data at increasing levels of abstraction to arrive at essential themes. This resulted in three thematic networks that provided the foundation for the discussion of three sets of findings presented in Chapters Five, Six and Seven. Salient themes identified in the leaders' interview data were integrated into each set of findings shown by juxtaposing leaders' extracts and team members' extracts to draw out the dynamic nature of the data. Company questionnaire data provided a final layer in the data integration process by introducing wider participant feedback.

3.5 The effect of the researcher's presence in the research setting and analysis of the data

To gain access to Quantum required their trust in my ability to work with them and to achieve something of value for both parties. As the study unfolded a sense of mutual trust and commitment to the research endeavour developed as evidenced by the consistently helpful approach of my counterpart and others when organising meetings, arranging pilot activities and preparing the online questionnaire. Accordingly I felt a sense of being embraced by the organisation. During my time at Quantum I worked to maintain the trust of participants through rigorous observation of ethical procedures and professional conduct based on my experience of working in a business environment. This involved timely and clear communication, punctuality, and giving priority to the business agenda of the company.

I was aware that being previously unknown to the company did not enable me to extinguish personal biases as noted by Willig (2008): 'All qualitative methodologies recognise that the researcher is implicated.' (p.13).

However the following approaches helped to minimise unwanted influences from my personal background:

1)   My commitment to declaring my own interests and beliefs in the study and discussing this during supervision.

2)   Choosing not to work at a place where I was previously known in any way, either as an employee, customer or coach. As a complete outsider I was able to interpret participants' accounts of their experiences whilst avoiding bringing overly intrusive preconceptions into the study.

3)   Openness to the fact that the investigation may uncover no ripple effect at all or reveal something other than a ripple effect.

4)   Using three different methods of data collection to triangulate and therefore help to confirm/refute the emerging patterns in the interpretation of data.

As my unit of data collection is at the individual level, a particular challenge has been to avoid making inferences about the organisation from individual accounts. However I have been careful to note diverse *individual* organisational perspectives when reporting aggregate themes in order to understand the complex and dynamic nature of the organisational experience.

3.6 Validity and ethical considerations

In this section I provide the details of my approach to issues pertaining to validity and ethics.

3.6.1 Validity

A definition of validity is:

> *the extent to which our research describes, measures or explains what it aims to describe, measure or explain.* (Willig, 2008, p16).

However as Robson (2002) points out, 'validity' is a term 'avoided by many proponents of flexible, qualitative design' (p170). An alternative approach is to view research from the perspective of 'trustworthiness' and to use terminology that is more in tune with qualitative research. From the perspective of trustworthiness, validity is redefined as 'credibility' and is accompanied by 'transferability, dependability and confirmability', parallel terms for 'external validity', 'reliability' and 'objectivity' (Guba and Lincoln, 1988, cited in Fetterman, 1988, p111). Using terms associated with trustworthiness I now discuss the associated issues for this study.

Credibility is associated with the extent to which the findings of the study are believable. To enhance credibility the company questionnaire provided a source of 'respondent validation' (Denscombe, 2007, p297) from a wide group of participants. Additionally the appropriate use of anonymised verbatim quotations has meant that participants' accounts are directly represented in the study. The aim has therefore been to present believable findings through the voice of the participants themselves.

Additionally it has been important to show the dynamic nature of the findings in a believable manner. Hence by juxtaposing all participants' accounts in the findings chapters I have sought to present the dynamics of the organisational experience in a way that enhances credibility. Significant amounts of time spent in the case study organisation and the use of multi-methods have also supported the aim to generate credible findings. In addition the aim has been to generate findings with an eye to

alternative explanations for results. I have also intended to help to question too 'convenient' interpretations from the data analysis by providing appropriate reflexive accounts.

Transferability is associated with the extent to which findings may be transferred to other contexts and requires that sufficient details be provided to enable this aspect to be judged (Denscombe, 2007, p299). Accordingly I have presented rich contextual detail (Chapter Four) so that others may discern how far they might generalise from my study (Fishman, 1999, p185) and have also been mindful that a single organisational case can be helpful to others by offering the 'force of example' (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p228). Whilst the study is set in a SME, it is also felt that findings will resonate with organisations of different sizes and configurations at a similar stage in business growth and organisational change. In this context I have sought to present the human dimension of an organisational experience, which may have a universal feel.

Dependability is related to the extent to which the study is repeatable and is enhanced by an unambiguous account of the researcher's journey to conclusions (Denscombe, 2007, p298). I have therefore adopted an approach aimed at increasing dependability whilst acknowledging that the unique nature of individual cases means that exact repeatability is not possible. However to help to achieve dependability I have introduced appropriate reflexivity in the reporting of this study to provide insight into my lines of enquiry.

I have also presented the analytic process as transparently as possible by setting out the associated sequential and parallel steps (Figure 3.3) so that others might:

> *...explore the process, judge the decisions that were made, and understand what salient factors in the context led the evaluator to the decisions and interpretations made.* (Guba and Lincoln, 1989, p242 cited by Fishman, 1999, p186).

In addition the questionnaire is designed to generate a 'convergence of shared constructs' (Fishman, 1999, p187) and so provide the reader with an important additional interpretative reference point in a study dealing with dynamic themes that by their very nature are something of a moving feast.

Confirmability relates to the extent to which the researcher has minimised the influence of the researcher (Denscombe, 2007, p300) and has ensured that:

> *Data, interpretations, and outcomes in research are rooted in contexts and persons of the case apart from the researcher.* (Fishman, 1999, p188).

Given the interpretative nature of the research process I have aimed at achieving confirmability by providing accounts of organisational experiences as dispassionately as possible. I have sought to maintain an open mind in relation to the investigation of a ripple effect and have also tried to ensure that I do not neglect data that does not fit with

my analysis (Denscombe, 2007, p302). Where appropriate I have also made reference to my background and previous experience to contextualise interpretations I have drawn from the data.

3.6.2 Issues pertaining to ethics

My approach has been to choose the individual as the unit of data collection and the single organisation as the unit of analysis and therefore the focus of the study. This approach, focused on understanding an holistic organisational experience, has helped with enabling participants to remain anonymous. Ethical procedures have included the following steps:

- Only those quotations (non attributable) where respondents refer to themselves were considered for the final report and only with their written consent.

- Electronic files were protected by the use of passwords. In accordance with Oxford Brookes University's policy on Academic Integrity, the data generated will be kept securely in electronic form for a period of five years after the completion of the research project.

- Following their collection, all data was de-identified to help to achieve anonymity, i.e. codes were used to identify research participants in place of their names.

- All interviews were conducted on a confidential basis.

- Findings were reported in aggregate thematic form.

Throughout the research process I have drawn on my professional experience of maintaining confidentiality in both a business and coaching context.

3.7 Limitations of the research design

A limitation to this multi-perspective study is that the interpretations of findings are produced by one researcher rather than a team of researchers (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p21). However the aim is to reduce the effect of this limitation by addressing the issues of confirmability.

The inability to generalise from a single case study is often seen as a limitation of the case study method. Addressing issues of transferability is aimed at helping to offset this concern. It is also argued that case studies can help to identify unique instances that falsify previous propositions (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p228) in contrast to the aims of generalisation.

Thirdly the apparently linear approach presented by thematic network analysis could be viewed as a limitation in relation to identifying the nature of a dynamic phenomenon.

However in practice the approach has offered a rigorous route to identifying essential themes whilst at the same time uncovering patterns in the data that produce insights.

3.8 Summary and next steps

A single case study design using multi-methods has provided a platform for understanding a ripple effect comprising one-to-one interviews for depth, anecdote circles for rich data in a group setting and an online company questionnaire for breadth of data collection and to provide the opportunity for participant feedback. By using thematic analysis to identify essential themes in the team members' data, comparing and contrasting questionnaire data and drawing insights from the leaders' interviews, this study has produced findings at three levels that draw attention to competing influences that will be presented in the following chapters:

- Chapter Five: 'Awakening personal needs'

- Chapter Six: 'Shifting dependencies'

- Chapter Seven: 'Challenging prevailing culture'

Chapter Eight will then present the concluding discussion.

Prior to the presentation of findings the contextual details of the case study are now presented in Chapter Four.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONTEXTUAL ASPECTS

This chapter presents the background to 'real life' events at Quantum following the coaching of their leaders in order to situate the investigation of a 'ripple' effect' prior to presenting the detailed findings of this study in Chapters Five, Six and Seven. I begin by setting the coaching initiative in the wider professional context and explaining how the coaching of leaders has guided and inspired the whole research. An outline of the key events then follows, and important aspects of working life at Quantum are presented. I conclude by explaining how the coaching of leaders has been the starting point for the whole research and the implications for the research topics and methodological choices.

4.1 Professional context

A report by the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (Accountancy: The Future Outlook - April 2009) outlined the challenges for the accountancy profession presented by an economic downturn and indicated the demise of traditional ways of working in the accountancy profession:

> *Gone are the days of the technical accountant sitting permanently behind a desk in an isolated office, remote from the business, simply processing the data and compiling accounts. (*p14).

More optimistically the report also signalled:

> *potentially exciting and enabling times for qualified accountants who have the opportunity to step up and take the lead...* (p14).

With an approach that resonated with the call for leadership in the above-mentioned 2009 report, leaders at Quantum were interested in reinvigorating the business. There was a sense that the business required new energy:

> Don: *…actually things had become a bit stale and we felt that things were just slowing too much or there wasn't enough variety.*

In this context leaders at 'Quantum' took part in a coaching initiative between August 2009 and March 2010. The aim of the coaching programme was to support leaders in developing and growing the business. This initiative is the starting point for this study which is interested in drawing out the human dimension of organisational life following the coaching of leaders. The central metaphorical 'splash' represented by the leadership coaching initiative is seen as only one of many that might trigger naturally occurring patterns of changes and related influences beyond coaching, that is, non-linear interrelated aspects, for example changes in the economy, the accountancy profession and in the home life of individuals.

However this study focuses on influences associated with leadership coaching outcomes to provide a clear starting point for an exploration of the nature of a ripple effect. These outcomes are: re-energised leaders, stretching business growth targets, new processes and a call for wider participation. Noticeably these outcomes combine business and human dimensions, a complex and sometimes paradoxical blend that triggered a variety of responses shared in interviews and which in turn inspired my decisions about methods. My aim was to explore mainly a human dimension: how people experienced the mix of these outcomes of coaching.

Quantum is an organisation that is able to attract talented staff, due to a supportive small company 'family' ethos. A distinctive feature of Quantum is the collective pride in the company's reputation as a 'good place to work' coupled with a strong reputation for client service. The ethos was defined by one of the leaders in the following way:

> Ted: *I suppose if you were saying 'what's our ethos?' I would say engage well with clients and engage well with each other probably.*

Arriving at Quantum's Head Office for the first time I was struck by the contemporary design of the offices and by the distinctive photographs of individual staff members that decorated the walls, images that spoke of work/life balance by representing individuals' diverse hobbies, musical interests and sporting activities. This gave the impression of a forward thinking organisation.

At the time of the study the organisation had experienced several changes associated with the integration of new offices over the previous 5-10 years and it was now felt that the business required new energy in an increasingly competitive environment. The departure of a senior partner was also a feature of impending change at Quantum. During that period at Quantum the acquisition of a number of small accountancy practices had led to a series of internal changes as several new office teams were integrated with the larger central Head Office team. As shown in the anonymised organogram (Appendix I), Quantum's Head Office team (over 40 people) was significantly larger than the three outer teams (8-10 people). Interestingly a myth appeared to have developed about the seriousness of Head Office with one team member describing it as 'scary'. However this apparent difference between Head Office and the smaller offices was not borne out by my own experience of the generally cheerful Head Office staff and the equally cheerful outer office staff.

The coaching programme involved initial training and the opportunity to work with a professional business coach. This initiative, coupled with their own progressive mindset, helped Ted and Don to participate in setting a new course for their company. Their new coach encouraged them to stand back from their business, think strategically and help develop a challenging plan to grow the business. Ted and Don were already energised

prior to coaching and were now enthused by the coach's solution focused approach which accentuated thinking without limits.

> Don: *Why should there be a boundary on what we can achieve? And again, I think that a deliberate or a definite outcome from coaching, is actually yeah, go for it.*

4.2 Key events

During the coaching period Ted and Don were able to develop their ideas as leaders of change, helping to spark a course of action that appeared to mirror aspects of 'discontinuous change' (Nadler and Tushman, 1999, p52). These aspects were a radical departure from the past and accelerated pace. A new business direction was announced to the whole company at an Annual Team Away Day in October 2009, shortly after the beginning of coaching. The objective was to deliver an important message: a challenging 80% growth ambition over the next five years and the need for all to be involved as 'one team'. This communication represented a shift in aspiration, and invited innovative thinking and the involvement of everyone. A wide spectrum of ideas was generated at the meeting focused on the needs of diverse stakeholders and demonstrating innovative and expansive thinking. These ideas, shared with me in a confidential document, seemed to indicate the creative potential of the organisational team.

Hence coaching had provided a stimulus 'at the top' of Quantum that encouraged the move towards more stretching financial targets and, indirectly, a creative flurry of ideas generated by the whole organisation. These immediate responses to coaching seemed to indicate a difference between a fast paced entrepreneurial SME culture and the time for coaching inspired change to percolate in larger organisations. The distinct focus on growth at Quantum heralded a change in ways of working as described by one team member in the following extract.

> Paul: *I think it's just got everyone pulling together to make sure we try and achieve some form of growth. And if there's any decision or anything that needs consideration, growth will be one of the indicators that gets considered.*

Following the radical announcement about growth ambitions and the call for contributions, team members received a communication in December 2009 reminding them of the ideas generated. The challenge was now about how to translate several good ideas into action and the need for additional business development expertise was recognised. Therefore when coaching ended in March 2010, the process of recruiting began in order to bring expertise and focus to the processes for business growth. A business development manager joined Quantum in May 2010 allowing Ted and Don and

their colleagues to focus their attention on strategy and client building. With the help of the new manager some of the Team Day initiatives began to take shape.

Alongside this new strategic agenda, there was a desire to shape the company according to values based on enabling people to flourish in an emotionally secure environment. This intent focused on the human dimension of working life resonates with the responsibility of leaders to create learning organisations where:

> *people continually expand their capabilities to understand complexity, clarify vision, and improve shared mental models….* (Senge, 1990, p340).

The following extracts illustrate firstly the essential humanity and personal drive behind the vision and secondly the challenge associated with 'letting go'.

> Ted: *…I would like to create a place that if I were starting my working life and I looked in on this organisation, that I would actually say 'now that's the kind of place I want to work in', and for me it's about creating an environment where people can flourish.*
>
> Don: *Post-coaching I'm consciously trying to step back to let others do it or encourage them, but I have to really, really try hard to sit on my hands, not to jump in.*

In June 2010 Quantum launched the first company-wide bonus scheme. Then in September 2010 virtually the entire company spent a long weekend in Brussels to celebrate achievements, a reward and 'thank you' to staff for their efforts over the previous year. Whilst the company trip was not the first time the whole team had been away together, this particular event came at a challenging time for businesses in general due to an uncertain economic climate. Accordingly some team members were sensitive about explaining the trip to clients suggesting a level of empathy coupled with a little discomfort. However my interviews with team members also generated several humorous tales of their time in Brussels, which suggested some of the positive aspects of spending time together as a team and a sense of camaraderie amongst people at Quantum.

In October 2010 the leadership team at Quantum took time to give further shape to the direction of the company at a 'Director's retreat'. Eight projects were scoped with two key projects taking priority in the shorter term: Head Office restructuring and a scheme to develop future directors and senior managers.

In February 2011 an opportunity to create wider participation in the business involved delegating a project to a selected team of managers. However remaining at a distance was a challenge for leaders who were used to making decisions:

> Ted: *We gave a brief but we haven't been involved in that kind of evolution of it and for us that's quite uncomfortable because normally or historically we've been the ones that institute change.*

From the chosen project team's perspective, their aim to deliver the best possible outcome meant that they wanted to take the time to shape their ideas. However the deliberations of the team created an initial tension as leaders, expecting greater pace, waited for outcomes. However this tension was also in the context of a desire to create a questioning, collaborative environment:

> Ted: *...we want to create an environment where people question, where people are inquisitive and curious, where people can harness their own ideas without fear of getting it wrong, or fear of automatically getting into trouble if they get it wrong.*

These frustrations seemed natural in a company seeking a change of pace and significant business growth alongside a participative culture. Following these initial tensions, productive dialogue between leaders and the project team led to an agreed way forward. As occurs in families, one participant remarked some time later that 'that was history' and that everything had moved on. A profound example of the small company 'family' feel at Quantum was associated with the deep emotion expressed in interviews in relation to the recent tragic loss of two colleagues. One team member spoke about 'the whole team, the way that everybody had to pull together', which put any work frustrations into perspective.

In parallel to creating a secure and flourishing environment for others, Ted and Don and leaders at Quantum also needed space to reflect and to spend time outside the organisation to engage, as role models, in energetic client building activity to fuel growth. Whilst this activity supported achieving the tangible performance goals encouraged by their coaching, the seriousness of intent and focus on processes to achieve growth had the potential to overshadow the desired 'small company feel'. Table 4.1 presents key events following coaching at Quantum to provide a context to the findings for this study, and also shows the timing of data collection activities.

Timing	Event
August 2009	Coaching programme begins.
October 2009	Annual Team Day: whole company event. Target for 80% financial growth over 5 years communicated. Participation invited from all in ideas for growth.
December 2009	Company newsletter reminding organisational team of ideas.
March 2010	Coaching initiative ends.

Timing	Event
	Process begins to recruit Business Improvement Manager.
May 2010	Business Improvement Manager joins company. Internal projects launched to improve processes *Data collection for this research begins*. *Face-to-face in-depth interviews with a cross-section of the wider team (10 interviewees).*
June 2010	First company-wide bonus scheme launched. *Face-to-face in-depth interview with 2 of the leaders who participated in the coaching initiative*
September 2010	Company trip to Brussels.
October 2010	Directors' retreat generating eight key projects. Two key projects are 'new team structure' and 'future directors/senior managers scheme. *Two anecdote circles with groups from the wider team (1x 5 and 1x 6 participants).*
December 2010	*Online company questionnaire distributed to 60 members of the wider team resulting in 30 responses.*
February 2011	Update on new team structure *Follow up leader's interview (Ted)*
March 2011	*Follow up leader's interview (Don)*
June 2011	*Follow up leader's interview (Ted)*

Table 4.1: Key events and data collection activities

As this sequence of events emphasises linearity a different way of summarising events draws out the natural flow of change following the initial restlessness and 'ripples of disturbance' from the leadership coaching outcomes. From this alternative perspective I offer the following interpretation of events:

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Restlessness for change → desire to shape a 'new business' → impetus of coaching → ripples of 'disturbance' of a small company 'family' environment → introduction of 'corporate influences' → desire for pace *and* widening participation *and* emotionally secure environment → embracing wider 'leadership' opportunity → mutual frustrations → learning from experience

It could be argued that restlessness for change and shaping a new business are influenced by economic and competitive influences. However in this interpretation of events I also saw that leadership coaching outcomes catalysed a pattern of natural influences that resonated with my research topics: the nature of the interfaces between individuals, hierarchical and mutual aspects of leadership and the underlying cultural and systemic complexity of an organisational experience.

4.3 Aspects of working life

As the above outline of events indicates coaching had created some apparent 'ripples' on the relatively calm surface 'waters' at Quantum. The nature of these ripples can also be placed in context by looking at the views of team members on the most important aspects of working life at Quantum (Figure 4.2).

Questionnaire Q1: Which aspects of working life are in your view the most important in relation to Quantum? Please tick the three most important to you from the following list. Please include some other aspect if you would like to.
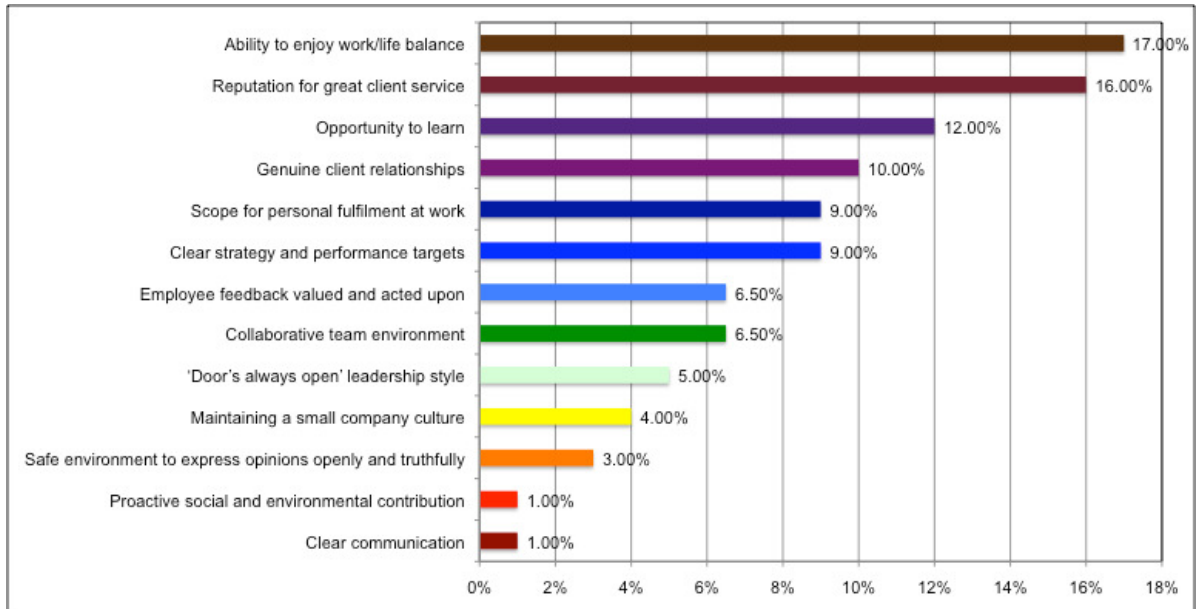

Figure 4.2 Quantum: Important aspects of working life

In Figure 4.2 it can be seen that work/life balance, client service with genuine working relationships and the opportunity to learn were in the top three responses for several team members. These responses suggest that the importance of a balanced life and self-development was accompanied by a strong professional commitment to the client. An interesting cluster of lower scores related to valued employee feedback, collaborative and secure team environment, and accessible leadership style. These lower scores suggested that cultural aspects that could be associated with participative working and collective leadership were comparatively less 'important'. It is noted that 'clear communication' was not an aspect in the list provided to respondents and was specified in the responses under 'some other aspect'. However it was perhaps the cultural nature and therefore the complexity of these aspects that led to less complex aspects scoring more highly in the questionnaire.

In response to the follow up question (Q2) concerning any changes discerned in relation to important aspects, several respondents recorded 'no change'. Where change was discerned by some participants, their comments related to specific business aspects: 'clearer targets and requirements', 'more emphasis on strategy' and 'more strategy emails' which were welcomed as examples of 'good communication'. Other feedback relating to the human dimension included: 'work/life balance (...) very much an imbalance', 'targets becoming harder to achieve' and 'less likely that personal ideas are

being taken into consideration'. In combination this contextual questionnaire data appears to show a balanced and professional team that was beginning to feel different ripples of change following the coaching programme. Change following the coaching initiative also involved challenges for the leadership team who were creating energy in the organisation, seeking greater involvement, and maintaining the dual role of mentoring internally whilst taking time to forge new relationships externally. By offering insight into events and specific aspects of working life during a time of change for Quantum I have intended to provide a dynamic picture of an organisational 'family' by blending aspects of the human dimension with aspects associated with business purpose.

In summary it became clear during the research process that the energy triggered by the leadership coaching initiative could not be fully explored in individual interviews and a questionnaire. Topics that emerged at the interview stage spanned emotional responses, ambiguities relating to new ways of working and cultural concerns. To understand these relational perspectives it was necessary to bring groups together to share stories of their organisational experience. Accordingly I introduced anecdote circles (discussed in Chapter Three) to enrich understanding in a dynamic group setting. In addition leadership coaching outcomes catalysed responses that could be viewed as the multiple realities that created an organisational experience. By conceptualising responses in this way I was encouraged to find a way of drawing out dynamic features. This was achieved by juxtaposition of participants' extracts in the findings chapters (Five, Six and Seven). Finally I chose thematic network analysis to enable exploration of complex patterns of influence from different perspectives discerned in the data. Hence a starting point that blended the business and human dimension triggered a journey comprising unpredictable responses, embracing multiple realities and discerning layers of perspective within an organisational experience.

In this study I recognise that linking the manifested actions of leaders with organisational responses suggests causality which cannot be proven in this type of research. I also acknowledge that I cannot easily isolate a particular influence that I am interested in from any other. However as my central metaphorical focus emphasises naturally occurring influences from a clear starting point, I am concerned to bring out the human dimension and to see complexity through a systems lens. In accordance with a systemic perspective I introduced anecdote circles to enrich data collection with stories and draw attention to dynamic characteristics of the organisational experience. Leadership coaching outcomes therefore instigated a variety of responses that represented an interplay of natural influences, a ripple effect, and the focus of this exploration from a

systems viewpoint. This chapter has provided a backcloth to the presentation of findings at three levels beginning with Chapter Five.

CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS: 'AWAKENING PERSONAL NEEDS'

This chapter begins by detailing the overall process of generating themes and essential findings from this study and continues with a discussion of the first of three sets of findings: 'awakening personal needs'.

Data analysis and integration from the multiple sources of data involved two distinct modes: remaining receptive to a bigger picture of patterns and influences that might suggest a ripple effect, and maintaining a record of the critical phases leading to the findings for the purposes of replicability and trustworthiness. This approach entailed identifying the components of the data whilst surfacing patterns and relationships that represented the data at an holistic level.

At the heart of the data analysis was the thematic network analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001) of team members' interview and anecdote circle data. Separately themes were identified in the leaders' data and juxtaposed with the wider team's data to draw out further dynamic features. Company questionnaire data generated wide ranging feedback for comparison and contrast with team members' data. These analytic phases arrived at the principal issues for discussion in relation to the central research question.

5.1 Generating essential findings

Thematic analysis was a rigorous process that generated three perspectives and accordingly three thematic networks. Each thematic network presents an exploration of complex patterns of influences from a different perspective discerned in the data. In this study I use the term 'influence' to evoke dynamic, interrelated aspects (rather than a linear association with power). I see 'competing influences' as dynamic aspects of the variety of responses to change: intricate shifts in organisational experience. These shifts appear to involve natural tensions that accompany mutual bonds in the organisation. Complex patterns in the data seemed to show competing influences and I saw these as characteristics of a discernible organisational ripple effect. By juxtaposing extracts from the leaders' interviews and from team members' accounts I was able to notice these reciprocal influences.

During the process of thematic network analysis the wider team members' data showed that participants spoke about influences at three levels: personal perspectives, in relation to leadership as a phenomenon and finally related to organisational perspectives. These combined perspectives were the result of returning to the team members' data several times and reviewing aspects that were 'semantic' ('identified within the explicit or surface meanings of the data') and 'latent' ('*underlying* ideas, assumptions, and conceptualisations') (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p84). Through these

iterative reviews I progressively closed in on the data and developed a set of increasingly tightly defined basic and organising themes. I then formulated specific 'prompts' derived from the levels of discourse I noticed in the organising themes. This approach enabled me to more tightly define the global themes (Appendix XVI Progression from Basic to Global Themes). Finally during the writing phase I identified the nuances and overlaps among the themes and arrived at a set of final global themes shown in Table 5.1, which summarises the analytic journey.

Levels of Participants' Discourse	Prompt from Organising Themes	Global Themes Defined	Final Global Theme
Personal	How I feel What I do What I notice	Awakening personal needs Affecting energy Highlighting ambiguities	Awakening personal needs
Leadership	How we relate to leaders What we expect from leaders How we are shifting leadership culture	Shifting dependency Highlighting needs from leaders Creating opportunities for leadership	Shifting dependency
Organisational	How we are now How we communicate How the organisation is changing	Challenging prevailing culture Changing nature of dialogue Reconfiguring relationships	Challenging prevailing culture

Table 5.1 From prompts to final global themes

Each final global theme became the centre of a thematic network that underpinned an exploration of a different aspect of a ripple effect (Figure 5.2).
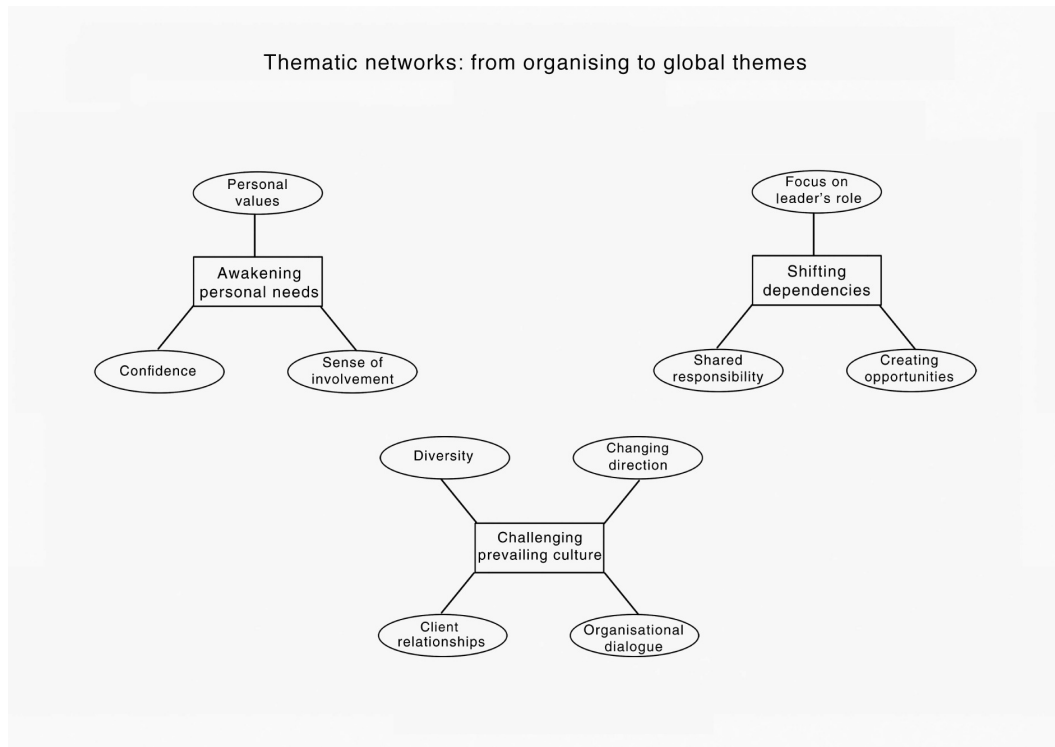

Thematic networks: from organising to global themes

Figure 5.2: Thematic networks: from organising to global themes

Corresponding insights from the leaders' interviews helped to create a rich picture of the interplay of influences. Company questionnaire data then provided the opportunity for wider participant feedback.

5.2 Introduction to Thematic network 1: 'Awakening personal needs'

The noticeably renewed energy of the leaders at Quantum, a vigorous agenda for growth and a call for greater participation among employees were discernible outcomes of leadership coaching at Quantum and provided the impetus for a potential ripple effect. In combination these aspects could be characterised as a natural 'disturbance' which could be characterised as 'ripples' across the existing patterns of working life at Quantum. As presented in Chapter Four this disturbance was most noticeably introduced when significant changes were announced immediately after coaching, exemplifying the 'can do', entrepreneurial style of leadership at Quantum. This immediacy was perhaps more typical of smaller entrepreneurial organisations than larger, bureaucratic organisations and for this study it enabled any ripple effect that might exist to be investigated from a recognisable starting point.

In this section the first of three sets of empirical findings is presented in relation to Thematic network 1 (Figure 5.3). This thematic network has the global theme 'awakening personal needs' at its heart and represents the differing personal needs that were shown to be 'awakened' in response to changes in organisational life at Quantum. Findings suggest the role of personal needs in the wider team during phases of significant change, particularly where individuals have not enjoyed the reflective space, support and challenge experienced in coach/leader relationships. By uncovering these personal responses to leadership coaching outcomes this chapter begins to indicate aspects of a wider reaching agenda for coaching in organisations.

Thematic network 1 is made up of three organising themes informed by relevant basic themes discerned in the data (Figure 5.3). This representation of the data indicates three aspects: individuals' personal values, their sense of involvement and aspects of their confidence. These in turn form the overarching global theme 'awakening personal needs'. In combination the competing influences associated with 'awakening personal needs' represent hidden personal needs among individuals experiencing changes resulting from leadership coaching outcomes and are now discussed in the following sections.
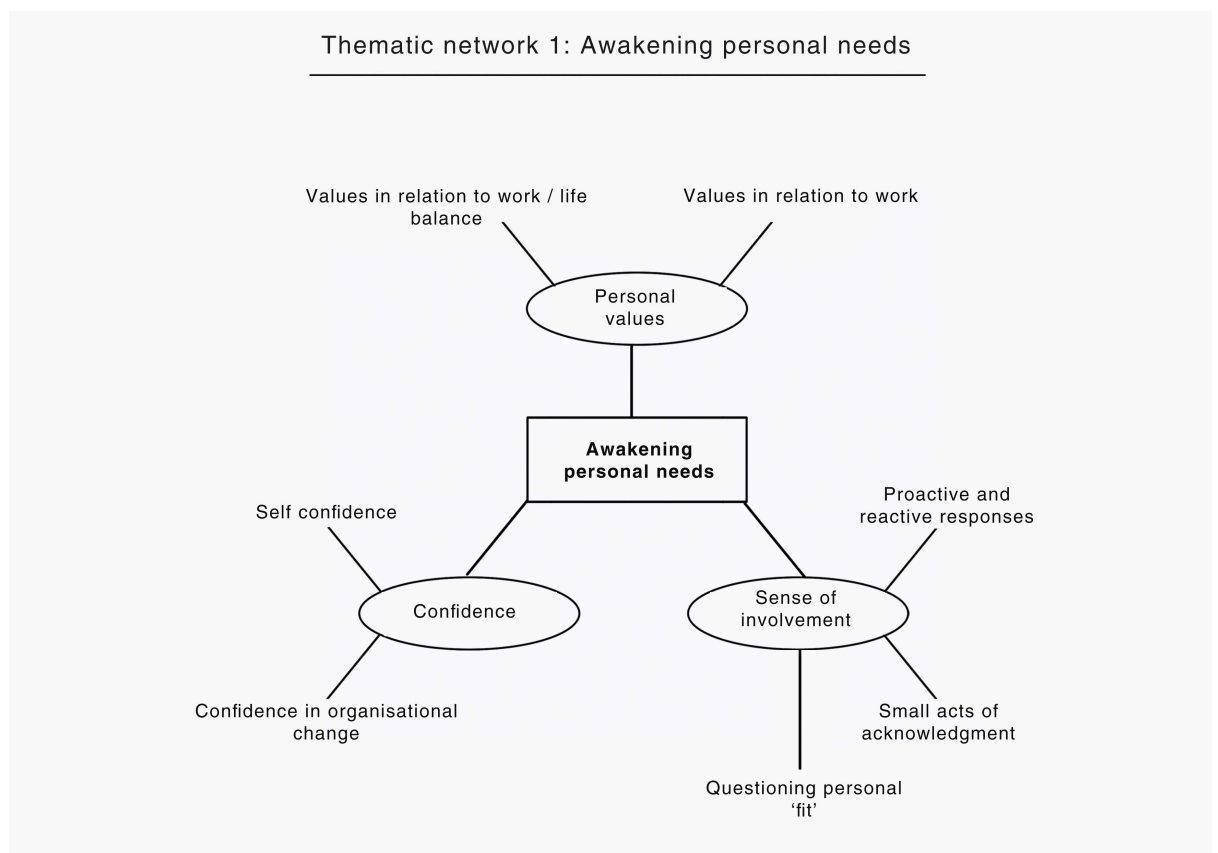

Figure 5.3 Thematic network 1: 'Awakening personal needs'

5.2.1 Findings: 'Personal values'

In response to the new energy in the business individuals reflected on the benefits of a sensible work/life balance whilst also acknowledging the personal benefits of a new challenge. These reflections seemed to be related to individuals' personal values. One team member referred to an 'inner battle' between home life and participating in the new business agenda. Other interviewees reflected on their need for challenge despite the beneficial effects of a comfortable work/life balance. For these team members the challenges presented by the five-year growth agenda were felt to be beneficial:

> Robert: *Work/life balance is very important (...) - I would almost say I've got very comfortable to be quite honest. I probably do need to focus and yeah you do need new challenges.*
>
> Geoff: *Now I feel that I've got more to answer for at the end of each financial year going forward, which is great because it gives me direction.*

In specific relation to work several team members conveyed a strong work ethic as indicated in the following extracts:

> Paul: *I put the highest expectation on myself, which is way above anything that (Quantum) put on me.*
>
> Catherine: *I want to come to work, feel I have got a contribution to make and go home thinking, yeah actually, that was a day worthwhile...*
>
> Robert: *...the competitiveness between the offices does seem to work. We have plenty of banter between us about 'pull your finger out' and so on and I think it generally seems to work.*

However there was also a concern about the pressure that Quantum's leadership team appeared to be under by pushing hard for change. This concern seemed to be in tune with a general concern for others at Quantum. However the new direction seemed to create positive energy for some leaders:

> Don: *There's so much change going on, the plates have just multiplied all over the place (...) and it literally feels like we've just taken a business out of a massive organisation and just sat it on its own so that everything is new and shiny and challenging.*

These extracts signify that the ripples of disturbance represented by coaching outcomes prompted individual reflections on work/life balance and the competing need for challenge. There was also a suggestion of a gap between some priorities in the wider team and the drive of the top team, despite a strong work ethic throughout Quantum.

The responses to the company questionnaire showed the importance to team members of the 'ability to enjoy work/life balance' which scored highest as the most important aspect of working life at Quantum just ahead of 'reputation for great client service' (Q1 Company Questionnaire: Appendix XIV). The above extracts indicated that change

generated beneficial influences by introducing greater challenge but that this was balanced with an underlying concern for driving hard at the expense of work/life balance.

The following extracts from questionnaire responses (Q12) indicated some anxieties running parallel to the value placed on work/life balance.

> *Feel under more and more pressure to meet unrealistic and unnecessary targets.*
>
> *Unease leads to a feeling of insecurity which has negative effects of feelings of wellbeing.*

These concerns were balanced with the following response to Q12:

> *My Wellbeing has not changed, as whether I am at (Quantum) or not the sun will still come up tomorrow.*

It therefore seemed that changes in the business arising from coaching triggered individuals' awareness of their workplace values and priorities outside work. In summary a ripple effect could be seen to involve competing influences associated with personal values that were:

<div align="center">

'work/life balance' ⬅➡ 'need for challenge'

</div>

5.2.2 Findings: 'Sense of involvement'

A more complex strand of a ripple effect appeared to be associated with team members' sense of involvement in the new direction at Quantum. These findings draw attention to perceived barriers to involvement in changes at work. At the heart of these findings were concerns associated with feeling separate and reflecting on personal fit; also the extent to which just small acts of acknowledgement provided significant encouragement. In combination these 'ripples' suggest a complicated story of the effect on some individuals' sense of involvement whilst experiencing change.

Prior to sharing individual responses it should be highlighted, as in Chapter Four, that the structure at Quantum had its own effect on individuals' sense of involvement as smaller office teams were like mini satellites around a larger Head Office team. Therefore a factor unrelated to the coaching that tended to influence 'a sense of involvement' was the feeling of some separateness in the outer teams illustrated from different perspectives in the following extracts:

> Joan: *... we're quite separate... somebody once described us as being the poor relation.*
>
> Sally: (Head Office) *is the hub of it all and I would say perhaps some of the other offices don't feel as involved and don't always get to know as much information.*

The questionnaire appeared to corroborate this sense showing 67% of respondents feeling a relatively slight connection with the decision-making centre (Figure 5.4).

Questionnaire Q4: What is your sense of connection with the decision making centre at Quantum?
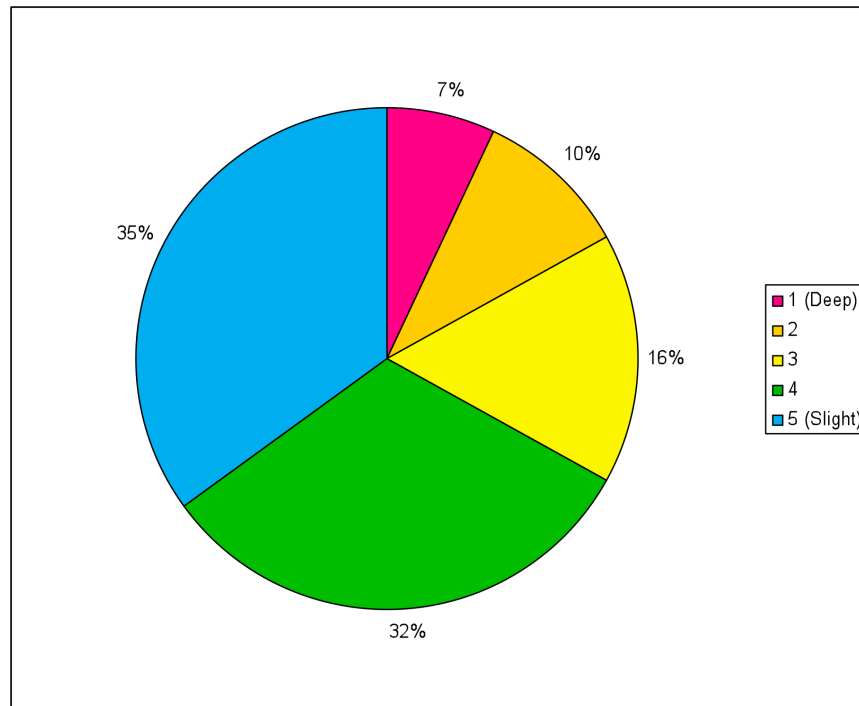
Deep =1 and Slight =5

Figure 5.4 Questionnaire responses: 'Sense of connection'

Furthermore respondent feedback from Questionnaire Q14 indicated strong agreement to the feeling that Head Office was the 'driving force of the company'.

These extracts suggest an unintentional gap between many team members and activity at Head Office that seemed to represent an organisational paradox. This paradox seemed to concern the call for participation in the new direction alongside a disconnection with Head Office during a time of great change. Narrative responses provided in the questionnaire (Q5) indicated that a disconnection with the aims and strategies of the company could exist at Head Office too. Given this background the complexity of a 'sense of involvement' is illustrated in the following section.

Findings showed that for some it appeared easier to soak up some of the new energy. The following extracts illustrate this point from both a leader's point of view and from a team member's perspective:

> Don: *…there's quite a buzz about it which is sort of the adrenaline bit which is great. There's a lot of things to do, there's a realisation that there's so much more to do.*

> Geoff: *They (leaders) have been re-energised so yes, there is an energy there (...) and that energy, yes, I am personally soaking some of it up, I'm hoping other people are as well...*

In contrast recruitment, 'aimed at trying to get that growth' in the words of one team member, seemed to distance some existing staff from the new agenda. Ironically another team member discussed wanting to contribute even more whilst not feeling 'a part of the whole' despite being highly valued and trusted.

Complex shifts in a sense of involvement were echoed in the questionnaire where responses indicated increased levels of 'frustration' and a slightly negative shift in feeling valued in the 12-month period after the start of coaching from December 2009 to 2010 (Questionnaire Q3). However feeling trusted was also found to be a consistently strong feature at Quantum (Questionnaire Q6).

In contrast the following extract highlighted a more motivating experience for one team member who welcomed being drawn into the new activity:

> Robert: *I'm being held to account for the performance a little bit more which obviously is a good thing. (...) And actually almost looking back, yes it was getting a bit comfortable and cosy and just doing more of the same.*

A different participant linked a positive sense of involvement with the potential to influence others suggesting the possibility of a gentle cascade of influences:

> Geoff: *I feel involved, I feel more involved than I ever have been. I feel that I can influence more, and maybe that's the next stage.*

The above extracts highlight differences in experiences of involvement, contrasting with the straightforward perspective of one of the leaders:

> Don: *...if you come and work with us here and you actively contribute and get engaged, there's actually no limit on what you can achieve, that's what we aspire to, whether we get it right all the time who knows but you certainly hope so.*

Accordingly there appeared to be room for several interpretations of the scope for involvement, from a sense of separateness to a sense of unlimited scope to contribute.

Findings also suggested that involvement was influenced by small acts of acknowledgement from leaders, in particular telephone calls to 'run things by' people and to assure people that they were free to make their own decisions: examples of reciprocal influences at play. Whilst not an unusual aspect of relationships at work in my experience, these findings suggested the lightness of human touch involved in bridging the gap between separateness and involvement:

> Paul: *…he 'phoned me up and said: I just wanted to run this by you (...), just so you're in the loop and make sure you're okay with things, which was very nice.*

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Reflections on 'personal fit' related to the extent to which people felt that their personal characteristics matched the changing organisation. An indication of what was required in order to 'fit' was presented by one participant:

> Paul: *I think it is a play hard, word hard type culture. Shrinking violets, quiet type people may struggle, may find it a little bit tough, but I think it's fairly easy. I mean, I think it's fairly okay to fit in.*

In the context of the changing direction at Quantum the question of personal fit raised concerns for some about the future, particularly where individuals felt daunted by 'stepping up' to the new challenges of networking and client meetings.

Personal fit did not only feature at an individual level. One anecdote circle imagined an unsettling scenario where their collective sense of 'fit' might be disturbed by change:

> *We all fit together so well someone else replacing us could change the whole dynamic of the office not for the better.* (Anecdote Circle Two).

The above expressions of hope and concern seem to find an echo in the following sentiment:

> *In taking our work seriously as an expression of our belonging, we hazard our most precious-sometimes our seemingly most fragile hopes and dreams, in a world that is more often than not associated with a harsh and destructive bottom line. (*Whyte, 2001, p14*).*

The picture that emerges here is of pockets of concern based on imagining negative future scenarios. This could suggest that a positive future scenario that everyone might tap into would be beneficial.

Facets of the competing influences arising from a 'sense of involvement' were found to be 'physical separateness',' 'sense of personal fit', 'myth of headquarters', 'feelings of frustration' and 'acts of acknowledgement'. These influences suggested that for many participants there was a clash between feeling some sense of frustration and separateness as an individual 'component' of the organisation whilst needing to respond to a changing business environment. There was a sense that whilst some team members were energised by the new business direction, others felt less involved or were wanting to be brought into the change process.

In summary a ripple effect could be seen to involve competing influences associated with a sense of involvement that comprised:

'individual frustrations' ⬅➡ 're-energising the business'

5.2.3 Findings: 'Confidence'

A third aspect of a ripple effect was associated with aspects of 'confidence' that appeared to be unintentionally influenced by the coaching outcomes. New working practices were beginning to affect people's self-confidence at different hierarchical levels suggesting a shift in the collective experience of working at Quantum. The enthusiastic shift in emphasis from an internal focus following the acquisition of new offices to an external focus to attend to growth ambitions was shown to have a surprising effect on individuals' sense of confidence. This seemed to relate to working alongside new recruits hired for their business skills and likely different thinking. Findings suggested an underlying concern that the focus may have shifted towards newer staff and, in the words of one team member, whether existing staff were viewed 'as highly as people who have been brought in'. This concern appeared to suggest that one aspect of a ripple effect could be an unintentional wavering of confidence in existing staff just as greater confidence was needed to meet new challenges.

In the view of another participant confidence was a factor in demonstrating technical skills in a competitive environment:

> Robert: *...I'm all for learning new skills or developing skills that I think are weak, I mean part of this might be a confidence thing, that I'm very happy doing the technical bits and so on with clients where they're existing clients and we know them. It's just possibly having confidence to do that where I know I'm competing against other firms of accountants and I've got to win…*

The general sense from these extracts was of a need to strengthen confidence made plain in the following extract from one anecdote circle participant:

> *It is making us all needy I think we just need a bit of reassurance.* (Anecdote Circle Two).

This need for reassurance appeared to resonate with the following expression of the significance of 'human moments':

> *The human moment provides the zest and colour in the painting of our daily lives; it restores us, strengthens us and makes us whole.* (Hallowell, 1999, p65).

In contrast the following leader's extract illustrates a hidden aspect of this human dimension: a respect for the potential for discomfort in the wider team:

> Ted: *I don't do the factory walk if you like and stop and ask what's going on. I suppose I need to develop a way of doing it. I always feel people feel slightly embarrassed because it's open plan and to stop by someone's desk and to say how's it going it doesn't bother me but I don't want it to be a problem for them...*

The above extracts indicate that changes in business direction created complex influences at the human level associated with self-confidence. Ironically this came just at a time when the leaders were interested in people expressing themselves openly:

> Ted: *...it would be nice if people thought just as they are being challenged that they are able to voice things...*

Involved in this aspect of a ripple effect was the fact that confidence was not an issue for the leaders:

> Don: *...to me my natural state you try stuff, if it doesn't work you try something else, if it doesn't work you try something else (....) I think I've done that all my life so actually it's not a big thing, you just do it.*

Interestingly results indicated that feelings of apprehension and of being daunted were not growing issues during the 12-month period from December 2009. (Appendix XIV Questionnaire Q3). However interview and anecdote circle data provided more nuanced findings and uncovered some of the unpredictable associations between people's experiences and the effect on confidence.

Alongside these aspects of personal confidence was also a need for confidence in the commitment to a new direction. Despite the clarity of the October 2009 Team Day announcement it was also recognised that 'fantastic ideas' were not always completed before embarking on the next idea, which could be regarded as a typical feature of an energetic and changing SME environment.

The competing influences associated with confidence appeared to be a combination of 'confidence in relation to newcomers', 'confidence in relation to competitors', 'confidence in leaders' commitment to change', 'a need for reassurance' and a bias towards ambition felt by the leaders that was reflected in their interest in achievement by others. Complex, interconnected aspects of these influences appeared to involve encountering changes in the workplace and a need to feel embraced as a participant in change.

In summary a ripple effect could be seen to involve competing influences associated with confidence that are:

> 'need for reassurance' ⬅➡ 'challenge from newcomers and competitors'

5.3 Summary

The picture that emerges from these findings is one of a ripple effect ruffling the 'surface' of organisational life awakening different needs in people related to personal values, sense of involvement and confidence. The competing influences described in this chapter (Figure 5.5) suggest mutual bonds and some dilemmas among individuals that, viewed as a whole, seem to represent the potential for a level of organisational awareness that resonates with the following quotation:

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We are used to thinking of compassion as an emotional state, based on our concern for one another. But it is also grounded in a level of awareness. In my experience, as people see more of the systems within which they operate, and as they understand more clearly the pressures influencing one another, they naturally develop more compassion and empathy. (Senge, 1990, p171).

Organising Theme	Competing influences: 'Awakening personal needs'		
Personal values	work / life balance	⟷	Need for challenge
Sense of involvement	Individual frustrations	⟷	Re-energising the business
Confidence	Need for reassurance	⟷	Challenges from newcomers / competitors

Figure 5.5 Competing influences: 'Awakening personal needs'

The empirical findings presented in this chapter provide insight into the interplay of competing influences flowing from changes arising from coaching outcomes. The overall picture seemed to be of interrelated influences that represented changes in individual perspectives on working life as shifts in the organisation triggered different personal needs. Competing influences that were an aspect of people experiencing change could be viewed as potential hindrances to organisational success. They could also be viewed as organisational features that could be part of a wider reaching coaching agenda. These influences seemed to be accompanied by some undercurrents of empathy: a concern about the pressures for leaders, alongside a concern not to create discomfort among team members.

Findings presented in Chapter Six and Chapter Seven offer further insight into the potential reach of coaching and the concept of reciprocal learning space is introduced in concluding Chapter Eight to capture the scope for learning and development by uncovering these interdependent and sometimes competing aspects of organisational life.

CHAPTER SIX: FINDINGS: 'SHIFTING DEPENDENCIES'

6.1 Introduction to Thematic network 2: 'Shifting dependencies'

In this chapter the second of three sets of empirical findings is presented. These findings relate to Thematic network 2 (Figure 6.1) which has the global theme 'shifting dependencies' at its centre. Once again I have viewed the themes generated from the data as aspects of a ripple effect that seemed to form a dynamic and multifaceted 'whole'. It becomes apparent that these aspects resonate with the concept of leadership culture where the spectrum is from a dependent culture, seeing leadership as residing in authoritative individuals, to an interdependent culture where leadership is a 'collective activity' (Palus, 2009, p5). Thematic network 2 is made up of three organising themes informed by relevant basic themes in the data. This representation of the data indicates three aspects: focus on the leader's role, shared responsibility and the scope for creating opportunities.

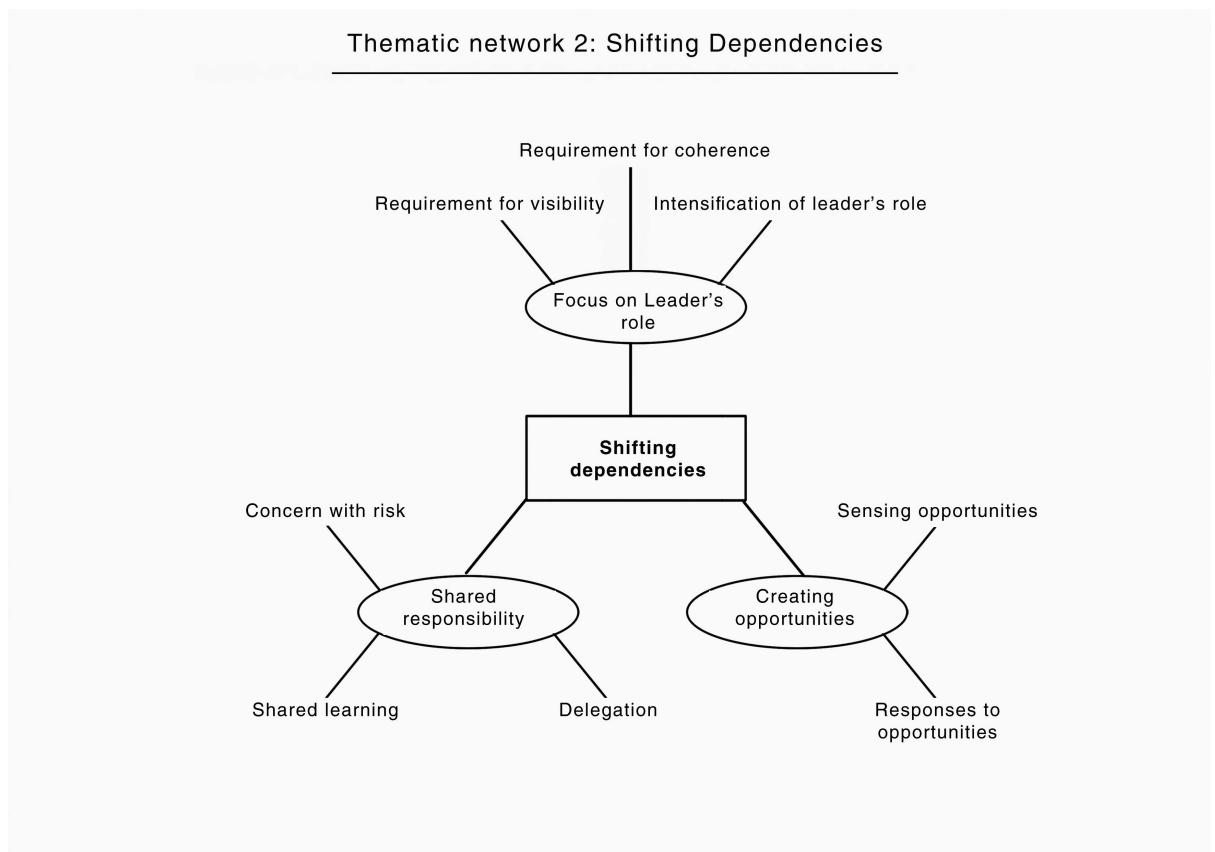**Figure 6.1 Thematic network 2: 'Shifting dependencies'**

Whilst it is difficult to avoid a separation between leaders and the wider team in this chapter, a discernible ripple effect is shown by uncovering interdependent aspects of the leader/team member dynamic. This dynamic is made up of competing influences that represent a further shift in seeing more than the 'component parts' of a ripple effect.

These competing influences represent hidden aspects of change in organisational life following the coaching of leaders. Several ambiguities are also indicated associated with the way participants appeared to think about the concept of 'leadership'. By raising awareness of these ambiguities findings contribute to a potential agenda for learning and development. These aspects of a ripple effect are now discussed in the following sections.

6.1.1 Findings: 'Focus on the leader's role'

The data suggested that the role of the leaders had intensified following their coaching. Ted and Don had responded to coaching by acting swiftly and energetically to help reinvigorate the business. In doing so it seemed that much depended on leaders at the top to steer the business forward:

> Don: *...I think in terms of how we drive change in the business, a lot of it sits with (refers to us the leaders) as almost architects of that.*

The company questionnaire appeared to support the idea that the leadership team needed to drive change: around 75% of respondents agreed that 'we rely on our leaders to make change happen' (Q13). This seemed to suggest that despite calls for greater participation at the October 2009 Team Day, the majority of team members may prefer to depend on Quantum's leaders to 'show the way' (Kegan, 1994, p322). This appeared to indicate the energy needed by Ted and Don and the leadership team to drive the new agenda forward.

The ambiguity associated with the leaders' call for ideas and participation from everyone seemed to centre on a blend of authoritative leadership from the top with a desire to share responsibility much more widely. In this context subtle reciprocal influences appeared to be a strand of a ripple effect. These reciprocal influences seemed to involve the leaders' reaching out to the organisation and a sense of the organisation pushing leadership back to the leaders. This dynamic suggested aspects of a dependent leadership culture at Quantum.

Dependency on the leaders seemed also to involve observing them in terms of their success or failure in managing change:

> Don: *If ever you're going through a period of change you'll always expect to see fear and trepidation or 'oh my God, here we go again'. They kind of stand back and see 'well will you fail? If you go for change will you fail?'*

In this context the wider team appeared to have an unspoken role in 'assessing' the leaders' activities and 'requiring' their success before deciding to take part. This strand of a ripple effect associated with a focus on the leaders' role seemed to suggest a reciprocal requirement for performance: whilst leaders sought good performance from

their team members it appears that team members also sought good performance from their leaders.

An accompanying strand of a ripple effect was the expectation of coherent messages from the leadership team. This aspect could be viewed both as dependency on the leaders and also as a requirement of leadership by the wider team, again suggesting reciprocal aspects of the leader/team member dynamic at Quantum. In this regard the rational thinking that accompanied the new business purpose was welcomed:

> Sally: *A lot more thought being given to the reasoning behind why certain things like that should be done, it's not just because you do it and because we've always done it, now it's actually being thought what's the reason behind it and what do we want to achieve from it.*

The following extracts also echo a general desire in the wider team for focus from the leadership team and for a rationale for change to accompany the renewed energy and entrepreneurial spirit:

> Robert: *...we used to have vague aims and so on but I think we're getting a lot more focused...*
>
> Geoff: *I think because I can feel there's a direction of the firm, then I can be a bit more direct with the way I access things. I think it clarifies, to use that word again, what I can achieve at [Quantum], in my role and how I can develop my role.*

However other respondents indicated that the strategic message appeared to lose some apparent coherence in the wider organisation, suggestive of a waning ripple effect. This softening of a ripple effect appeared to produce contrasting reactions to changes in the direction of the business: from a more relaxed approach from some team members to some uncertainty from others as illustrated in the following extracts:

> *This is where we want to be in certain amounts of time ...so they've sort of set goals for the firm as a whole...*
>
> *I don't think it's actually impinged on our working pattern. (*Anecdote Circle One).
>
> *We seem to be under a bit more pressure to increase profits (...) it's whether we're gonna meet it or not and what happens if we don't.* (Anecdote Circle Two).

These extracts show differing team experiences and indicate the potential for different messages to be 'heard' in one organisation during periods of organisational change. These findings appeared to suggest that a characteristic of a ripple effect is its capacity as a dynamic phenomenon to create differing responses during the course of its flow.

A further strand of a ripple effect associated with focus on the leaders' role related to an unintentional lack of leaders' visibility in the organisation particularly where the outer offices were concerned. This could be associated with the coaching initiative that had encouraged the leaders to step back to reflect on business strategy and also to focus on client building activities. In this regard one team member acknowledged these reasons

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for the external focus whilst noticing a gap opening up between the top team and the rest of the organisation due to their absence from the day to day internal business activity. Another team member also acknowledged that a collective effort could be made to visit the smaller teams. Separately T described an important aspect of visibility: the need to be a role model in order to communicate important company values:

> Ted: *...obviously there's a role to articulate things, beliefs and values, but to me people don't take as much notice of that as how you operate yourself, how you act, how you are towards people, how you deal with situations, how you react and so on. It's about people being close up enough to learn and begin to see that and to see how we are.*

Indeed the overall intention, explained in a company document (Capacity and Structure Project Brief) was to reduce leaders' internal workload and so allow more time for leaders to act as mentors alongside their increased networking and selling activities. However the following extract indicates the challenge associated with balancing internal and external aspects of the leader's role:

> Ted: *I think there's been so much going on at a strategic level I've focused most of my time on that this past year (...) I actually feel if anything I've pulled myself back. That's not what I want to see happening longer term but in order to get my head around things you've always got to stand back a bit.*

Following the coaching programme, subtle, competing influences appeared to relate to a 'focus on the leader's role'. On the one hand team members were affected by the communication of the new business agenda in different ways. A few team members also suggested a need to see more of their leaders. On the other hand the leaders had intentionally removed themselves from internal business activity to act as role models by demonstrating the energetic behaviours required to grow the business.

In summary competing influences relating to a 'focus on the leader's role' involved a spotlight on leaders that brought expectations from the wider team as a result of announcing the new business agenda. Influences also highlighted ambiguities associated with unintentional distance from staff to pursue the company's growth targets whilst being needed internally to support participative ways of working. These competing influences were:

<p style="text-align:center;">'intensification of leader's role' ←→ 'ambiguity of leader's role'.</p>

This strand of a ripple effect from leadership coaching suggests dynamic aspects between leaders and the wider team that seemed to accompany a shift towards shaping a more interdependent leadership culture. This dynamic appears to involve hidden aspects that are developed further in the next section that discusses 'shared responsibility'.

6.1.2 Findings: 'Shared responsibility'

A ripple effect appeared to have aspects that could be associated with 'shared responsibility' here intended to mean sharing the responsibility among all staff for achieving the company's goals. However findings suggested some hidden barriers to shared responsibility arising from competing influences at play in the organisation. The following extracts illustrate, in the first case, the drive and desire to get people involved and, in the second extract, the way that the message is heard:

> Don: *...we actually said 'look, this is where we're going, this is what our plans are, these are the aspirations we've got, we've got a few ideas but we'd really like to get yours'. (...) we are about to embark on some serious growth things here, you've all got a part to play in it. It's not just down to us, what are we going to do?*
>
> Adam: *(The leadership team are) sort of – we all know what needs to be done, we're not gonna tell you what needs to be done. We'll assume (a) that you know what you're doing and (b) that you've got your own drive to do it... I think there's a sense that they've sort of devolved responsibility downwards...*

In combination these extracts indicate the intention to share responsibility with an implicit requirement that the wider team would manage the associated accountability. Questionnaire responses corroborated the team members' sense of requirement to take on more responsibility: over 40% of respondents felt more accountable, and fewer than 5% felt less accountable during the period after the coaching programme (Questionnaire Q3).

The following extract suggests that an expectation of high standards accompanied the shift towards encouraging the wider team to share responsibility:

> Ted: *...I'm demanding because I'm demanding of myself, my own standards and can be self critical but I expect pretty good standards of other people...*

However following the call at the October 2009 Team Day to participate in meeting the company's growth ambition, some team members were feeling the pressure of increased accountability and meeting stretching business targets whilst maintaining desired levels of client service. This new collective responsibility led some to be concerned about the risk of making mistakes and the implications for clients:

> *Well, the fear to me, 'cos you're under more pressure to meet targets and make profits and that you'll start making mistakes and obviously the client notices you make a mistake (...). (Anecdote Circle Two).*

This view was corroborated by questionnaire responses (Q6) indicating that many team members felt that they had less time to work to a high standard and were less motivated by their performance targets in the period since the start of the coaching initiative. However this concern ran counter to the view from one of the leaders where taking a risk is firstly seen in the context of matching capability and effort:

> Ted: *I think my only issue of real intolerance is when I think people aren't capable of what I think they're capable of doing and making the effort to do. I don't mind people making mistakes if they're attempting to do the right thing and they've got that underlying capability that means that they can do the right thing.*

Secondly risk is related to learning:

> Ted: *I don't mind if people make honest mistakes if they learn from it ...we all make mistakes. I don't want people to feel they're going to be punished as soon as they make a mistake. If you're going to really try something and do something that's pretty good, that's a good way of learning.*

This combination of extracts suggests that at the top of the organisation it was recognised that striving to do better, working to one's full potential and learning along the way might mean making a few mistakes. However it seemed that for some team members the extra pressure of work meant that making mistakes was less about the potential for learning and more about getting things right, perhaps unsurprising given the responsibilities of the accountancy profession. The following anecdote circle extract indicates that a sense of risk could perhaps be exaggerated:

> *I got something badly wrong, it was resolved, I was glad I was working here then (...) there were no ramifications from it (...).*
>
> *I've got a similar story there's recently something come to light something I've done wrong I think I held my breath for about four days (sound of laughter from colleagues) and it was just let's sort it out no punishing or lock you in a cupboard.* (Anecdote Circle One).

However, where a sense of risk was apparent at Quantum, there appeared to be a gap between developing an environment where people participate, learn and challenge and the real pressures felt by individuals.

Tolerance emerges as a theme that appears to relate to a restlessness to do better. Intolerance of failure to reach one's full potential appeared to be associated with the leaders' personal values and to relate to their overall ambition for the company. The concern for people to learn and grow appeared to be based on a genuine desire to create an entrepreneurial environment within which team members might flourish:

> Ted: *Being stuck in a box and being told 'this is what you have to do', in my mind, isn't any way to go through a working life, and I guess we want to create an environment where people question, where people are inquisitive and curious, where people can harness their own ideas without fear of getting it wrong, or fear of automatically getting into trouble if they get it wrong. A learning environment and an environment where there's always more that can be done, or ways in which we can improve. I think maybe that's a personal thing for me, in the sense that I think my own personality is one where however well you do something, it's not that you're unhappy with yourself but you always think 'that was good but I'm sure we could still do even better'.*
>
> Don: *What we're trying to do with this is to make team leaders and the whole team as a result more entrepreneurial.*

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However in this regard questionnaire responses (Q10) indicated that in a 12 month period since the coaching initiative there was a slight negative shift in team members' sense of 'many opportunities to learn', 'culture of openness', being 'encouraged to question and challenge' and feeling of 'many opportunities to take a lead'. It seemed that creating more opportunities and time to share learning without worrying about 'getting it wrong' might support a general shift towards a more questioning environment.

Developing greater accountability through targets and budgets seemed to be inadvertently in tension with one of the most important aspects of working life at Quantum: a 'reputation for great client service' (Questionnaire Q1). There was a perception of risk in some parts of the organisation associated with time pressure and with a strong desire not to let the customer down. These complex features of a sense of a risk could be regarded as potential obstacles to developing shared responsibility.

A different strand of 'shared responsibility' appeared to be associated with delegation. The new business agenda required that senior team members delegate more to make time for client building activity. Delegation was shown to have altruistic overtones for one team member in particular, who actively relinquished favourite work to provide the opportunity for others to develop. To place this approach in context, the following extract indicates the influence of the traditional hierarchical approach related to accountancy practice:

> Brian: *...probably the biggest part of the leadership within the firm is delegating the clients' work out and keeping track of it. Because even once they've delegated it out, the director still maintains responsibility...*

However a fascinating slant on influences from one participant, namely a 'hierarchy of influence', manages to blend the natural, relational aspects of 'influence' with linear thinking:

> Geoff: *...if there was a hierarchy of communication or a hierarchy of influence, I would hope that I would be quite near the top...I see my role to be quite integral to the firm.*

The ability to influence described here appears to resonate with 'living leadership' (Binney *et al*, 2005) that emphasises the quiet influence of the 'ordinary' leader with the 'courage and willingness to be an authority in the presence of others' (p183).

The interdependent nature of influences associated with shared responsibility seemed to involve a tension between a view that taking risks was in the interest of learning and the extent to which some team members' perceived a risk to the company's reputation for great client service. There was also an accompanying suggestion that more opportunities to share learning would be beneficial accompanied by the perception of a

slightly negative shift in openness and opportunities to question, challenge, learn and take a lead.

In summary a ripple effect could be seen to involve competing influences that comprised:

'sense of risk' ⬅➡ 'shared learning'

6.1.3 Findings: 'Creating opportunities'

The scope for creating opportunities was a strand of a ripple effect relating to 'shifting dependencies' associated with team members' perceptions of the scope to independently respond to opportunities. A surprising gap appeared to exist between the perception of opportunity from some team members and the scope of opportunity that the leaders felt was available. This gap had the potential to hinder a shift to a more interdependent leadership culture.

The following extract indicates that a genuine enthusiasm for providing opportunity was accompanied by a call for greater tolerance of difference:

> Ted: *We want to see keenness, we want to see endeavour, ambition and all those things, but within that I think we need to be tolerant of how people do certain things.*

A complex dynamic appeared to exist at Quantum: just as coaching had helped to inject more energy into the business and at the same time place a spotlight on the central leaders, the new agenda was also creating opportunities that needed to be sensed and seized by people. However it appeared that a strand of a ripple effect associated with creating opportunities encountered some complex undercurrents. These undercurrents seemed to relate to the theme of tolerance that was associated with the right to be heard and demonstrating the capability needed to grasp opportunities. It seemed that it was understood that a certain set of traits was required in order to step up and contribute proactively. Indeed there appeared to be a strong assumption articulated by one of the central leaders that leadership resided in individuals:

> Don: *...the future leaders will do it anyway and they'll find a way to make the change. And I think that we very much respond to that.*

In response to the call for participation, team members seemed to have differing perceptions of opportunity: one participant described the new agenda as 'outside my scope'. Other team members indicated a tentative sense of the opportunities available:

> Joan: *I don't think anybody would stomp on your fire or whatever if you had some good ideas on things.*
>
> Adam: *There is no reason why somebody couldn't feel they could approach their line manager, or the directors to say 'I'd like to have a go at this' or 'I've been thinking, could we do this?'. That is encouraged just by the culture itself.*

Others expressed some of the ambiguity involved in sensing opportunities:

> Luke: ...*I think most people know that they're going to be given the opportunities if they can show that they deserve the opportunities....*
>
> Geoff: ...*I think everybody is given the opportunity although it might not be obvious...*

It therefore appeared that whilst opportunities existed, there was an expectation of capability and individual characteristics that would enable individuals to flourish in the new organisational environment. In this context one participant articulated the importance of being tuned into the new direction of the business**:**

> Geoff: …*if people show the desire and that, then the directors or the leaders would encourage that. So you could say, yes, there's a circle going on here. Where I am – am I pressing buttons? – I'm accessing is a better way than pressing buttons, I'm accessing the opportunities, the opportunities are being given to me, I'm developing them... and it's ongoing.*

The above extract suggests that part of the skill of organisational life lay in sensing opportunities and understanding the intricacies of influencing and embracing opportunities. In tune with the central metaphor for the study this activity perhaps represented small whirlpools of behaviour for the benefit of both individual and organisation. The intricacies associated with embracing opportunities in this way were amusingly summarised by the participant:

> Geoff: *I've influenced myself. Is that possible? No, maybe I've just taken the opportunities- no I've created the opportunities!*

A more obvious link appeared to exist between the coaching initiative and a tangible ripple effect involving opportunities to collaborate between offices. One team member described how coaching had encouraged dialogue between office teams that would not have occurred 'two years ago' and had also created opportunities to share 'what works and what doesn't and actually do something about it'. This aspect of a discernible ripple effect had the potential to cascade through the organisation and as such represented one of the most valuable influences from leadership coaching at Quantum, bringing together the human dimension of collaboration and improvements in line with business purpose.

In the following extract the most noticeable feature of the leader's vision is the almost paternalistic desire to create opportunities for others that had perhaps been lacking in the leader's own experience. This continues the theme of restlessness and personal striving to do better that was a strong feature of the company ethos arising from the personal values of leaders at Quantum:

> Ted*: …I would like to create a place that if I were starting my working life and I looked in on this organisation, that I would actually say 'now that's the kind of place I want to work in', and for me it's about creating an environment where*

people can flourish. And flourishing is multi-dimensional, I guess, because to flourish properly as a human, I guess you've got to feel emotionally secure; you've got to feel that you can interact socially; you've got to feel that you're able to utilise your own faculties and brains, and be given some authority to do things, and I suppose it benefits the business financially in the long run but that's not necessarily the primary reason for it. If you can have people that are firing on all cylinders and feel, in an holistic sense, feel they're in a good place at work, I think we'll get the best out of people, and I think as individuals people will feel they're achieving something and contributing something.

Aspects of tolerance were therefore accompanied by an overarching desire for people to have opportunities to be the best they can be. This intention appeared to fit with a wider ambition for the company resonating with the following view on changing leadership culture:

> *When we expand our mindset to include leadership as not only the task of the individual, but as the combined actions produced by* all *the organisation's members to ensure ideal direction, alignment and commitment, we're beginning to make an important shift.* (Palus, 2009, p4).

Interdependent factors were that differing perceptions of the scope of opportunity to play a greater part in the organisation had implications for shifting towards a more independent leadership culture.

In summary a ripple effect could be seen to involve competing influences associated with 'creating opportunities' that are:

'perception of opportunity' ⬅➡ 'rich scope for contribution'.

Organising Theme	Competing influences: 'Shifting dependencies'	
Focus on Leader's role	Intensification of leader's role ⬅➡	Ambiguity of leader's role
Shared responsibility	sense of risk ⬅➡	Shared learning
Creating opportunities	Perception of opportunity ⬅➡	Rich scope for contribution

Figure 6.2 Competing influences: Shifting dependencies

6.2 Summary

The overall picture suggested by these findings is of ripple effect creating a complex interplay of leader/team member influences. These dynamic competing influences indicate several ambiguities associated with moving towards a more interdependent leadership culture and collaborative working to achieve growth and change at Quantum.

In combination competing influences associated with 'shifting dependencies' (Figure 6.2) illustrate ambiguities between the intensification of the leader's role and a call for widening participation; a sense of risk in the wider team aligned with a professional commitment to client service contrasting with the need for challenging debate and new ideas associated with shared learning, and the mixture of perceptions in the wider team of the opportunity to contribute contrasting with the rich scope for contribution perceived by the leaders. These ambiguities seemed to create a 'whirlpool' of competing influences that suggested some hindrances to creating a more interdependent culture characterised by collective leadership.

The empirical findings presented in this chapter provide insight into a further interplay of competing influences flowing from changes arising from coaching outcomes. Competing aspects again suggest potential hindrances to organisational success that can also be viewed as hidden opportunities for organisational learning and development. Accordingly in this chapter the second of three sets of competing influences are presented and conceptualised as part of a wider learning agenda. In the next chapter the third set of findings associated with wider organisational aspects are presented and discussed.

CHAPTER SEVEN: 'CHALLENGING PREVAILING CULTURE'

7.1 Introduction to Thematic network 3: 'challenging prevailing culture'

In this chapter the final set of findings is presented and discussed. Here the features of a ripple effect are about 'challenging prevailing culture' represented by Thematic network 3 (Figure 7.1). They suggest aspects of a ripple effect that appear to resonate with aspects of organisational culture. This thematic network has the global theme 'challenging prevailing culture' at its heart and underpins the discovery of dynamic aspects of a ripple effect at the organisational level. Thematic network 3 is made up of four organising themes informed by relevant basic themes discerned in the data. This representation of the data indicates four aspects: 'diversity', 'changing direction', 'organisational dialogue' and 'client relationships'. I have again viewed the themes as facets of a ripple effect, a dynamic and multifaceted 'whole'.

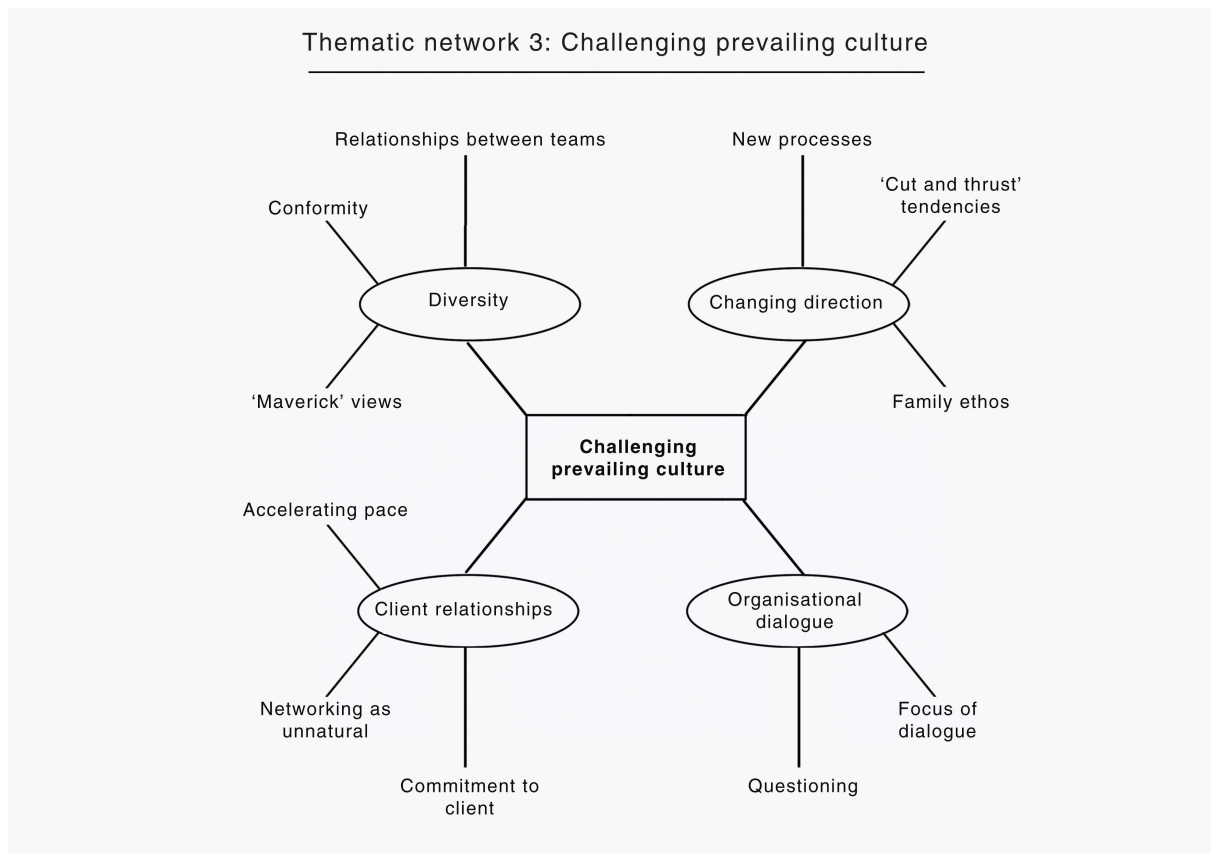**Figure 7.1 Thematic network 3: 'Challenging prevailing culture'**

This third group of features are about the way that the new agenda arising from coaching appeared to affect aspects of the small company 'family' culture. Unpredictable influences relating to coaching outcomes, in particular the focus on growth and on introducing more corporate structures, appeared to challenge prevailing culture.

Findings indicated competing influences that represented a potential hindrance to successful organisational changes and to creating the type of environment envisioned by the leaders. These competing influences indicated important interdependent aspects of organisational life that could be the basis for a wider reaching coaching agenda.

7.1.1 Findings: 'Diversity'

The coaching initiative had introduced a new agenda requiring Quantum to draw on the many voices and ideas in the organisational team. Diversity refers to the multiplicity of relationships at Quantum enriched by recent acquisitions of new offices with different local leadership styles and distinctive ways of working. The integration of these smaller offices was part of the leaders' desired 'one team' approach. However it seemed that these newer teams might not feel fully included in the Quantum 'family':

> Catherine: *I'm not sure that there is this inclusion that we want which is that we are all one firm and I do think that possibly isn't the way the other smaller offices feel about it.*

The integration of these smaller teams offered the potential for fresh perspectives. However just as the leaders were requesting new ideas and viewpoints, the newer teams appeared to feel the need to conform by not challenging aspects of the new agenda. One team member discussed an inclination to 'go with the flow' whilst wondering about the need for the stretched financial target. Another team member discussed feeling 'a little bit outside of what the (Quantum) way is'. This tendency towards conformity seemed to be a natural result of joining an established company. However it also appeared to represent a lost opportunity to hear from individuals with different perspectives. Moreover the following leader's extract indicates that a culture of conformity was not something that was desired:

> Ted: *I like people who can think independently and bring something different.*

However despite this preference towards independent thinking, another team member described the feeling of being different at Quantum by acknowledging that others might 'shrug their shoulders with you a little bit'. It therefore appeared that the potential for diversity through integrating new office teams was accompanied by an unspoken sense that a culture of conformity existed. This complex cultural aspect was reflected in the questionnaire responses where 60% disagreed with the statement 'it is easy to be different at Quantum' compared to 50% in the previous twelve months (Q10). Whilst conformity could be viewed as part of professional accountancy culture these responses seemed to indicate a slight shift towards greater conformity in the organisation since the start of the coaching initiative.

This conformity could be linked to the introduction of new structures to underpin the drive for growth. In this regard one questionnaire respondent indicated the paradox of new companywide processes that appeared to unintentionally contradict encouragement to think independently:

> *We are being encouraged to work in more uniform ways between offices, which on the one hand is good for transferring work etc, but on the other is very frustrating in that one size does not fit all, and it also removes the opportunity to use discretion as to the most effective way of working.* (Questionnaire respondent: Q11).

The scope for acting independently also appeared to be related to alignment with the company ethos. It seemed that different ideas needed to be accompanied by adherence to specific company values. These overarching values represented professional and respectful ways of working among colleagues and clients and appeared to relate to acceptance of team members' opinions:

> Ted: *Core values are obviously like treat each other with respect, make sure we deal with clients as well as we can and make sure we're seen to be servicing their needs. Make sure we don't allow politics to enter too far into us as an organisation and create rifts and so on. If people are buying into that but they have strong opinions on other aspects which are there for debate, I'm very happy to have debates and discussions.(...) where I have a problem is when it cuts against the grain of our ethos.*

However another participant welcomed maverick views particularly where they provided helpful feedback: a valuable 'ripple' back to decision makers at Head Office.

A different aspect of conformity was associated with professional respect for the experience of others in the organisation as described by one team member:

> Paul: *Rocking the boat, saying (...) 'we're going to do it all differently now', I certainly haven't got weight or experience to be able to do that.*

Overall findings suggested that perceptions among team members of a culture of conformity conflicted with the challenge and questioning welcomed by the leaders. It could be argued that the coaching initiative had created scope for fresh ideas that was hampered by a perceived need to conform. These complex influences suggested a hidden context for concerns about the level of independent thinking at Quantum:

> Ted: *I do think we need a much more free thinking environment now...thinking at different angles, looking at different angles a bit, challenging the status quo and coming up with some different ways of looking at things.*

However an alternative perspective is suggested by the flurry of ideas shared at the October 2009 Team Day indicating a high level of untapped innovative potential and scope for future participation in developing the organisation. There was also a sense that confident behaviours, combined with a strong work ethic, represented opportunities to have a voice in the organisation:

> Ted: *I'm all for good, healthy debate, frank and honest, and it doesn't have to agree with me. I don't mind engaging in proper debate and don't get hung up on sensitivities.*

And also:

> Ted: *...they're people it's worth listening to because they're committed, hardworking, they've earned the right to be heard...*

Whilst coaching had stimulated the call for wider participation, competing influences indicated some hindrances to this endeavour. The general sense provided by the findings in this section was of an unintentional gap between the need for more independent thinking in the organisation and the perception of a need to conform. An aspect of this organisational dynamic also seemed to relate to a 'right to be heard'. These findings indicated potential obstacles to sharing diverse views and ideas at Quantum, obstacles that could hinder successful change. Awareness of these dynamic aspects could become a source of learning as part of an integrated, relational coaching agenda.

In summary a ripple effect could be seen to involve competing influences associated with 'diversity' that comprised:

<div align="center">'conformity' ⬅➡ 'independent thinking'.</div>

7.1.2 Findings: 'Client relationships'

Genuine client relationships were a high priority for many team members as evidenced in the questionnaire responses (Q1) where 'reputation for client service' was second behind 'ability to enjoy work/life balance' in respondents' ranking of the most important aspects of working life at Quantum. This is how the commitment to strong relationships with clients was seen before the coaching initiative:

> *We had a 10 or 15 minute ethos sort of presentation about the firm, how they like to be perceived, what they do to get that perception and a lot of it was trying to build bonds with your clients, take the time, don't just rush through it, they're more than just money they're the future of the company.* (Anecdote Circle One).

However findings showed that some team members anticipated some effects on client relationships arising from changes in the approach to client building:

> *Personally I don't think anything has changed just yet but looking at diaries things are gonna change at some point (...) I don't want particularly want to have interference in that relationship.* (Anecdote Circle Two).

> Robert: *I've had one or two clients or potential clients that say they dread going to their accountants and I certainly don't want that to be their experience.*

Questionnaire responses indicated some concerns about looming change:

> *Reputation for great client service: feel this is being sacrificed in exchange for better recovery rates.* (Q2).

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> *Recovery rates are increasing and so we are being encouraged to work faster. This will affect the standard of work being provided; this is what we are meant to be priding ourselves on!!!* (Q8).

For some interviewees it appeared that the new business direction was creating less time for maintaining a strong reputation for client service. One participant described the dilemma of maintaining loyal client relationships and therefore supporting gradual business growth whilst participating in an agenda for accelerated growth:

> David: *I think you can try and expand too fast sometimes, and you can lose sight of things that are important. You could also perhaps take your eye off your loyal clients in the drive to expand too fast and, you know, perhaps upset some of the clients you've known for a long time and have been very loyal to you. So I think there's a bit of a balancing act there...*

It seemed that targets were affecting team members' in unpredictable ways by creating concerns about client service. A concern for meeting targets was accompanied by a concern for the changing nature of client relationships. This aspect of a ripple effect could be viewed as unintended influences flowing from targets with the potential to affect engagement with clients.

In this context one approach to accelerating business growth was to encourage staff to network. However professional networking was perceived by some team members to be a peculiar way of developing client relationships.

> *There is that bit of brutality underneath where people will work out whether you're worth talking to or not (…) and sometimes you'll see it when people aim for certain people it's very, very strange.*
>
> *I think part of it being strange is because you know everyone's there for a purpose even though on the face of it, it's all kind of casual, everyone's still there to kind of suss whether you will be beneficial to them in one way or another and that's what kind of underlies it all so it makes it very strange...* (Anecdote Circle One).

From this perspective networking seemed to jar with the traditional values of the company that Quantum wanted to maintain associated with taking time with clients and creating bonds. However despite these feelings about networking, questionnaire responses showed that the majority of respondents felt that 'networking is helping to build better client relationships' (Q14). This suggested that a seemingly less natural way of building client relationships was beginning to be embraced by the organisation.

Coaching outcomes therefore seemed to stimulate concerns about client relationships. A ripple effect seemed to involve a tension between the interconnected aspects of stretching financial targets and a perceived challenge to maintaining authentic and loyal client relationships. In summary competing influences associated with a 'client relationships' comprised:

'financial growth targets' ⬅➡ 'genuine client relationships'.

7.1.3 Findings: 'Changing business direction'

Findings associated with 'changing business direction' provided a sense of an organisation driving forward whilst at the same time creating an 'undertow' of concern based on team members' experiences of other larger organisations. Whilst coaching had brought energy and direction, there was a sense that the small company 'family' culture could be affected by growing the business:

> Robert: *One of the things that I have been very keen on over the years and I've always been very proud about is the fact that we've got a culture of being a good place to work for employees. (...) I absolutely love my work and I wouldn't want that to change at the expense of becoming a firm that was nearly twice the size of where we are now.*

New processes were being introduced to bring more structure to Quantum's activities and to meet the needs of a firm that had grown from 20 to over 70 people in recent years. These processes were not only designed to create uniformity but were in recognition that Quantum could no longer rely on a structure designed for a much smaller team and, in the words of one team member, needed to 'act a little bit more like we're a bigger firm'.

At the same time the small company 'family' culture and associated team ethos were shown to be highly valued by team members from a whole firm perspective and at a personal level:

> *I think the firm as a whole makes an effort to keep the team ethos (...) even though we've grown, like the team days, the Christmas dinner, we still have our tea made for us twice a day trying to keep a sort of smaller firm approach...* (Anecdote Circle One).

> Paul: *It's almost like a family if you like, in that I know that if I'm in a mess – which I never will be – but if I was in a mess, I know that my (family) would all be there in a heartbeat to make sure everything was okay, and I've never to call on them touchwood. And it's the same with (-) really, in that if I needed anything I think he would – and I've never put him to the test but you do just get that support...*

However in parallel it seemed that coaching had unleashed an open-ended sense of the potential of the organisation:

> Don: *I think there's only so much change people can cope with but actually (...) we could do something completely different. We haven't quite worked out what 'it' is yet, but actually when you've got the drive and the passion and the enthusiasm and excitement and everything going with that, you just think actually yeah. I don't think you should be constrained by current form and size.*

One interviewee described the turbulence in ways that shared the excitement of the leaders:

Geoff: *So we're very much in a state where everything's up in the air but that doesn't mean to sound like nobody knows what's happening, it's very much, it's a time I find quite exciting.*

However the changing business direction tended to remind other participants of past experiences of more 'cut and thrust' corporate cultures. One team member spoke of issues where a firm can get 'too big, too many partners, bicker and split'. In this regard another team member emphasised Quantum's ability to attract talented people by maintaining a friendly culture:

Robert: *...we've built up a very good reputation without necessarily being so cut and thrust by being able to attract good people who will naturally want to progress and do those things without necessarily having to have interrogations every Monday morning if they haven't produced sufficient work the previous week.*

Experience of previous cultures therefore seemed to fuel people's imaginations in ways that represented genuine concerns. The nature of these concerns also seemed to have the potential to inform ways of managing the changing business direction. However just as the wider team were sensing a shift from a small company 'family' culture to a more corporate style of business, the following extract shows awareness of the tension between the drive to achieve growth and the ethos of independent thinking and fulfilling individual potential:

Ted: *If all people are seeing is passed down is their workflow, what they need to get done by next week, the week after and so on and they're thinking God it's all about growth it's all about ...we haven't developed the framework yet really for the ethos to pervade as much as it should...*

This awareness aligned with team members' concerns about changing values seemed to indicate a cultural bond that was about balancing the business dimension and the human dimension of organisational life. However an unintentional gap between the commitment to creating a beneficial working environment and the experience of some staff is indicated in the following team member's extract, which was in stark contrast to the experience of working life that the leaders wished for staff:

Every single day, every day without fail I worry about my recovery. There's not a day goes by I don't worry about it. (Anecdote Circle Two).

The following participant's view seems to capture the competing influences on the individual's experience at work by contrasting the secure environment provided by introducing structure with the associated constraints on the ability to act independently:

Brian: *I think going to something that is a bit more corporate, where it's more structured and you have that set position, it can have pros and cons as well, in that being defined, it takes that bit of responsibility and a little bit of pressure off the individual, but limiting that freedom I suppose to a point restricts the variety and excitement of what they can do.*

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Findings suggested that competing influences associated with 'changing direction' had unpredictable characteristics: recognition of the need for improved structures as the business was growing accompanied by a turbulence that could be seen as exciting or be associated with negative memories of turbulent growth. Also the small company 'family' culture at Quantum seemed to be in tension with the drive for growth. These features of a ripple effect appeared to involve some clashing 'corporate', 'entrepreneurial' and small company 'family' aspects stimulated by the coaching initiative that had helped to reinvigorate the business.

In summary a ripple effect could be seen to involve aspects of a 'changing business direction' on the following spectrum:

'need for improved structures' ←→ 'turbulence as exciting'.

7.1.4 Findings: 'Changing organisational dialogue'

A further strand of a ripple effect was associated with the changing organisational dialogue at Quantum. A new conversation seemed to centre on concerns about the focus on growth and the perception of a corresponding loss of traditional values. These concerns appeared to flow from widening participation and calling for ideas. One way of looking at responses to the October 2009 Team Day communication was to recognise that this message was received by people with differing values, motivations, needs, capacities to seize opportunities, in different office environments and at different stages of life. There was a suggestion that a clear message pervaded the company:

> Paul: *...everyone is talking about growth across the firm...and all decisions are taken with growth in mind, they do want to grow.*

However in one anecdote circle the group appeared to be less affected by the new direction.

> *We're more likely to talk about the way things don't change...* (Anecdote Circle One).

It was also suggested by one interviewee that the dialogue about growth might wane in the wider organisation:

> Paul: *I suppose it loses some momentum as you go through the organisation but I think everyone's talking about it.*

The company questionnaire showed that over 50% of respondents disagreed with the statement 'company communication is consistent and effective' with over 20% disagreeing strongly. However despite the apparently unpredictable nature of communication at Quantum, the radical financial growth target also triggered questions about the new direction shared in groups and by individuals:

We haven't been given an exact reason as to why this is happening. (Anecdote Circle Two).

David: *...is expanding as fast as you can and getting a bigger turnover is that necessarily the best thing? I question it sometimes. Do you perhaps lose focus of things that are more important?*

These questions indicated several concerns: loss of traditional company values, the perception of an unnecessary emphasis on profits and financial growth, and wondering about the purpose of changes. These concerns are also noticeable in the following questionnaire responses:

Questionnaire Q14: Is there something else that you would like to add in relation to how things may be changing over the past year? If yes, please share below providing an example if possible.

---

*'some of our traditional **values are being lost**'*

*'the growth culture seems to have bred a feeling of **uncertainty**'*

*'Until recently we had been focusing upon **growth, almost at all costs**'*

*'I no longer know **where the firm is heading,** and how my role fits into that plan'*

*'I feel that people **are more anxious** about how things are going to change in the future (possibly some of these fears are groundless) regarding working more efficiently and generating more fee income'*

*'I feel the company is at a crucial time. The last year has seen some changes and more initiatives; this has caused **uneasiness** at times'*

Extracts from a total of 11 responses to Q14.

These findings appeared to suggest that tangible business targets were in tension with a strong desire to create a more participative culture where people might flourish. The sense gained from the above responses is of uncertainty and anxiety, which contrasted markedly with the intention expressed in the following leader's extract:

Ted: *...we want people to feel they can be emotionally secure... I want their voices to be heard and that's why we're doing it the way we're doing it but as part of it and I guess it's inevitable, anxieties come to the surface 'cos you're treading into new territory and I don't think you can avoid it.*

In this context a genuine desire for personal involvement in communicating deeply felt aspects of the company ethos was clear:

Ted: *I think the only way we can embed the ethos is people seeing what we do and they'll only see what we do if they're working with us and that will only happen if we go into these teams I think. Otherwise no one ever really gets close enough to have that time to impart it and the last thing, the last thing we should be doing is standing up and preaching at people.*

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The overall picture seemed to suggest that whilst some were unaffected, several team members were engaged in a changing organisational dialogue that questioned the new direction and worried about a shift away from traditional values. In parallel leaders seemed to empathise with some of the challenges in the wider organisation. Findings appeared to show a contrast between the clear communication of tangible aspects of the new direction and the complexity of the more emotional aspects of the organisational dialogue. In summary a ripple effect could be seen to involve competing influences that comprised:

'concern for financial growth' ⬅➡ 'concern for traditional company values'.

7.2 Summary

Findings showed a range of competing influences that suggested a tension between tangible business aspects and cultural and systemic aspects of organisational life more closely associated with the human dimension (Figure 7.2). Just as the organisation was hoping to benefit from diverse thinking and more open dialogue, it seemed that team members were respecting a culture of conformity. However this respect was accompanied by concerns about new processes, targets and structures, and aspects of the business growth agenda. One particular aspect was a company-wide commitment to maintaining genuine client relationships. These aspects of a ripple effect appeared to be in tension with a sense that the turbulence of change was exciting and with a potential shift in traditional company values. Underlying these influences there appeared to be a sense of pride in the company's reputation and a cultural bond shown in the wide concern to maintain specific values.

Organising Theme	Competing influences: 'Challenging prevailing culture'		
Diversity	Conformity	⬅➡	Independent thinking
Client Relationships	Financial growth targets	⬅➡	Genuine client relationships
Changing Business Direction	Need for improved structures	⬅➡	Turbulence as exciting
Organisational Dialogue	Concern for financial growth	⬅➡	Concern for traditional company values

Figure 7.2 Competing influences: Challenging prevailing culture

These competing influences captured dynamic aspects that might be more noticeable in a small organisation than in a large corporate structure. However findings might resonate with experiences in larger organisations wrestling with cultural aspects of change particularly associated with mergers and acquisitions.

Chapter Eight will now draw together the findings from this chapter and Chapters Five and Six, discuss the concept of reciprocal learning space to capture the dynamic learning environment that has been uncovered, and present the conclusions of this exploratory case study.

CHAPTER EIGHT: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

8.1 Introduction

The purpose of this in depth organisational study has been to understand the nature of a ripple effect following leadership coaching, to draw attention to the potential of coaching as an organisational intervention and to a perceived gap in coaching studies: real life dynamic experience in an organisation following the coaching of leaders. I found that leadership coaching outcomes, representing new changes in a constantly changing environment, elicited a variety of complex responses identified as reciprocal and competing influences from personal, leadership and organisational perspectives, which bring to life what is happening at a relational level in an organisation: at the interfaces *between* individuals. I saw these dynamic aspects as the characteristics of a ripple effect. Although findings suggest a significant effect of leader centred coaching on the organisation at the heart of this study, they also draw out mutual bonds and some tensions in the ripples: perceived influences from the perspective of individuals in the wider team beyond leaders who are coached. I have conceptualised this interplay of influences as *reciprocal learning space*. Insights from relational aspects identified in this study present a novel view of organisational 'presenting issues' and suggest that a focus on holistic and dynamic aspects of organisational life is the domain of a new and wider reaching coaching agenda. These insights have inspired me to develop a coaching framework that embraces the whole organisation as the 'client' and all organisational members as part of the 'whole'. I have called this approach *organisation focused coaching.*

This chapter begins with a brief overview to introduce some of the original insights in this study for the field of coaching in organisations before a discussion of the findings presented in Chapters Five, Six and Seven. I then introduce my holistic model of a ripple effect and from this model I draw attention to reciprocal learning space and make the connection between this concept and my practice framework for organisation focused coaching. I then discuss the unique contribution of this study which, by taking an holistic organisational viewpoint, contributes to coaching practice from theoretical, practical and methodological perspectives. The limitations of the study are then assessed and suggestions are made for future research. Finally I conclude with my reflection on the original contribution of the whole study.

8.2 Overview of the findings

Specific leadership coaching outcomes associated with this study were re-energised leaders, stretching business growth targets, new processes and a call for wider participation. In this regard the variety of responses, seen as reciprocal and competing

influences identified in this study, seemed to relate to the ambiguity and complexity of these business oriented *and* people oriented changes. These complex influences appeared to signify hidden strengths and also constraints from a business and human perspective and to suggest opportunities for learning and development through greater awareness of these relational aspects of organisational life. A ripple effect from leadership coaching outcomes could be viewed as a dynamic example of the unpredictable nature of change that occurs all the time in organisations. However in this case changes flowing from coaching at the top provided a clear starting point to look more deeply at an organisation's experience during a specific phase of transition and to understand the scope for coaching. By focusing on experiences that create patterns of influence I have endeavoured to draw out the human dimension of organisational life alongside the tangible coaching outcomes.

I now discuss each level of findings in the light of previous literature and suggest some implications for professional coaching, leadership and organisational practice.

8.3 Discussion: 'Awakening personal needs'

At the personal level findings suggest that leadership coaching outcomes triggered some new thinking among individuals in the wider organisation. Unpredictable responses reflected some of the dilemmas faced by individuals experiencing radical changes instigated by revitalised leaders. In this study leaders' needs for engagement and contributions from others also became apparent as part of a whole dynamic that seemed to create misunderstandings and concerns, despite positive intentions and mutual bonds. This complex interplay had the potential to affect the mutual endeavour of the whole organisation based on a genuine commitment to client service and small company 'family' values.

The specific leadership coaching outcomes associated with this study seemed to indirectly affect individuals in the wider team in ways related to personal values, aspects of confidence and individuals' sense of connection with the organisation. Findings seem to indicate the level of resilience people need to have during constant change. Whilst alternative reasons for 'awakening personal needs' may have related to a challenging working environment, a tough economic climate and perhaps private aspects of home life, it seemed that coaching outcomes created some emotional energies in the wider team that produced important questions for individuals concerning their future working life.

In this light it could be argued that a ripple effect represents the many aspects of flux associated with 'whole' change (Morgan, 1997, p283) following leadership coaching. In relation to personal needs responses to flux could be seen in the personal dilemmas

uncovered by this study associated with 'awakening personal needs': work/life balance *and* the need for the stimulus of personal challenge, individual frustrations *and* coping with the drive to re-energise the business, and also a need for reassurance *and* experiencing challenges to confidence from newcomers and competitors. These dilemmas seemed to combine a personal search for harmony with a sense of being in a cradle of change that required balancing. This combination seemed to resonate with the following picture of flux and transformation:

> *Opposites are intertwined in a state of tension that also defines a state of harmony and wholeness. Could this tension lie at the basis of all change? Could flux and transformation be a manifestation of contradictory tendencies through which phenomena change themselves?* (Morgan, 1997, p283).

This study has also identified the scope for mild confusion in relation to this picture of flux. For example, whilst the leaders were enthusiastic about greater participation, there seemed to be a sense of expectation and of looming change in the wider team. This differing energy seemed to involve some collective frustration. This confusion appeared to resonate with a view of widening participation in organisational plans as an 'inevitably frustrating and awkward process' (Kegan, 1994, p323). These findings suggest that reciprocal aspects of personal needs are part of a dynamic involving the whole organisation that had the potential for collective understanding, learning and change if unlocked.

In my experience leadership coaching typically begins with 360 degree feedback on the leader to be coached and performance criteria related to the individual's capacity to contribute to organisational aims. After coaching, further 360 degree feedback shows if positive change has occurred in the leader. Client organisations are then likely to use shorter term ROI measurements to try to quantify results. This approach aligns with a view of leadership coaching that sees change coming from developing competencies in individual leaders. However, by seeing leaders as just one 'component' of a greater whole this study begins to see some limitations in this approach. The potential appears to exist for longer term benefits from coaching that tackles important relational aspects that may be holding an organisation back.

At this point I would emphasise that this study does not disregard the significant benefits of individual centred coaching. However by itself, an approach that focuses on individuals 'at the top' appears to have unintended consequences leading to a potential imbalance in the development of the whole organisation. For example, it seems that whilst energy and enthusiasm at the top creates pace and vigour this may not reach all parts of an organisation. Additionally an emphasis on the business dimension appears to constrain opportunities to develop aspects of the human dimension of the whole organisation.

Organisation focused coaching, a concept that I propose and will introduce later in the chapter, would offer a way of working from a profound understanding of the interconnected nature of an organisation. In this way an agenda that starts with awareness of where an organisation may be 'stuck' in terms of the capacity to meet today's complex challenges, or is simply not benefitting from understanding its strengths, would become a context in which to support the collective team. The organisation focused coach would work with individuals as interrelated members of the 'whole' organisation.

I acknowledge that the influences from leadership coaching outcomes in this study are in part related to the prominence of the leaders' role in an SME environment and to the typical expectations and responsibilities of leaders at the top of organisations. It is difficult to ignore the reality of different responsibilities according to hierarchical positions in organisations. However findings from this study imply that noticing patterns of influence and relationships would enhance leaders' overall capacity even more in a world of unpredictable consequences. This could be done through coaching that explored future scenarios and their implications for the whole organisation.

An approach that used dialogue to place leaders 'in team members' shoes' might also be beneficial. Then to mirror this activity, coaching in the wider organisation might bring insight into the challenges of leadership and place individuals in 'leaders' shoes.' To begin with, selected coachees might be those who are deemed to be independent thinkers in different parts and at different levels of the organisation, providing an opportunity for creating leadership 'ripples' in the organisation as a whole.

Where leader centred coaching is an organisation's starting point, leaders might be encouraged to produce reflexive diaries before, during and after coaching. These diaries could reveal their own progression and also those areas where the wider team might be struggling without the benefit of similar motivational support. Whilst these suggestions are in the context of coaching 'at the top', they offer a potential way of overcoming potential tensions in the ripples from leadership coaching and of creating an even better flow amongst the wider team.

This study suggests that coaching at the top stimulates emotions, perceptions of leadership and cultural concerns more widely than previously understood. I would suggest that a wide repertoire of coaching interventions is needed to support all individuals coping in dynamic organisational space. The personal needs of individuals outside the focus of leader centred coaching appear to be responses to flux and at the same time experiences of flux. Furthermore the characteristics of a ripple effect at this personal level appear to communicate important features of an environment where

individuals can be at their best: a sense of belonging, genuine relationships and a blend of challenge at work and work/life balance.

A challenge for this study has been to understand the dynamic nature of a ripple effect from 'separate' components of the organisational 'whole': leaders and team members. Whilst this holistic study has not intended to explore any hierarchically based disconnection between leaders and followers, findings have illuminated some aspects of a 'leader/follower' dynamic discussed in previous literature. One of these aspects is an idea of 'servant leadership' (Greenleaf, 2002), which emphasises the leader's role in helping to meet followers' needs. Similarly leadership studies discuss the need for leaders to support individuals during turbulent phases, like the drive for growth at Quantum, by offering 'emotional connection and inspiration' (Sandler, 2009, pp30-35) and 'predictability, understanding, control and compassion' (Sutton, 2009, p49).

In contrast to these aspects emphasising the leader's role, this study reveals reciprocal personal needs: the leaders' restlessness and desire for change alongside the differing personal needs of the wider team. From this mutual perspective the whole organisation may be seen to have complex interrelated needs requiring support. Mutual needs among leaders and followers appear to represent an important feature of an organisation's development agenda. Opportunities for future research might include investigation into the balance of the business and human dimension at work and how coaching might help to integrate these aspects more fully.

8.4 Discussion: 'Shifting dependencies'

Characteristics of a ripple effect were also associated with ambiguous aspects of leadership culture defined simply as 'the way leadership is round here' (Tate, 2009, p33). This ambiguity related to shifts in the way the leaders were leading (accelerated pace, radical aims) and the way team members were responding (to a clear lead *and* to opportunities to take a lead). An opportunity for mild confusion seemed to exist in the ambiguous relationship between the perception of opportunity and the scope of opportunity to contribute. These findings into the nature of leaders' needs and of the ambiguities associated with leadership culture provide novel insights that are underemphasised in empirical studies.

In terms of the interplay between leaders and team members, this study has identified unpredictable responses to leadership coaching outcomes that suggest that for coaching in general, changing an organisation relies too heavily on a hierarchical and linear view rather than an holistic view of leadership and change. Findings show non-linear consequences of leadership coaching outcomes that are bound up with intricate personal responses to organisational change. This complex picture appears to resonate

with the outcomes of a longitudinal qualitative study into sense making during organisational change. In this recent study unintended consequences flowed from the different ways that people interpreted changes instigated by leaders (Balogun and Johnson, 2005, p1587). It seems that a coaching agenda drawing on experiences in the whole organisation could bring insight into the unpredictable roots of an organisation's challenges and strengths and create helpful coaching ripples from these sources.

Drawing on the whole organisation is a feature of *Lean Thinking* (Womack and Jones, 2003)*,* an approach that focuses on reducing 'waste' in order to create greatest value from a customer perspective. From a *Lean* perspective, reducing waste in manufacturing terms includes, for example, eliminating quality problems, reducing waiting time between activities and avoiding overproduction. The idea is to eliminate activities that add nothing to serving the customer. In my previous experience as a member of a Manufacturing Executive Team, this approach extends throughout the supply chain and so involves all stakeholders in the supply chain from client through to the source of the product or service. Hence reducing waste involves all stakeholders and embraces 'kaizen', the Japanese concept of continuous incremental improvement.

This idea of waste is used in the context of leadership to draw attention to the 'waste' of leadership talent that persists in organisations (Tate, 2009). Here the suggestion is that creating value is about identifying and addressing obstacles to leadership. In this regard Tate sets out the seven categories of waste more usually associated with *Lean Thinking*, applies these to leadership (pp108-9) and then offers ways of avoiding such waste (p110). From the unique perspective of an organisation's experience this study similarly uncovers unintentionally missed opportunities for leadership to flourish widely.

'Kaizen' therefore seems to offer a helpful perspective by emphasising collective accountability to continuously and incrementally improve the 'relational space'. By viewing organisational development in *Lean* terms it can be seen that understanding the organisational system goes much wider than the immediate organisational boundaries. In relation to this study it could be argued that a wider agenda for coaching could extend throughout a supply chain, with the potential to reach more widely than imagined at the start of this study. A coaching framework that embraces wider stakeholders would be important, and I would argue that it is critical to understand the natural, interrelated aspects of stakeholder relationships by adopting a systems perspective, rather than to take a linear perspective.

Whilst the immediate organisational environment may be characterised as 'murky' water (Tate, 2009, p32), this study offers a contrast by beginning to see brighter aspects of the organisational context: the collective commitment of individuals coping in an unpredictable environment, a desire for authentic relationships, and the good intentions

towards helping others. It seems that even where aspects of 'intolerance' are identified by this study, this could be viewed as a virtue being associated with striving for excellence (Long, 1998, p110). However these positives may signal opportunities masked by tensions associated with competing organisational influences.

Findings appear to support the view that leadership is more polarised in an SME context than in larger organisations, due to a greater reliance on leaders from team members (Haugh and McKee, 2004, p391). At the same time findings indicate responses to seemingly ambiguous leadership aspects that might also prompt reflection in larger organisations. These aspects include setting a firm direction *and* seeking ideas*,* acceptance of risk associated with learning *and* requiring high standards at an accelerated pace, and also encouragement for greater participation *and* hesitancy among staff in terms of coming forward. These ambiguities indicate the level of nuance involved in the leadership culture at Quantum, and perhaps leadership culture in general, in contrast with the hopes implicit in the following definition of an interdependent leadership culture:

> *the combined actions produced by* all *the organisation's members to ensure ideal direction, alignment and commitment.* (Palus, 2009, p4).

Based on the findings of this study, team coaching – at all levels of the organisation – could be a potentially helpful intermediary space between leader centred coaching and wider organisational change by adopting an outward facing, systemic approach (Brown and Grant, 2010, p31). With an understanding of dynamic organisational concerns as a starting point, team coaching could help individuals to reflect on team dynamics in the context of organisational concerns: for example, the team's concept of leadership (on a spectrum from 'heroic' to relational), and the influence of the team on other teams, clients, suppliers, investors, and the community.

To accompany this approach coaching might use feedback on leadership culture defined as 'aspects of organisational life that are deep seated, affect many people and are a function of more than one leader' (Tate, 2009, p175). Such feedback could be derived from appropriate inquiry in anecdote circles, forums suited to uncovering hidden cultural aspects. In contrast to individual focused 360 degree feedback, leadership culture related feedback would offer a more expansive starting point for bringing insight to, for example, hindrances to greater participation or levels of independent thinking**.**

Based on the findings from this study I would suggest identifying reciprocal learning space as the starting point for a wider reaching team coaching agenda. Opportunities for further research might include looking beyond the boundary of the team to understand the team's relationship with the whole system, rather than dealing with apparent weaknesses or amplifying strengths solely within the team. Reciprocal learning space

could be viewed as a set of presenting issues from the client (the organisation) that a team might address with the help of a systemic approach to coaching. This approach could involve inquiring about patterns and relationships:

> *the impact or influence that parts of this larger picture have on each other: what may make a change in one factor more or less effective, and what unexpected outcomes may occur.* (Clutterbuck, 2007, p231).

8.5 Discussion: 'Challenging prevailing culture'

From an organisational perspective a ripple effect from leadership coaching outcomes appeared to combine business oriented and people oriented influences that raised cultural concerns. For example, the drive for business growth seemed to affect people's beliefs and assumptions about organisational life, creating a further whirlpool of opportunities for ambiguity, misunderstanding and concern. Whilst these aspects may be typical of organisational change, it could be argued that leadership coaching outcomes may create an imbalance in the energies and space for reflection between leaders and other team members with unintended consequences for adapting as a whole organisation to change. This imbalance could be more marked in smaller organisations where the activities of leaders are more noticeable. In this case the vitality of the leadership team seemed to create ripples of energy *and* hesitancy in relation to becoming more involved. However I would suggest that the potential exists for similar ripples in larger organisations following coaching at the top. These findings offer new insights into the unintended consequences of 'top down' coaching and suggest that the traditional coaching focus may unintentionally create an imbalance in the relational space in organisations. From this point of view it seems that coaching has a part to play in raising awareness and addressing this imbalance. It is suggested that these findings offer fresh insight into the nature of energy and resistance in organisations during change.

During the investigation, participants' abilities to clearly articulate cultural aspects and concerns were noticeable, supporting the view that organisational culture is a strong and well understood feature of SME environments (Peel, 2006, p14). The combination of data from interviews, anecdote circles and the company-wide questionnaire seemed to indicate a collective sense of culture: an 'invisible consciousness' (Scholtz, 1987). In this regard a ripple effect was indicated by concerns about the potential loss of traditional small company 'family' values and the pace of growth. These concerns could be seen as an example of 'intolerance' in the wider team in relation to losing positive aspects of the culture at Quantum and could also be linked to a desire to maintain an excellent working environment. Interestingly where tolerance is usually associated with managerial control,

this study offers a wider perspective and suggests that tolerance of change is an aspect of the mutual relationship between people in an organisation.

Organisational culture is seen as a critical success factor for organisations (Boatman and Wellins, 2011, p13) and from this study it appears that leadership coaching outcomes can unintentionally disturb valued cultural aspects. Outcomes that presented challenges to a relaxed small company culture were new targets, processes and changes in roles and accountability. There was a sense that team members needed these changes to be aligned with traditional company values. These cultural aspects, combined with previously discussed personal and leadership aspects, represent interrelated facets of a whole ripple effect and provide an overall sense of 'inescapable mutuality' (Senge *et al*, 2008, p43). This whole phenomenon could be viewed as the dynamics of change in which everyone involved was both responding to change *and* influencing change.

A traditional ROI approach to understanding the impact of coaching provides a shorter term view of associated benefits (McGovern *et al,* 2001). However I would argue that longer term organisational benefit resides in creating coaching interventions that address hidden barriers to sustainable organisational success. In this study openness to seeing patterns of influence and relationships, a systems perspective, has helped to identify a rich learning agenda for coaching in organisations. Findings therefore provide a response to the call to make systems thinking more accessible to organisations (Ackoff, 2006, p707).

A systems perspective helps to surface subtle constraints and hidden strengths as a foundation for coaching the organisation as a whole and within this context the whole individual. Drawn from the findings of this study, examples are a bias towards conformity that could hinder independent thinking, and hidden strengths such as strong professional and cultural values and also a bias towards authentic internal and external relationships. Understanding these aspects could inform team coaching and individual coaching agendas with a view to creating shifts in awareness and behaviours that might contribute to a shift in the whole organisation.

A ripple effect from leadership coaching could be viewed as a feedback loop and therefore a continuation of the leaders' coaching process. Findings represent the facets of organisational feedback and begin to answer a call for greater understanding of how people in organisations 'make sense of and therefore contribute to change outcomes' (Balogun and Johnson, 2005, p1597). In this study the organisation has produced the basis for an integrated coaching agenda suited to helping the process of complex change. Accordingly the organisation has been able to behave just as an individual client behaves when presenting 'issues' for coaching.

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In practice, organisations often choose individuals to lead change processes. Here findings indicate that successful change could be supported by coaching that increases the focus on feedback from the 'organisation' and that couples this with attention to congruent behaviours. Leaders responsible for 'managing change' might focus on communicating emotional aspects of change alongside the business proposition, and encouraging dialogue, diverse opinions and confidence in others.

Leadership team coaching could also be a useful bridge between individual coaching and wider organisational change. This could be achieved by helping to shape team behaviours (visibility, productive dialogue, mutual respect) that encourage energy, collaborative working, sharing ideas in the wider organisation and role modelling a collective approach to leadership. Whilst this may have more immediate visible benefits in smaller organisations I would suggest that such team behaviours could also produce a helpful ripple effect in larger organisations. Opportunities for future research may include action research into leadership team coaching practice as a bridge between individual coaching and organisational development.

8.6. An integral perspective on a ripple effect from leadership coaching

It seems that a ripple effect brought about by specific leadership coaching outcomes is made up of influences that are reciprocal (harmonious) and competing (related to tensions), and a blend of the business and human dimensions also becomes apparent. Understanding these patterns of influence led to my conceptualising *reciprocal learning space*, discussed in more detail in the following section, as the scope for learning and change in an organisation: a dynamic learning environment as the basis of an integrated agenda for coaching.

A ripple effect from leadership coaching is shown as a dynamic and integrated phenomenon in Figure 8.1.

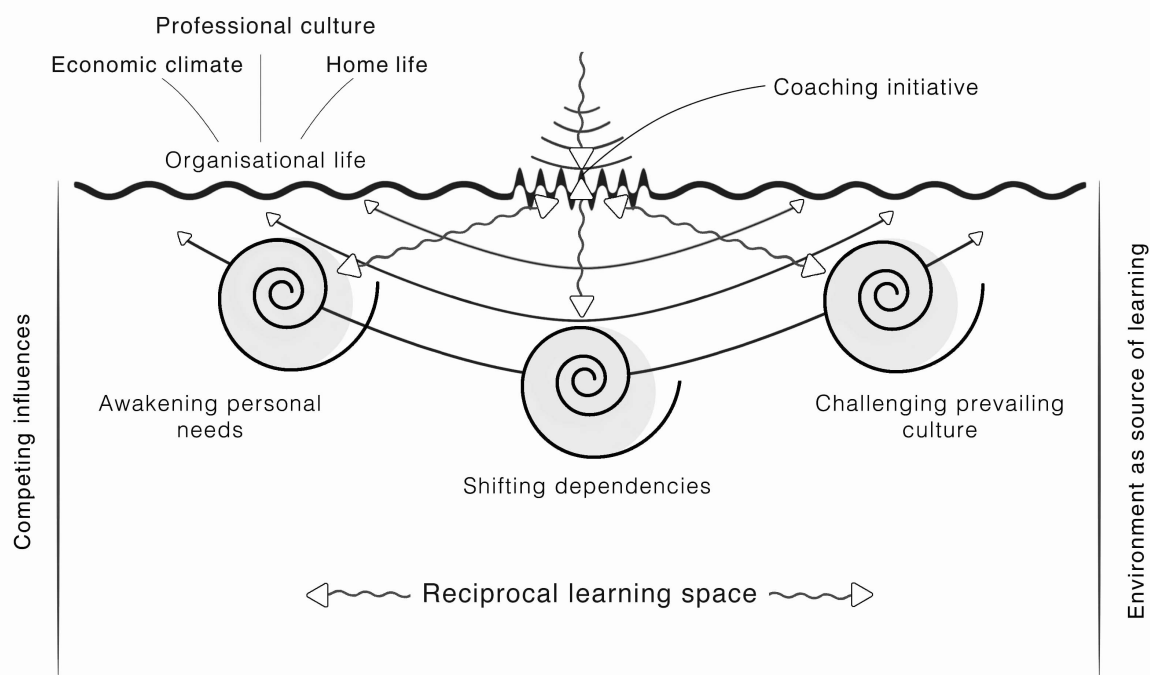A ripple effect from leadership coaching

Figure 8.1 Overview: A ripple effect from leadership coaching

This depiction of a ripple effect brings to life the unpredictability and complexity following change and the meaning behind the following words: 'we never directly experience the consequences of many of our most important decisions' (Senge, 1990, p23). This diagram illustrates the 'disturbance' from leadership coaching that produced a ripple effect. The disruption to the patterns of organisational life at Quantum is indicated by a wavy line suggesting the non-linear flow of different influences. To represent factors outside the coaching initiative other influences are shown: professional culture, here meaning the traditionally hierarchical and professionally rigorous ways of working in the field of accountancy, the economic climate which was becoming increasingly challenging for businesses at the time of the study, and more personal influences from the home life of organisational team members. Accordingly 'organisational life' is conceptualised as having an undulating 'surface', agitated by leadership coaching outcomes and also influenced by other factors. Below this surface lie the hidden organisational 'depths': dynamic aspects of organisational experience uncovered by this study.

In this organisational 'space' the three levels of thematic findings from this study are indicated: i) 'awakening personal needs', ii) 'shifting dependencies' and iii) 'challenging

prevailing culture' from which competing influences arise and become part of the organisational environment. Curved arrows depict the interconnected and reciprocal nature of these thematic groups. The reference in the diagram to the 'environment as a source of learning' marks the organisation's role as a sphere of learning and development. Reciprocal learning space then denotes the sheer scope for learning from reciprocal and competing influences. Hence the organisation is viewed from several perspectives: as an environment of competing influences, as a source of learning and as a client with great potential for learning.

The example of the natural frustrations felt in February 2011 described in Chapter Four, may help to bring this picture of a ripple effect to life. Competing influences associated with these events appeared to be about the intensification of the leaders' role *and* the ambiguity of their role. These competing aspects seemed to involve contrasting perspectives of leadership: reinvigorated heroic leadership *and* emerging distributed leadership where team members demonstrated independency and collaborative working. Coaching focused on intricate dynamics of this nature might unlock tensions by raising awareness of hidden bonds, amplify positive intentions and shift perspectives on leadership.

In tune with the metaphorical focus of this study, I have pictured the three levels of findings as interrelated 'whirlpools' occurring among other influences: home life, economic changes and cultural effects. These natural 'organisational whirlpools' attract profound questions that could be explored as part of an holistic coaching agenda: 'Why do they exist? How do they sustain themselves? What can be done to influence their course?' (Morgan,1997, p252). These particular questions are unlikely to be appropriate in a coaching conversation with individuals who are simply looking to cope and hopefully thrive in an organisational context. However by seeing these whirlpools as underlying issues presented by the organisation, coaching might explore these aspects as part of developing the organisation as a whole.

A suggested future research avenue would be case study research on a larger scale and over a longer time period to compare and contrast organisational experiences of coaching that focused on important underlying organisational aspects. Furthermore implications from understanding this example of a ripple effect are that organisations may present a less coherent 'story' to wider stakeholders – customers, suppliers, investors and the community - than imagined. Further research might explore stakeholder relationships at the organisational boundary and how coaching might help.

8.7 Reciprocal learning space

Competing influences presented in Chapters Five, Six and Seven combine to create an intricate set of opportunities for learning and change at the level of the interfaces between individuals. This domain represents reciprocal learning space and I see this as the arena for coaching in the organisational environment. The interplay of influences that is the basis of reciprocal learning space appears to blend the business and human dimension of organisations. Reciprocal learning space is about seeing levels of potential 'interference' at an organisational level. Understanding interference is at the heart of coaching and may be noticed at the individual level or among inter-relational aspects of teams (Downey, 2003, pp148-9). At the organisational level interference is more difficult to discern as it requires noticing relational aspects.

Reciprocal learning space spotlights the dynamics that represent potential obstacles to change and existing strengths that the organisation may not understand. The findings from this study illustrate the intricate nature of the interfaces between individuals through the voices of people that make up the organisation. This interrelatedness suggests a contrast with the view that "a system has a dynamic that is independent of the individuals who work in it" (Tate, 2009, p204).

The concept of reciprocal learning space arose during the analytical process of identifying competing influences and considering how these important aspects might be reconciled in a helpful way. It seemed that coaching from a collective perspective – organisation focused coaching – might foster collaborative behaviours and increase adaptability by helping to reconcile aspects that represent hidden constraints. In this way constraints could become springboards for learning and change. During this study I have been receptive to a definition of leadership as occurring 'in relational dynamics throughout the organisation' (Uhl-Bien, 2006, p655). It could be argued that reciprocal learning space is the arena for developing relational leadership by shifting focus towards collective, relational aspects. Accordingly this study suggests that coaching focused on reciprocal learning space expands the agenda of coaching from a leader centred approach.

Reciprocity is emphasised in collaborative learning in the education sphere. Processes that underpin collaborative learning seem to inform the coaching repertoire working in reciprocal learning space. In the educational sphere empirical research associates reciprocal learning with 'courage' and 'mutual respect' (Le Cornu and Peters, 2009, pp241-2), 'collegiality' (Patrick *et al*, 2010) and collaborative learning presented as follows:

> *A myriad of processes characterises the dynamic nature of collaborative learning. These integral processes include   social synergy, shared learning,*

dialogue process, critical exploration, and negotiations which result in reconfiguring the traditionally stratified roles of teachers and learners. Active engagement and ongoing reciprocity create a community of co-inquirers. (Lee, M., 2003, p79).

In an educational setting the call has been made to create spaces for leadership learning that emphasises reciprocity, partnership and thinking from a systemic perspective (Robertson, 2009, p43). A debate in adult learning is associated with whether the focus should be on individual learning or societal concerns (Lee, M. 2003, p91). Drawn from case study research, collaborative learning in education is shown to involve processes that extend a focus on the whole person to embracing the social dimension (Lee, M. 2003, p92). This study suggests that coaching focused on reciprocal learning space could complement individual centred approaches by addressing the whole person *and* by introducing an organisational focus. Whilst the prime focus of collaborative learning is on engaging the whole individual, this study also sees individual experiences as a way of collectively shaping reciprocal learning space. This in turn creates the basis for an organisation focused coaching agenda spotlighting the needs of the whole organisation. Hence the organisation, rather than the individual, becomes the client. By emphasising a place for coaching in the relational space of organisations this study supports the following assertion:

> *You cannot meet organisation–based needs with individual-based responses whatever this approach may achieve for individual managers in their jobs and careers.* (Tate, 2009, p69).

In spite of important similarities this approach to supporting organisational development contrasts with Appreciative Inquiry (AI) as a way of creating conditions for people to flourish in organisations. Where AI focuses on uncovering positive aspects of organisations to create a better future (Michael, 2005, p222), reciprocal learning space is derived from shared organisational experience and from asking questions that allow competing influences to emerge. A different perspective acknowledges that AI may focus too much on the positive and highlights the importance of the 'shadow' side of appreciative inquiry (Oliver *et al*, 2011, p57). However I would argue that reciprocal learning space goes further and is the domain for difficult and complex challenges that may not be unearthed by appreciative inquiry. As the basis for organisation focused coaching, reciprocal learning space recognises the cut and thrust of organisational life and seeks to address 'stuckness' in order to unleash more flexible, collaborative behaviours.

Hence organisations might adopt as a diagnostic tool a similar approach to that taken in this study using confidential one-to-one interviews, anecdote circles and a company questionnaire. In contrast to approaches based on appreciative inquiry, coaching in reciprocal learning space is about engaging with tensions that constrain the ability to

adapt to change rather than using predominantly positive feedback to create change. In this way coaching interventions could offer benefits that address longer term systemic challenges by indicating where an organisations may be 'stuck', rather than short-term performance enhancement to be measured in traditional ROI terms.

Linked to appreciative inquiry, positive organisational scholarship (POS) and positive organisational behaviour (POB) are associated with employee engagement (Bakker and Schaufeli, 2008, p147). I would suggest that reciprocal learning space could also enhance employee engagement although with a different approach based on inquiry to uncover some of the untidy 'presenting issues' of an organisation seeking improved employee engagement.

Furthermore reciprocal learning space offers a platform for furthering organisational learning by helping to address 'mixed messages' that involve 'paradox', 'inconsistency' and the 'undiscussable' (Argyris, 1999, p94). By emphasising dynamic features, such as those uncovered in the findings from this study, coaching would focus on important interdependent aspects, for example, the scope for further collaborative working at Quantum. In this way organisational learning would be supported by coaching experienced as a collective process engaged with the holistic development of the organisation as well as the developmental concerns of individuals.

8.8 Practice framework for organisation focused coaching

By illuminating relational aspects findings led to my conceptualising reciprocal learning space as the foundation for organisation focused coaching and from this I was inspired to create a practice framework (Figure 8.2). With this framework I suggest how practitioners might identify and address underlying strengths and concerns in organisations. This approach to identifying reciprocal learning space is adapted from the flexible methodological approach to this study.

The holistic framework focuses on both tensions and strengths of organisational life and the suggested process engages many in a process of learning and change from the outset, beginning at the centre (Figure 8.2) with dialogue and moving outwards to include supervision and the potential to explore the interfaces between the organisation and wider stakeholders: customers, suppliers and the community. Hence the metaphorical focus and associated findings for this study based in a systemic perspective have inspired a framework that continues this perspective into organisation focused coaching practice.
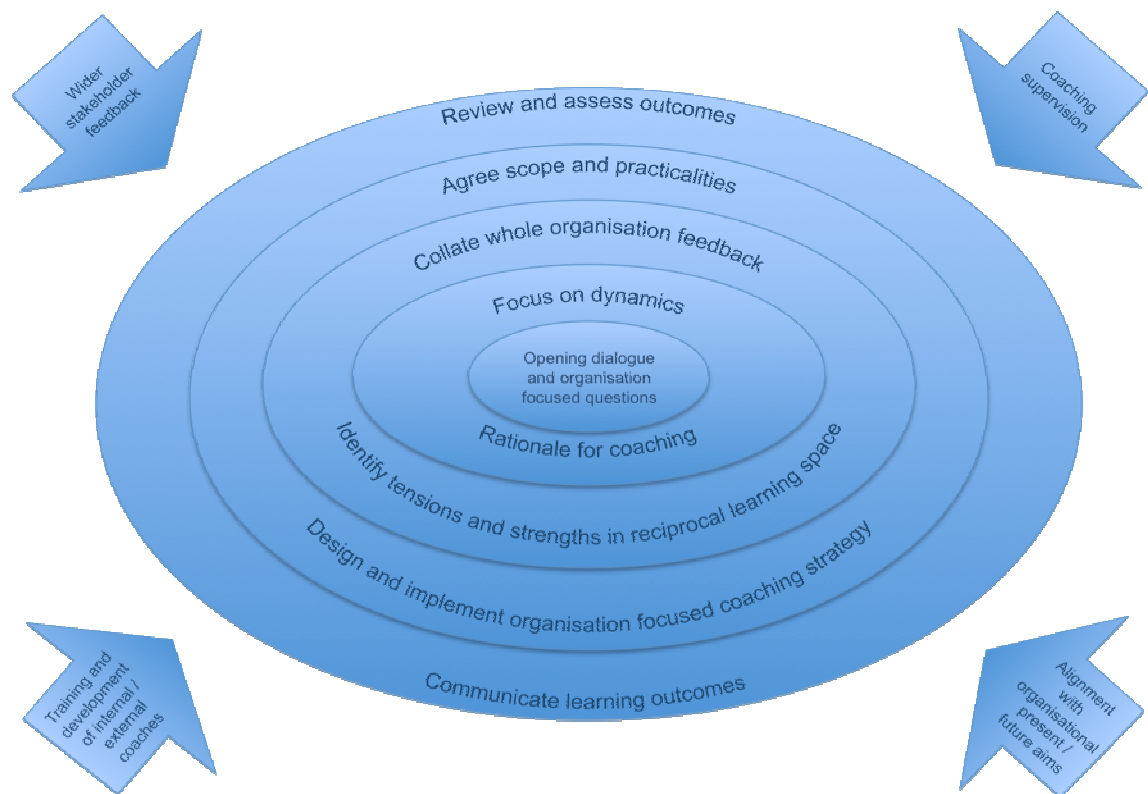
Figure 8.2 Practice framework for organisation focused coaching

Seeing the organisation as the client begins and ends with people who collectively make up the organisation (Downey, 2003, p170). During the course of this study it becomes apparent that a whole organisation might experience discernible influences that could be supported by wider reaching coaching. Whilst advocating a focus on dynamics rather than on individuals, organisation focused coaching would begin by opening dialogue with representatives of the organisation. However here is where organisation focused coaching could begin to shift focus by presenting and discussing the rationale for a different, more holistic approach. In practice this dialogue is likely to begin with members of the top team. From my own experience commitment and understanding from key decision makers at the outset is critical to the success of coaching interventions.

An associated ethical framework would centre on a similar approach to this study where individual experiences that make up organisational feedback and hence 'presenting issues' would focus on the self rather than others. Inquiry would allow participants the freedom to express emotions based on their own experience. For example feedback drawn from anecdote circles might invite participants to reflect on a time when they might have felt 'happy', 'frustrated' or simply 'surprised'. This line of inquiry opens up possibilities for discovering not only the potential, but also what might be in the way of successful change at a profound level in the organisation.

An holistic framework (Figure 8.2) sets out a practical route to identifying and working with aspects of reciprocal learning that may be conceptualised as presenting issues from the whole organisation. This framework is aimed at meeting the needs of an organisation at an integrated level and is rooted in the data by picking up on the variety of responses and suggesting a holistic approach to addressing such variety and complexity.

Findings indicated that leadership coaching outcomes triggered both opportunities and concerns. Based on these insights the framework is how I present a route to identifying these aspects as this might occur in other organisations, too. Also having identified in this study that leadership coaching is one splash among many, the framework supports adapting to change whatever its source may be. In this light reciprocal learning space represents underlying organisational strengths and concerns at different stages of complex organisational life.

Ambiguities may be identified that are sources of concern at personal and leadership levels. Concerns and strengths may be uncovered at the cultural level. The framework enables coaches to ask different questions and, using a systemic methodology, to identify relational aspects and help inform the organisation's way forward. Benefits occur straightaway as individuals are engaged from the start during the diagnostic phase to gather multiple viewpoints.

The findings of this study suggest that coaching outcomes at the individual level might trigger unpredictable opportunities and concerns at the organisational level requiring a different type of supervisory dialogue. The implication for supervision is that the requirement is to support coaching at a greater multi dimensional level. Organisational focused coaching requires engagement at a systemic level wider than the 'selves' of the supervisor and coach since the client is defined as the whole organisation. Supervision would need to address the perspective of the whole organisation *and* the supervisor/coach/coachee perspective. Understanding of the boundaries between the organisation and the wider business context which is constantly in flux would also be important. Accordingly supervision becomes much more of a conversation about the nature of the interfaces in an organisation.

In summary the framework offers a route to defining interfaces and boundaries, asking new coaching questions and making sense of the organisation as a whole through its 'presenting issues'. Multiple perspectives are addressed through supervision, and the focus is on the engagement not only of all who make up the organisation but has the potential to reach out to wider stakeholders, and factor in a variety of influences, all part of the organisational environment. Based in a systemic perspective this framework

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signals a new approach to supporting organisational adaptability to constant wider change.

To supplement Figure 8.2 the underlying principles and a process for organisation focused coaching are outlined in Appendix XVII.

8.9 Unique contribution

The findings from this study seem to address gaps in the previous literature: a lack of empirical studies showing patterns of experience after change from a whole organisation perspective, the nature of interfaces between individuals throughout a 'real life' organisation and understanding of the interconnected human dimension, and from an under reported SME perspective. In this section I discuss the unique contribution of this study at three different levels.

8.9.1 Theoretical contribution to coaching literature

This study focused mainly on the body of literature associated with leadership and executive coaching and found a dominant tendency to view coaching from hierarchical, corporate and coach/coachee relationship perspectives. Whilst a preoccupation with individual performance and the corresponding 'Return on Investment' prevails in the coaching literature, this study's interest in human interconnectedness has helped to produce findings that contribute to an important area of knowledge for coaching: how to support organisations in their capacity to adapt constantly in an interconnected world?

Findings support emergent ideas, albeit in the mentoring sphere, about the need to see beyond individuals and into systemic organisational space (Jones and Corner 2012) and show that the wider reach of coaching involves the capacity to see what is happening at the human interfaces in organisations. This study chimes with this view in the mentoring literature by setting aside traditional hierarchical ideas of executive and leadership coaching and offering a fresh perspective on the skill, capacity and role of the coach practicing in organisational settings. The conclusions reached in this research strongly support a need to rebalance an emphasis on individual leaders in transition with a focus on organisations as wholes in continuous flux.

By being open to relational concepts of leadership and to human interconnectedness as a significant underlying characteristic of organisations, it becomes possible to shape a coaching agenda that starts by identifying the variety of responses to specific changes. Findings from this study have signalled the scope for wider reaching coaching and the need to conceptualise coaching as an intervention at the interfaces between individuals. Analysis of the real life experiences of participants in this study provides a new

dimension that is missing in the attempts to understand complex, natural interfaces that characterise the human dimension of organisations.

The study also contributes to the literature on relational concepts of leadership that deal with interfaces between individuals rather than individuals themselves. Findings from this study indicate some of the ambiguities associated with relational aspects that included distributed and shared leadership where issues of accountability can become blurred. This study provides some insight into the complexities of real life relational aspects of leadership.

Finally this study has also contributed to understanding the under-researched setting of a small medium sized enterprise by bringing to life an SME experience during a period of significant change. The study also offers a tentative contribution to the field of 'relational leadership' by illustrating the potential for mutuality and also unintended conflict in the relational leadership space.

In addition to my theoretical contribution I see the introduction and development of 'reciprocal learning space' as a conceptual contribution resulting from my interpretation of the three sets of competing and reciprocal influences as a combination of learning opportunities. These opportunities arise from understanding what is happening at the interfaces between individuals in an organisation. Reciprocal learning space is the domain for coaches wishing to practice *in* the organisational system rather than from the edges of the system by taking a systemic view of responses to change. Working with reciprocal learning space requires skill in identifying interfaces between individuals through the voice of the whole organisation.

This conceptual contribution gives attention to a dynamic, integrated perspective as a result of seeing beyond the traditional view of hierarchy and control in organisations and being open to relational aspects of organisational life. This shift in mindset helps to move from individual centred coaching to coaching focused on the natural interfaces in an organisation co-created by its many individuals. This concept draws attention to the wider agenda for coaching where the task is to ask new questions and through collaborative working, to address underlying concerns and highlight hidden strengths in the whole organisation.

8.9.2 Practical contribution

In combination findings provide a rich organisational story to add to readers' own stories of organisational life. This story can contribute to deeper awareness important for coaches working in organisation at the time of change. Firstly, at the personal level, findings contribute a story of individual needs in response to changes. Secondly the story of ambiguity associated with leadership brings to life tensions and bonds when

ways of leading change. Thirdly findings present a story of an organisation coping with a sense of losing aspects of cultural tradition. It seems that there is more for coaching to do to create reflective space and to support and guide more widely in organisations than is currently emphasised in the coaching literature.

These findings prompted me to develop my practice framework for organisation focused coaching to help coaches to identify and address the unique features of reciprocal learning space in client organisations. The key practical contribution is finding a route to accomplishing specific developmental shifts in the whole organisation by embracing all staff at the outset as participants in change, identifying and addressing relational tensions and amplifying strengths.

8.9.3 Methodological contribution

The first methodological contribution is the multifaceted choice of methods to reflect the complexity of the research focus and systems approach. This approach contributes to understanding creatively how we might explore dynamic phenomena using a systems lens. A case study approach using multiple methods led to an investigation that uncovered the component parts of a phenomenon through thematic network analysis and also the concept of reciprocal learning space from seeing dynamic aspects of an interdependent whole. Confidential individual interviews and a company questionnaire allowed narrative responses that provided opportunities for participants to share individual experiences in different ways for depth and breadth respectively.

A second specific contribution is the introduction of anecdote circles, an approach providing additional richness, centred on the opportunity for story-telling (Callahan *et al*, 2006; Carter, 2009) which provided an important methodological contribution to this case study by allowing participants to share sometimes emotional experiences among close colleagues. These experiences generated complex data that represented some dynamic aspects that could not arise from individual interviews or questionnaires. In these sessions individuals were sufficiently relaxed to engage in humour and also in more profound dialogue about events that touched all participants in the circle. Whilst the inability to generalise from these sessions may be seen as a limitation, anecdote circles resulted in data that felt honest and on occasion heartfelt as teams were comfortable with sharing truths that would perhaps not be shared in private.

Anecdote circles work best in a relaxed atmosphere and for this reason the set up requires careful attention (Callahan *et al*, 2006, p14). In this way anecdote circles align with important aspects of coaching where ambience, comfort and safety are important environmental aspects. For this study I prepared for both anecdote circles by choosing groups of participants who were friends, selecting comfortable private office space,

preparing delicious light food and drink and ensuring that my own mood was suitably relaxed for the occasion. These efforts were intended to contrast with the more formal approach associated with focus groups where the intention is to discover opinions rather than stories and experiences. Due to the relaxed nature of the approach, anecdote circles seem to get close to 'real life' and can uncover important cultural aspects in a trusted group environment. For these same reasons I have advocated the same approach as part of identifying reciprocal learning space as a precursor to organisation focused coaching.

A third methodological contribution involves my approach to thematic network analysis and an associated call for 'the exchange of ideas, concepts, and experiences' associated with this analytical tool that suffers from 'gross under-reporting' (Attride–Stirling, 2001, p403). I have responded to this call by offering details on the intricacies of my approach in Chapter Three (see Figure 3.3). I hope that my intended transparency will be helpful to other researchers interested in an approach that draws on intuition and non-linear thinking (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p403).

A specific example of my approach has been the creative use of 'prompts' during thematic network analysis (Figure 5.1). This idea arose in response to a challenge during the process of interpreting findings when it became necessary to shift from a focus on components (units of data) to overarching themes and their meaning. To help with the interpretative process I needed a change in mindset. I therefore created this change by devising specific questions to challenge my interpretations, enabling me to shift perspective and draw a further level of meaning from the data.

8.10 Assessment of limitations and challenges

The complexity and scope of this multi-dimensional study has led to various limitations and challenges. Firstly it could be argued that contrasting team members and leaders experiences created a limitation by introducing a disconnection that threatened to obscure a view of the whole ripple effect. However by juxtaposing data from all participants and drawing relevant conclusions it was in the end possible to see dynamic aspects that suggested mutuality *and* natural tensions associated with change.

A further limitation has been that individuals recounted their experiences without recourse to reflexive diaries. Therefore whilst accounts seemed to benefit from their immediacy, there may have been a reduction in their reflective nature. In addition it could be argued that those who volunteered to share experiences face to face were the more vocal members of the organisational team leading to a bias towards the more extrovert members of the organisational team.

An emphasis on particularity in case study research creates an exemplar of the case from which others might derive meaning and understanding (Willig, 2008; Flyvbjerg, 2006). A challenge has been to discern particular aspects that relate to the phenomenon under investigation rather than idiosyncrasies of general interest. However an aspect of the SME context was that the leaders' clear response to coaching created an obvious starting point for considering diverse influences, including events, behaviours, and beliefs. The manageable size of the organisation, and the rapport with organisational team members, meant that responses to clear coaching outcomes could be discerned more easily than would perhaps have been the case in a larger more complex organisation. Also I have been mindful of influences relating to professional culture, economic climate and home life and this awareness has helped me to discern these influences and separate them from the data. I have also been aware that the imminent departure of one of the company's founders could be an influencing factor by intensifying emotional aspects of tension in a ripple effect. However awareness has helped me again to focus on interpreting influences that appeared to arise from the immediate coaching outcomes.

By choosing a single SME environment this study has been able to explore a ripple effect throughout an organisation due to the manageability of the organisation's size. However a limitation of this study is that it is difficult to generalise from the findings due to the uniqueness of the case. There will be differences between a small entrepreneurial company growing at pace compared to, for example, a long established, steadily growing large corporation. Among SMEs there will be different contexts to take into account when trying to apply the findings more widely. Whilst outside the scope of this study in terms of timescale and resource, a longitudinal study that also involved multiple cases would offer the opportunity to apply findings to different contexts over a longer period. Although I have not sought to generalise I have hoped that findings might show some universal aspects of the human dimension at work that may have resonance for different SMEs and for larger organisations. Clear coaching outcomes, albeit in a unique SME context, have enabled me to use this single case as an example of the potential for unpredictable influences from leader centred coaching.

Furthermore it could be argued that a ripple effect may have been intensified by the research itself. Just as in coaching, this research allowed individuals to express their feelings in a safe environment. As the research required reflection on experiences it is likely that the research process itself created its own ripples. With particular regard to anecdote circles, this challenge corresponds with the view that 'once an anecdote circle process is started, the change has already begun' (Callahan *et al*, 2006, p5). However it is hoped that by questionnaire design, careful examining of factors that might not be related to a ripple effect and building rigour and trustworthiness into the study, I have

helped to eliminate opportunities for greater intensity to creep in. By drawing on my coaching experience, and also my experience of interviewing for my MBA study, my approach to data collection involved being balanced about raising levels of emotion. I was also focused on individuals' own experiences rather than inviting views that might ignite emotions or concerns.

Challenges have included ethical constraints that have made it difficult to draw out some of the idiosyncrasies of the case. It was important to balance reporting particular contextual features of the case, whilst also vital to maintain the anonymity of individuals and teams. However, reporting thematically has helped with the challenge set by the ethical framework.

At the outset I created a challenge by specifically seeking an organisation where I was previously unknown: I wanted to be able to 'stand back' and view the organisation through fresh eyes. However it soon became clear that through building rapport with the many participants and other staff, through time spent with my HR counterpart, and by gaining a sense of the organisational culture over time, the potential for my own involvement in influences was clear. Multiple methods also produced a wealth of data and it was therefore inevitable that wide scope existed for my personal angle in my interpretation of data. However, I feel that this potential for influences between the organisation and myself has been compensated by a genuine care that I felt for this organisation and my desire to produce as clearly as possible a reflection of the organisational experience, from which the organisation can also benefit.

A further challenge is that I may have enacted a division between leaders and followers by contrasting experiences in order to draw out additional dynamic thematic findings. However as leadership coaching outcomes stemmed from the leaders it seemed appropriate to contrast team members' experiences with leaders' experiences. Whilst this approach seems at first to emphasise duality a focus on dynamic and interconnected aspects of organisational life has uncovered reciprocity rather than an interplay between individual leaders and followers.

8.11 Further suggestions for future research

Mixed methods approaches are favoured in future coaching research (Passmore and Fillery-Travis, 2011, p80) and it might be valuable to compare the findings of a mixed methods study in a large organisation or to compare and contrast findings among different sectors. Building on the findings of this study, action research, an approach influenced by systems thinking (Hawkins, 2004, p411), may be a particularly fruitful avenue for future research by taking each or any of the competing influences identified

and exploring these in greater depth: 'working with creative dichotomies' (Hawkins, 2004, p420).

This study has also viewed organisational experience at three levels, each of which might be explored separately in-depth. Longitudinal research would also enable changes over time to be examined. Approaches to researching dynamic organisational aspects might also involve an emphasis on organisational stories and myths, reflexive diaries of team members and participant observation of groups.

8.12 Concluding thoughts

My choice of metaphorical focus lends a new perspective that has led to surprising discoveries about the ambiguities and challenges of organisational life. These discoveries have been part of a journey towards seeing coaching as an integral aspect of organisational development.

This journey has involved identifying an interplay of influences, a variety of responses to changes, conceptualised as natural space for learning which in turn has helped to shape a practice framework. These insights and associated holistic framework are to help coaching practitioners seeking to identify and address deeply embedded organisational concerns and hidden strengths. Hence the metaphorical focus has provided a rich basis for an understanding of the wider reach of coaching and how this might strengthen coaching practice.

This study has shown that whilst leader centred coaching can stimulate energetic and exciting organisational change, this approach can also stimulate unpredictable influences in the organisation. It seems that an organisation responds as an entity incapable of being controlled. Unintended consequences in the wider organisation appear to involve complex tensions that may hinder success and mask hidden strengths. However these same tensions also signify opportunities. At a time when people in organisations need to be resilient in the face of constant change this study presents an integrated approach to coaching which sees organisations as a whole where multiple viewpoints and mutual bonds exist.

This also comes at time when the profession is calling for insight into the wider reach of coaching and when there is a lack of empirical studies in the area of human interconnectedness. By adopting a metaphorical focus and a systems perspective this study indicates a new way of thinking for researchers and practitioners alike. The main message is that coaching can help to bypass traditional assumptions about hierarchy, control and accountability by plunging deeper into the organisational system for understanding. A fresh dialogue between coaches and organisations is called for – one

that explores connections, shared responses and catalyses participation at all levels in learning and change.

The study suggests that opportunities for the coaching profession can be found in reciprocal learning space, which represents the scope for learning and change. It is hoped that this study, which began by exploring the nature of a ripple effect from leadership coaching, may create some ripples of influence on future theory and practice in coaching, leadership and organisational development.

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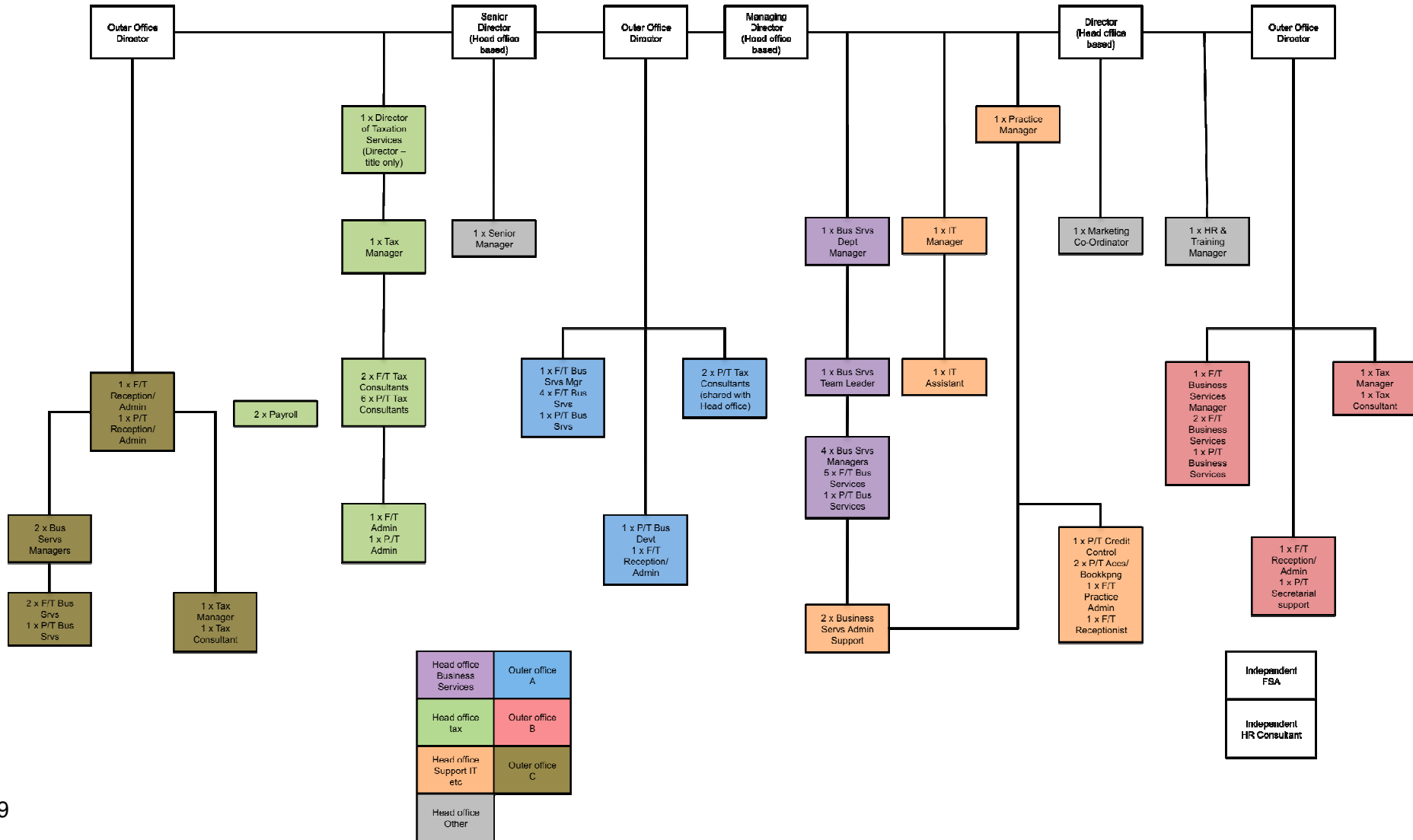
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Appendix I - Organogram: Quantum (as at 1st September 2009)

Outer Office Director

Senior Director (Head office based)

Outer Office Director

Managing Director (Head office based)

Director (Head office based)

Outer Office Director

1 x Director of Taxation Services (Director – title only)

1 x Practice Manager

1 x Tax Manager

1 x Senior Manager

1 x Bus Srvs Dept Manager

1 x IT Manager

1 x Marketing Co-Ordinator

1 x HR & Training Manager

1 x F/T Reception/ Admin
1 x P/T Reception/ Admin

2 x Payroll

2 x F/T Tax Consultants
6 x P/T Tax Consultants

1 x F/T Bus Srvs Mgr
4 x F/T Bus Srvs
1 x P/T Bus Srvs

2 x P/T Tax Consultants (shared with Head office)

1 x Bus Srvs Team Leader

1 x IT Assistant

1 x F/T Business Services Manager
2 x F/T Business Services
1 x P/T Business Services

1 x Tax Manager
1 x Tax Consultant

2 x Bus Servs Managers

1 x F/T Admin
1 x P/T Admin

1 x P/T Bus Devt
1 x F/T Reception/ Admin

4 x Bus Srvs Managers
5 x F/T Bus Services
1 x P/T Bus Services

1 x P/T Credit Control
2 x P/T Accs/ Bookkpng
1 x F/T Practice Admin
1 x F/T Receptionist

1 x F/T Reception/ Admin
1 x P/T Secretarial support

2 x F/T Bus Srvs
1 x P/T Bus Srvs

1 x Tax Manager
1 x Tax Consultant

2 x Business Servs Admin Support

Head office Business Services

Outer office A

Head office tax

Outer office B

Head office Support IT etc

Outer office C

Head office Other

Independant FSA

Independant HR Consultant

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Research Topic: The ripple effect from leadership coaching

Researcher: Lesley O'Rourke- Oxford Brookes University

This document is a guide to the questions and themes that I am hoping to explore with you in a confidential interview.

The interview is semi-structured and is focused only on experiences and observations that may be related in your view to a' ripple effect from leadership coaching' i.e. the spreading of influences that may follow the coaching of leaders.

With this in mind I will be interested in your experience of organisational life following the coaching initiative. Questions will relate e.g. to the scope of your work; to how in your view things are done at (Quantum); to opportunities for learning and development and to any other aspects of your working life that are important to you and that you feel may have been influenced by any changes following the coaching initiative. I will be interested in examples, if any, of what has happened, what you have noticed and what you feel is different in your organisation. I will ask, for example: 'Have you been influenced in any way to behave differently?' 'Could this be related to any changes in aspects of leadership/culture following the coaching initiative?' Although it is usually difficult to determine the direct link from an initiative of this nature, I will be interested in your perspective.

I will also be interested in examples of relevant communications, decisions and events that in your view represent changes in the way things are done at (Quantum). Also I will be interested in any changes that you may have experienced in relation to your own sense of engagement with the organisation and that may in your view be connected to a different approach in the company.

The next stage will be to explore your view on any value in the broadest sense that may have been created in relation to aspects discussed. I will be interested in your perspective on this value for you and for the organisation as a whole. If applicable I would finally like to ask your view on any relevant implications for your organisation.

Thank you for taking the time to read this interview guide.

Appendix III Research Participant Interview Guide (Leaders)

Research Topic: **The ripple effect from leadership coaching**

Researcher: *Lesley O'Rourke - Oxford Brookes University*

This document is a guide to the questions and themes that I am hoping to explore with you in the interview.

The interview is semi structured and is focused only on experiences and observations related in your view to a ripple effect from leadership coaching i.e. influences forwarded from you to others resulting from your coaching.

With this in mind I will be interested in examples, if any, of what has happened, what you have noticed and what you feel is different following your coaching experience. For example I will be asking about any change you may have noticed in your work relationships; about any effect you may have had on the performance of others; and any effect you may have had on the learning and development of others. I will be interested in any connections you may make between the effect of your coaching experience and changes for the ripple zone i.e. those people who may experience related influences.

I would then like to explore with you the value, in your view, of any changes that you may have observed or perceived for the people involved and the organisation as a whole.

If applicable I would finally like to ask your view on any relevant implications for your organisation.

Thank you for taking the time to read this interview guide.

Appendix IV - Research Participant Interview Guide (Leaders-Phase Two)

Research Topic: **The ripple effect from leadership coaching**

Researcher: ***Lesley O'Rourke - Oxford Brookes University***

This document is a guide to the questions and themes that I am hoping to explore with you in a confidential interview. The interview will be semi-structured and focused on your experience of any change that you may have felt following the coaching initiative.

I will be interested in examples, if any, of what has happened, what you have noticed and what you feel is different in relation to your approach and experience of working life at (Quantum). I will ask, for example: 'Have you noticed anything different about yourself at work?' 'Could this be related to any changes in the organisational environment following the coaching initiative?' Although it is usually difficult to determine the direct link from an initiative of this nature, I will be interested in your perspective.

The next stage will be to explore your view on any value in the broadest sense that may have been created in relation to aspects discussed. I will be interested in your perspective on this value for you and for the organisation as a whole. If applicable I would finally like to ask your view on any relevant implications for your organisation.

Thank you for taking the time to read this interview guide.

Appendix V - Interview questions: Wider team

Q1

What is working life like at Quantum from an employee perspective?

I'd like you to tell me in as much detail as possible about your experiences of working at Quantum; whether something may have changed in recent months and if so, what you feel may have influenced any changes.

- *Could you begin by describing your experience of a typical working day?*
- *So what is the scope of your role and how much freedom do you have to act?*
- *How would you describe the way things are achieved here? Is this changing?*
- *Have you an example of something that has particularly motivated you in relation to your work? What in your view influenced this? (Any change in recent months?)*
- *Have you an example of something that has particularly frustrated you in relation to your work? What in your view influenced this? (Any change in recent months?)*

Q2

What is expected of people at Quantum?

- *What do you feel is expected of you at work? Have you noticed any change in expectation of you? Of your team? Of others?*
- *Are you being asked to do anything different in recent months?*
- *What is the attitude to failure? To risk? Is this changing?*
- *How are ideas/knowledge/differences of opinion shared? Are you noticing more diverse views expressed?*

Q3

Has anything changed recently? If so, what is the nature of any perceived change and what might have influenced change?

- *Tell me about working relationships at Quantum - anything changing?*
- *Thinking about your typical day has this changed in any way in recent months? If so - in what way?*
- *Thinking about the organisation as a whole: what in your view are the most important challenges for Quantum? How are these being managed? What is different?*
- *What seems to be urgent now compared to previously? Any example of initiatives that are accelerating? Or slowing down?*
- *Do you have any examples of relevant communications, decisions and events that in your view represent changes in the way things are done at Quantum?*

- *Have you experienced any change in your own sense of engagement with the organisation? Could this be in your view connected to a different approach in the company?*

- *Have you been influenced in any way to behave differently? Could this be related to anything new about leadership at Quantum?*

- *Thinking about your opportunities to learn – has anything particular occurred? How did this come about? Is this different?*

- *Has anything happened recently at work that you are curious about?*

Q4

Has any perceived change helped with personal /team/organisational performance? If so, how?

- *What are your personal priorities in relation to your working life? How are these being met? Have you noticed any changes?*

- *What's important to you at work in order to be at your best? Is anything happening differently for you to be at your best? Could this be associated with the coaching of leaders?*

- *Are you noticing any change in the way your team is behaving/performing?*

- *Tell me about any new communications, decisions, events that represent a change in the way things are done at Quantum.*

- *How do you think Quantum is performing?*

- *Are you noticing any change in relationships with stakeholders e.g. employees,, customers, suppliers, community, investors? What in your view are the major influences?*

- *What in your view is the value to you, your team, or to the organisation as a whole of any changes that you may have noticed?*

Finally…

- ***Can you tell me a story or anecdote about anything that stands out for you in relation to what we have been discussing?***

Appendix VI - Anecdote Circle 'triggers'

When have you felt most excited or most frustrated or uplifted about working life here at your company in the last year?

When have you been disappointed or happy or perhaps just pleasantly surprised at work?

How are you generally feeling about the new business growth target?

As a team are you feeling any need to behave differently and if so have you an example...?

Has anybody got any anecdotes to share about...?

Any surprises in terms of conversations you have had?

Has this been your experience as long as you've been working here or is there something different about the last 12 months at all?

Are you noticing anything different in the way life is here over the period of the last 6-12 months?

Has anybody got an example of a period when they've felt very happy with what they are doing or perhaps disengaged or perhaps found work particularly funny or amusing?

...is there a particular experience you want to tell us about?

Has anybody got a similar story or something to top that?

Can you think about a time when the office has been particularly lively, or particularly quiet or tense or amusing?

Thinking of a time in the recent past, has anyone felt particularly detached or particularly involved?

So how did that make you feel... the communication about a stretched goal?

Has anybody got any examples or short tales, the sort of thing you might talk about over a coffee or in a pub situation?

Do you have a sense of a change in expectation of you either as an individual or as a team or in connection with your client base...?

Has anybody been along to a networking event and how has that been: natural, funny, nerve wracking?

What is your experience of doing things differently at (location)? Can you share examples of when you've done something differently?

Thinking about your appraisal were you particularly frustrated or happy or surprised - anything like that you're comfortable with sharing?

Think about a communication or a decision or a event over the last twelve months and then tell me when have you felt particularly frustrated, or motivated or perhaps just pleasantly surprised or some other feeling that you had?

If I wanted to understand how the team works here socially what could anybody tell me that would help me understand that?

How typical is that? Has anything changed in the way things happen here?

What's the funniest thing that has happened in the team over this last year, 6 months or 12 months?

If somebody was thinking of joining Quantum and you were asked to tell them something that would help them make their choice, what would you tell them about Quantum?

What is it that's held dear here, do you want to talk a little bit more about that?

Tell me more about when...?

Has that always been the case?

Have you all had that experience?

So before we close – has anybody got anything to add at all?

Appendix VII Interview Questions: Leaders - Phase One and Two

Phase One: 2010

Could you tell me in as much detail as possible about your experience of working at Quantum - anything you'd like to tell me about following the coaching initiative last autumn?

What type of organisation do you want to create here?

If you were to explain the company ethos in a phrase, what would that be?

What values do you think attract people to your organisation? Is anything changing in this regard?

Broadly, what percentage of your coaching do you think has influenced the *what* and what percentage has influenced the *how* part of your working life/life at Quantum?

What is expected of people at Quantum? What are your expectations of change in people following the coaching initiative?

What have you observed in people around you following the coaching initiative that might be different?

If so, what is the nature of any perceived change and what might have influenced change?

In your view how much scope do people have to challenge - how much freedom do people have to act on their own initiative?

Have you got any stories or anecdotes that would bring what you're saying to life?

What may be changing, if anything, in terms of the culture as you expand the business?

What, if anything, is changing in (Head office)?

What, if anything, is changing in (outer offices)?

In your view would (xx) have occurred without the coaching initiative?

Thinking about the organisation as a whole: what in your view are the most important challenges for Quantum? How are these being managed? What is different?

Are you noticing any change in the way the wider team is behaving/performing/developing?

Are you noticing any change in relationships with stakeholders e.g. employees, customers, suppliers, community, investors? What in your view are the major influences?

In the broadest sense what in your view is the value to you, or to the organisation as a whole, of any changes that you may have noticed?

Can you tell me a story or anecdote about anything that stands out for you in relation to what we have been discussing?

Phase Two: 2011

Have you noticed anything different about yourself at work since the coaching initiative?

What, if anything, has shifted for you personally?

Could this be related to any changes in the organisational environment following the coaching initiative?

Tell me about your role in creating this environment?

What have you learnt from (...)?

Can you describe what happened when (...)?

How do you see change being 'played back' to you by the organisation as a whole?

What feedback have you received following the accent on growth/acceleration of pace?

How much debate are you experiencing?

Has anything happened that has required you to think differently in any way?

Appendix VIII - Introductory communication to all staff at Quantum

A recent coaching initiative has helped with shaping our business. Following coaching we are interested in how things may be changing in the company. To help to find out how you may be experiencing changes in the business we are taking part in a Doctoral study with Oxford Brookes University Business School led by researcher Lesley O'Rourke. Over the coming months Lesley will be inviting you to share your perspectives and experiences. Participation is completely voluntary and all contributions will be on a confidential basis.

The study will look at changes and influences that you may have discerned following the coaching initiative. From the confidential individual interviews and questionnaires the study will draw together themes and patterns from across the whole organisation. We look forward to learning how things may be changing, what this means for us as an organisation and to sharing findings with you all.

Thanks

(*Name of Managing Director)*

Appendix IX - Participant Information Sheet (Interview)

Project title: The ripple effect from leadership coaching

You are invited to take part in research investigating how things may be changing at (Quantum) following a recent leadership coaching initiative. Before you decide if you would like to take part it is important for you to know why the research is being carried out and what it will involve. Please take the time to read the following information carefully.

The 'ripple effect' is used in the study to describe the spreading of influences that may follow the coaching of leaders. The purpose is to explore the potential reach of leadership coaching from an organisational perspective. To do this I will be inviting perspectives from across the company on experiences of organisational life.

It will be your decision whether or not to take part in this project. If you do decide to take part, you will be invited to participate in a confidential interview and we will agree on a mutually convenient time and appropriate place to meet. You will also be invited to sign a consent form but at the same time you can withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason.

The interview will be informal and semi-structured. It will take approximately 1.5 hours and will be, with your permission, audio recorded. I have attached a copy of the interview guide which will give you an idea of the sort of questions I would expect us to explore. I plan to interview 8 people in total. From these confidential interviews themes and patterns will be drawn and form the basis of a follow up questionnaire. The questionnaire will provide an opportunity for people from across the whole organisation to contribute.

Every effort will be made to help to achieve anonymity and confidentiality. (However please be aware that it may be impossible to totally guarantee anonymity and confidentiality of participant identity due to the small research sample size i.e. 8 interviewees).

All participants' names will be de-identified i.e. codes will be used to identify research participants in place of their names. Also, whilst names may be mentioned during confidential interviews, only those quotations (non attributable) where you refer to yourself will be considered for the final report and only with your written consent. The audio recorded interviews will not be shared with anyone else and only used for the purposes of this research. None of the responses will be shared with individuals' employers and will be kept anonymous. The data generated in the course of the research will be kept securely in paper or electronic form for a period of five years after the completion of the research project.

This study is being conducted as part of my Doctoral research programme at Oxford Brookes University (OBU), and has been approved by the University Research Ethics Committee at OBU. Findings may form the basis of articles submitted for publication in appropriate academic journals. Copies of any article(s) accepted for publication will be made available to you, should you wish to receive them.

The research programme, which began in December 2009, is planned for completion towards the end of 2011and includes data collection (current phase); data analysis, writing up and submission of the completed research. I am being supervised by Dr Tatiana Bachkirova (Director of Studies) and Dr Elaine Cox (Second Supervisor), both senior researchers within the Business School at OBU. Their contact details are as follows:

Dr Tatiana Bachkirova, CPsychol
Programme Director: Supervision for Coaching and Mentoring
International Centre for Coaching and Leadership Development
Oxford Brookes University Business School
Wheatley Campus
Oxford
OX33 1HX
Tel: +44(0) 1865 488367`
Email: tbachkirova@brookes.ac.uk

Dr Elaine Cox
Head of Research, International Centre for Coaching and Leadership Development
Oxford Brookes University Business School
Wheatley Campus
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OX33 1HX
Tel: +44(0) 1865 488350
Email: ecox@brookes.ac.uk

Additionally my external supervisor is Peter Hawkins, Chairman of the Bath Consultancy Group and Visiting Professor at Oxford Brookes University, who may be contacted on 01225 444709 or via email: peter.hawkins@bathconsultancygroup.com.

I hope this information has been useful in helping you to decide whether or not to participate in this study. I am also happy to meet to discuss the research in more detail before you decide. You can reach me via email on: lhorourke@refreshcoaching.co.uk, or by telephone on (mobile) 07840 477276 or via the following address:

Mrs Lesley O'Rourke
Doctoral Research Student
Oxford Brookes University Business School
Wheatley Campus
Oxford
OX33 1HX

If you decide that you would like to participate please confirm to me via email. We will then agree a time and place to meet and I will invite you to sign a voluntary consent form prior to interview. If you have any concerns about the way in which the study is being conducted, please contact the Chair of the University Research Ethics Committee on ethics@brookes.ac.uk

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Lesley O'Rourke

15th April 2010

Appendix X – Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

OXFORD
BROOKES
UNIVERSITY

Full title of Project: The ripple effect from leadership coaching

Name, position and contact address of Researcher:
Mrs Lesley O'Rourke
Research Student: Doctorate in Coaching and Mentoring

Oxford Brookes University Business School
Wheatley Campus
Wheatley
Oxford OX33 1HX

Please initial box

1.   I confirm that I have read and understand the information
     sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to
     ask questions.

2.   I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am
     free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason.

3.   I agree to take part in the above study and
     understand that I have a right to obtain a
     copy of the results.

Please tick box

		Yes	**No**

4.   I agree to the interview being audio
     recorded

5.   I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in
     publications

_____   _____   _____

Name of Participant   Date   Signature

_____   _____   _____

Name of Researcher   Date   Signature

Appendix XI - Participant Information Sheet –Leaders (Interview)

Project title: The ripple effect from leadership coaching

You are invited to take part in research investigating how things may be changing at (Quantum) following a recent leadership coaching initiative. Before you decide if you would like to take part it is important for you to know why the research is being carried out and what it will involve. Please take the time to read the following information carefully.

The 'ripple effect' is used in the study to describe the spreading of influences that may follow the coaching of leaders. The purpose is to explore the potential reach of leadership coaching from an organisational perspective. To do this I will be inviting perspectives from across the company on experiences of organisational life.

It will be your decision whether or not to take part in this project. If you do decide to take part, you will be invited to participate in a confidential interview and we will agree on a mutually convenient time and appropriate place to meet. You will also be invited to sign a consent form but at the same time you can withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason.

The interview will be informal and semi-structured. It will take approximately 1.5 hours and will be, with your permission, audio recorded. I have attached a copy of the interview guide which will give you an idea of the sort of questions I would expect us to explore. I have interviewed ten people from across your organisation and now plan to interview two leaders who have been coached. From these confidential interviews themes and patterns will be drawn and contribute to the basis of a follow up questionnaire. The questionnaire will then provide an opportunity for people from across the whole organisation to contribute.

Every effort will be made to help to achieve anonymity and confidentiality. However please be aware that it may be impossible to totally guarantee anonymity and confidentiality of participant identity due to the small research sample size of leaders who have been coached (i.e. two).

All participants' names will be de-identified i.e. codes will be used to identify research participants in place of their names. Also, whilst names may be mentioned during confidential interviews, only those quotations (non attributable) where you refer to yourself will be considered for the final report and only with your written consent. The audio recorded interviews will not be shared with anyone else and only used for the purposes of this research. None of the responses will be shared with individuals' employers and will be kept anonymous. The data generated in the course of the research will be kept securely in paper or electronic form for a period of five years after the completion of the research project.

This study is being conducted as part of my Doctoral research programme at Oxford Brookes University (OBU), and has been approved by the University Research Ethics Committee at OBU. Findings may form the basis of articles submitted for publication in appropriate academic journals. Copies of any article(s) accepted for publication will be made available to you, should you wish to receive them.

The research programme, which began in December 2009, is planned for completion towards the end of 2011 and includes data collection (current phase); data analysis, writing up and submission of the completed research. I am being supervised by Dr Tatiana Bachkirova (Director of Studies) and Dr Elaine Cox (Second Supervisor), both senior researchers within the Business School at OBU. Their contact details are as follows:

Dr Tatiana Bachkirova, CPsychol
Programme Director: Supervision for Coaching and Mentoring

International Centre for Coaching and Leadership Development
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Wheatley Campus
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Tel: +44(0) 1865 488367
Email: tbachkirova@brookes.ac.uk

Dr Elaine Cox
Head of Research, International Centre for Coaching and Leadership Development
Oxford Brookes University Business School
Wheatley Campus
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OX33 1HX

Tel: +44(0) 1865 488350
Email: ecox@brookes.ac.uk

Additionally my external supervisor is Peter Hawkins, Chairman of the Bath Consultancy Group and Visiting Professor at Oxford Brookes University, who may be contacted on 01225 444709 or via email: peter.hawkins@bathconsultancygroup.com.

I hope this information has been useful in helping you to decide whether or not to participate in this study. I am also happy to meet to discuss the research in more detail before you decide. You can reach me via email on: lhorourke@refreshcoaching.co.uk, or by telephone on (mobile) 07840 477276 or via the following address:

Mrs Lesley O'Rourke
Doctoral Research Student
Oxford Brookes University Business School
Wheatley Campus
Oxford
OX33 1HX

If you decide that you would like to participate please confirm to me via email. We will then agree a time and place to meet and I will invite you to sign a voluntary consent form prior to interview. If you have any concerns about the way in which the study is being conducted, please contact the Chair of the University Research Ethics Committee on ethics@brookes.ac.uk

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Lesley O'Rourke
28th May 2010

Appendix XII - Participant Information Sheet (Anecdote Circle)

Project title: The ripple effect from leadership coaching

You are invited to take part in research investigating how things may be changing at (Quantum) following a recent leadership coaching initiative. Before you decide if you would like to take part it is important for you to know why the research is being carried out and what it will involve. Please take the time to read the following information carefully.

The 'ripple effect' is used in the study to describe the spreading of influences that may follow the coaching of leaders. The purpose is to explore the potential reach of leadership coaching from an organisational perspective. To do this I will be inviting perspectives from across the company on experiences of organisational life.

It will be your decision whether or not to take part in this project. If you do decide to take part, you will be invited to participate in a 90-minute Anecdote Circle which will provide an opportunity to explore and share collective experiences around important themes associated with organisational life at (Quantum). During this meeting you will be invited to share your experiences with 3-5 close peers across a range of relevant themes.

The experiences you share as a group will remain confidential. The Anecdote Circle will be, with your permission, audio recorded and transcribed and I will remove any names or other identifying references in my analysis to help preserve your confidentiality. You will also be invited to sign a consent form before the meeting but at the same time you can withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason.

The sharing of experiences will be informal and there is no requirement for any preparation on your part. I plan to conduct 2-3 such meetings with different groups from which themes and patterns will be drawn. This will help guide the design of a follow up questionnaire. The questionnaire will provide an opportunity for people from across the whole organisation to contribute.

Every effort will be made to help to achieve anonymity and confidentiality. (However please be aware that it may be impossible to totally guarantee anonymity and confidentiality of participant identity due to the small research sample size i.e. 2-3 circles of 4-6 people and the process required to set up the meeting at (Quantum).

All participants' names will be de-identified i.e. codes will be used to identify research participants in place of their names. Also, whilst names may be mentioned during the confidential Anecdote Circle, only those quotations (non attributable) where you refer to yourself will be considered for the final report and only with your written consent. The audio recorded Anecdote Circle will not be shared with anyone else and only used for the purposes of this research. None of the group conversation will be shared with individuals' employers and the conversation will be kept anonymous. The data generated in the course of the research will be kept securely in paper or electronic form for a period of five years after the completion of the research project.

This study is being conducted as part of my Doctoral research programme at Oxford Brookes University (OBU), and has been approved by the University Research Ethics Committee at OBU. Findings may form the basis of articles submitted for publication in appropriate academic journals. Copies of any article(s) accepted for publication will be made available to you, should you wish to receive them.

The research programme, which began in December 2009, is planned for completion towards the end of 2011 and includes data collection (current phase); data analysis, writing up and submission of the completed research. I am being supervised by Dr Tatiana Bachkirova (Director of Studies) and Dr Elaine Cox (Second Supervisor), both senior researchers within the Business School at OBU. Their contact details are as follows:

Dr Tatiana Bachkirova, CPsychol
Programme Director: Supervision for Coaching and Mentoring
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Oxford Brookes University Business School
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Additionally my external supervisor is Professor Peter Hawkins, Chairman of the Bath Consultancy Group and Visiting Professor at Oxford Brookes University, who may be contacted on 01225 444709 or via email: peter.hawkins@bathconsultancygroup.com.

I hope this information has been useful in helping you to decide whether or not to participate in this study. I am also happy to meet to discuss the research in more detail before you decide. You can reach me via email on: lhorourke@refreshcoaching.co.uk, or by telephone on (mobile) 07840 477276 or via the following address:

Mrs Lesley O'Rourke
Doctoral Research Student
Oxford Brookes University Business School
Wheatley Campus
Oxford
OX33 1HX

If you decide that you would like to participate please confirm to me via email. You will then be invited to the Anecdote Circle taking place at (time) at (Quantum's office) and I will invite you to sign a voluntary consent form in advance. If you have any concerns about the way in which the study is being conducted, please contact the Chair of the University Research Ethics Committee on ethics@brookes.ac.uk

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Lesley O'Rourke

7th October 2010

CONSENT FORM

**OXFORD
BROOKES
UNIVERSITY**

Full title of Project: The ripple effect from leadership coaching

Name, position and contact address of Researcher:
Mrs Lesley O'Rourke
Research Student: Doctorate in Coaching and Mentoring

Oxford Brookes University Business School
Wheatley Campus
Wheatley
Oxford OX33 1HX

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason.

3. I agree to take part in the above study and understand that I have a right to obtain a copy of the results.

Please tick box

Yes   **No**

4. I agree to the Anecdote Circle being audio recorded

5. I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications

_____   _____   _____

Name of Participant   Date   Signature

_____   _____   _____

Name of Researcher   Date   Signature

Appendix XIV – Questionnaire

The Quantum Questionnaire 2010

Dear Participant,

My name is Lesley O'Rourke and I am leading a Doctoral Study at Quantum. The study follows a coaching initiative at Quantum and I am interested in understanding perceptions of any changes that may have been experienced in the organisation. The purpose of this confidential questionnaire is to understand widely at Quantum how things may be changing following the coaching of leaders.

The following questions invite you to think about aspects and features of your work that are important to you and to share your views with me in relation to these aspects. It is your individual viewpoint that is of interest to me so it is important not to collaborate with others.

All responses will be automatically submitted anonymously and data will be analysed for themes and patterns. Completing this confidential questionnaire should take approximately 15 minutes.

You will notice some questions require a narrative response and please feel free to state not applicable, where appropriate.

If you'd like more information about how your survey answers are submitted anonymously, please copy and paste this link into your web browser:

http://help.surveymonkey.com/app/answers/detail/a_id/3950/kw/anonymous%20survey/sno/1

Thank you for taking the time to complete the questionnaire - it is much appreciated.

The navigation buttons are at the bottom of the screen so don't forget to scroll down. Once you have finished the survey, click on the "Submit your Answers" link in the top right hand corner of the screen.

Kind Regards

Lesley

Lesley O'Rourke
Doctoral Researcher
Oxford Brookes University Business School

Questions

1. Which aspects of working life are in your view the most important in relation to Quantum?

Please tick the three most important to you from the following list. Please include some other aspect if you would like to.

☐ Clear strategy and performance targets

☐ Maintaining a small company culture

☐ Reputation for great client service

☐ Opportunity to learn

☐ Employee feedback valued and acted upon

☐ Ability to enjoy work/life balance

☐ Scope for personal fulfillment at work

☐ 'Door's always open' leadership style

☐ Safe environment to express opinions openly and truthfully

☐ Genuine client relationships

☐ Collaborative team environment

☐ Proactive social and environmental contribution

☐ Is some other aspect important to you? Please type the other aspects in the space provided below.

2. Following on from Q1, which, if any, of your three chosen aspects have been recently changing, and how would you briefly describe any change?

First Aspect:

Second Aspect:

Third Aspect:

3. Compared to 12 months ago, how do you feel about working life at Quantum in relation to each of the following adjectives?

Please indicate on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is less and 5 is more

	1 (Less)	2	3	4	5 (More)
Valued	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Loyal	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Self motivated	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Fulfilled	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Competitive	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Secure	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Cautious	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Frustrated	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Gloomy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Excited	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Supported	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Flourishing	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Concerned	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Ambitious	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Involved	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Enthusiastic	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Daunted	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Trusted	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Rushed	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Influential	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Accountable	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Apprehensive	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

4. What is your sense of connection with the decision making centre at Quantum?

Deep =1 and Slight =5

	1 (Deep)	2	3	4	5 (Slight)
Sense of connection	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

5. To what extent does geographical location play a part in your response to the previous question? If you would like to add some comments please use the space provided below.

6. Thinking about your individual role at Quantum, please consider each of the following phrases.

For each phrase please use the drop down boxes to select the option that most closely resembles how you felt 12 months ago and how you feel today.

	12 MONTHS AGO	TODAY
I feel able to explain how my own performance targets fit with the company goals	☐	☐
I feel motivated by my performance targets	☐	☐
I am learning and developing at work	☐	☐
I am trusted to do my work	☐	☐
I have time to do my work to a high standard	☐	☐
I have scope to contribute innovate ideas	☐	☐
I have personal control over my work	☐	☐
I find my work intellectually stimulating	☐	☐

7. How do you feel about the following aspects of working life at Quantum 12 months ago and today? Please consider each of the following phrases.

For each phrase please use the drop down boxes to select the option that most closely resembles how you felt 12 months ago and how you feel today.

	12 MONTHS AGO	TODAY
I understand the part I can and need to play in relation to company goals	☐	☐
I am involved in work that is meaningful and exciting	☐	☐
I am involved in productive dialogue and collaboration between offices	☐	☐
I am involved in work that matches my abilities	☐	☐
I am developing genuine client relationships for the longer term	☐	☐
I take opportunities to contribute beyond the scope of my position in the hierarchy.	☐	☐

8. Thinking about yourself at Quantum, are you feeling encouraged to do something different in any way?

If yes, please provide one or more examples below.

9. Thinking about your TEAM, are you being encouraged to do something different in any way?

If yes, please provide one or more examples below.

10. Observing the following aspects of organisational life at Quantum, how would you rate them?

For each phrase please use the drop down boxes to select the option that most closely resembles how you felt 12 months ago and how you feel today.

	12 MONTHS AGO	TODAY
There is a culture of openness	☐	☐
People are encouraged to question and challenge	☐	☐
There is more collaboration and less competition between offices	☐	☐
There are many opportunities to learn	☐	☐
There are many opportunities to take a lead	☐	☐
The level of strict instruction is increasing	☐	☐
It is acceptable to make a mistake on occasion	☐	☐
It is easy to be different at Quantum	☐	☐

11. Over the last 12 months what experience at work, if at all, has had the greatest influence (positive or negative) on your WORK PERFORMANCE? Please describe below or reply: 'Not applicable'

12. Over the last 12 months what experience at work, if at all, has had the greatest influence (positive or negative) on your WELLBEING? Please describe below or reply: 'Not applicable'

13. Thinking about your experience of working life at Quantum to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following views?

	Disagree strongly	Disagree moderately	Disagree slightly	Agree slightly Agree moderately	Agree strongly
(-) office is the driving force of the company	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Networking is helping to build better client relationships	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Our service to clients is a competitive advantage	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Our company image is changing for the better	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Knowledge is shared widely at Quantum	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
New ideas are encouraged from everyone	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Company communication is consistent and effective	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The pace of change is creating anxiety	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
We rely on our leaders to make change happen	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

14. Is there something else that you would like to add in relation to how things may be changing over the past year? If yes, please share below providing an example if possible.

Appendix XV – Participant Information Sheet – Confidential (Quantum) Employee Questionnaire

Project title: The ripple effect from leadership coaching

You are invited to take part in research investigating how things may be changing at (Quantum) following a recent leadership coaching initiative. Before you decide if you would like to take part it is important for you to know why the research is being carried out and what it will involve. Please take the time to read the following information carefully.

The 'ripple effect' is used in the study to describe the spreading of influences that may follow the coaching of leaders. The purpose is to explore the potential reach of leadership coaching from an organisational perspective. To do this I am inviting individual perspectives from across the company on experiences of organisational life.

It will be your decision whether or not to take part in this project. If you do decide to take part, you are invited to participate in a confidential web based questionnaire designed to take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

All information collected in the course of this research will be kept strictly confidential, within the limitations of the law. All the responses will not be shared with the individual's employers but will be kept anonymous. Paper records will be kept in locked filing cabinets and electronic files will be protected by the use of passwords. In accordance with Oxford Brookes University's policy on Academic Integrity, the data generated will be kept securely in electronic form for a period of five years after the completion of the research project.

Data will be analysed for themes and patterns associated with the presence of a ripple effect and associated influences. Patterns and themes will be described and findings reported on the potential reach of leadership coaching.

Findings from this research will be used within my doctoral thesis, and may form the basis of articles submitted for publication in appropriate academic journals. Reporting will be thematic in nature although non-attributable quotations may also be included. Copies of any article(s) accepted for publication will be made available to you, should you wish to receive them.

There is no obligation in any way to take part in this research; the decision to participate is entirely at your discretion. If you do decide to participate you are invited to retain a copy of this information sheet to keep and you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

This study is being conducted as part of my doctoral research programme at Oxford Brookes University (OBU), and has been approved by the University Research Ethics Committee at OBU. The research programme, which began in December 2009, will run for approximately 2 years. As a doctoral student I am being supervised by Dr Tatiana Bachkirova and Dr Elaine Cox, both senior researchers within the Business School at OBU. Their contact details are as follows:

Dr Tatiana Bachkirova, CPsychol
Programme Director: Supervision for Coaching and Mentoring
International Centre for Coaching and Leadership Development
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Additionally my external supervisor is Professor Peter Hawkins, Chairman of the Bath Consultancy Group and Visiting Professor at Oxford Brookes University, who may be contacted on 01225 444709 or via email: peter.hawkins@bathconsultancygroup.com.

I hope this information has been useful in helping you to decide whether or not to participate in this study. Should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me via email on lhorourke@refreshcoaching.co.uk, or by telephone on 0115 9282706, via mobile on 07840 477276 or via the following address:

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If you decide that you would like to participate please use the web link to the questionnaire provided in my covering email. You will then be invited to complete and return the confidential questionnaire by (date). If you have any concerns about the way in which the study is being conducted, please contact the Chair of the University Research Ethics Committee on ethics@brookes.ac.uk

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Lesley O'Rourke

14th December 2010

Appendix XVI – Progression from Basic to Global Themes

Perspectives	Basic themes	Organising themes	Global themes
Personal perspective	Emotional reactions are in response to leaders' behaviours	**Complex emotional responses**	**Influences awaken personal needs (What I feel)**
	Emotional reactions are in response to leaders' actions		
	Influences create similar emotions at different hierarchical levels		
	Influences create opposing emotions in individuals		
	Followers need acknowledgements, dialogue, courtesies	**Sense of belonging**	
	Influences highlight issues of 'personal fit'		
	Influences accentuate personal values	**Personal values**	
	Personal values influence needs		
	Influences create proactive and reactive responses	**Engagement**	**Influences alter energy (What I do)**
	Influences alter levels of engagement		
	Influences affect confidence	**Confidence**	
	Confidence alters motivation		
	Networking vs lack of visibility internally	**Leaders' actions**	**Influences highlight ambiguities (What I notice)**
	Team Day vs involvement		
	Adjustment for newcomers	**Observation of colleagues**	
	Reaction of others and toeing the line		
	Company targets vs desired image	**Tangible aspects of change**	
	Pace vs relationship building		

Perspectives	Basic themes	Organising themes	Global themes
Leadership perspective	Leaders are expected to match words and deeds	**Coherence**	**Influences raise expectations of leaders (What we expect from leaders)**
	Leaders are expected to explain rationale for new direction		
	Followers expect leaders to set a clear direction	**Focus**	
	Leaders are expected to balance present and future		
	Influences intensify leadership positions	**Role/hierarchy**	**Influences shift dependencies (How we relate to leaders)**
	Influences create role anxiety		
	Significance is placed on involvement of leaders	**Involvement of leaders**	
	Involvement influences engagement		
	Opportunity for leadership	**Contribution**	**Influences create opportunities for leadership (How we shift leadership culture)**
	Maverick contributions to debate		
	Shared responsibility influences energy	**Shared responsibility**	
	Shared responsibility spreads learning		

Perspectives	Basic themes	Organising themes	Global themes
Organisational perspective	Growth strategy challenges existing priorities	**Influences from growth strategy**	**Influences challenge prevailing culture (How we are now)**
	Growth strategy resonates with experiences of competitor culture		
	Sense of family depends on local culture	**Influences from family ethos**	
	Sense of family balances corporate influences		
	Influences affect sense of family		
	Influences accentuate similarities and differences between groups	**Relationships between groups**	**Influences reconfigure stakeholder relationships (How we want to be)**
	Collaborative effort reconfigures relationships		
	Accelerating pace of work reconfigures client relationships	**Accelerating pace of work**	
	Accelerating pace reconfigures employee relationships		
	Networking is perceived as unnatural	**Authenticity**	
	Image is contrasted with 'nitty gritty'		
	Mutual influences foster collaboration	**Mutual influences**	
	Mutual influences support personal ambition		
	Influences refocus organisational dialogue	**Nature of organisational dialogue**	**Influences change dialogue (How we communicate)**
	Dialogue tests conviction		
	Dialogue fosters learning		
	Questioning influences leaders	**Questioning**	
	Mavericks initiate important debate		

Appendix XVII – Steps towards organisation focused coaching

The work of organisation focused coaching would be to support, challenge and help bring insight to individuals and teams who *are* the whole organisational experience and who are also diverse actors *within* the whole experience. An holistic framework for organisation focused coaching was presented in Figure 8.2, offering an integrated approach to coaching the organisation as a whole. The central principles are as follows:

1. By identifying and working with aspects of reciprocal learning space, organisation focused coaching seeks to enhance adaptability to change in the shorter term and sustainable change for the longer term.

2. The approach draws on the real life experiences of individuals in all parts of the organisation. Coaching is based on a collective understanding of dynamic and reciprocal organisational aspects that prevent important changes occurring, or represent underemphasised hidden strengths.

3. The approach involves being mindful of critical aspects for success in an interconnected environment: collaboration, innovation and inspiring interactions seen as 'leadership' throughout the organisation. The organisation is both client and resource.

4. Coaching may be informed by a combination of internal and external perspectives that help raise awareness of dynamics existing in the organisation and between the organisation and others.

5. As with coaching in general, the approach is non judgemental, based on mutual respect, and places emphasis on the emotional security of individuals as they share their experiences.

6. Organisational challenges are accepted as naturally occurring in complex dynamics arising from people's best intentions.

A step-by-step approach is presented in the following chart.

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1. Open dialogue with appropriate representative(s) of the organisation e.g. member of the Board/Organisational Development team/HR team. The following questions would be helpful:

How are you defining 'the organisation'?

What is the organisation trying to achieve? What is the organisation trying to be? What would a successful organisation look like? What are the criteria? From a business dimension? From a human dimension?

What is going well?

Not so well?

2. Focus on dynamics /rationale for organisation focused coaching

Aspects to include in a preliminary discussion on the focus and rationale are:

The organisational environment is a rich resource for learning.

At the outset commitment is required from 'the top' of the organisation to an approach that emphasises the participation of all and is not based on hierarchical principles.

The approach is non judgemental and is based on the view that experiencing change involves individuals' best intentions.

A developmental approach is adopted where coaching skills are employed from the

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start. In this way learning and awareness occurs in the diagnostic phase and continues through to the organisation focused coaching interventions following collective feedback.

The focus is on identifying interconnected organisational aspects that mask hidden strengths and creating beneficial shifts towards learning and change.

The approach seeks to balance helping with shorter and longer term organisational challenges.

The approach draws on the whole organisation for energy, ideas and collaborative working

3. Collate whole organisational feedback

This diagnostic phase involves voluntary participation at all levels and from all divisions/teams to share experiences in one-to-one interviews, in anecdote circles (approach drawn from Callahan *et al* 2006) and via a company-wide questionnaire.

Reciprocal learning space is represented by themes in the collective feedback that suggest organisational tensions and strengths.

Based on the findings from this study it is suggested that inquiry might be helpful at three levels: individual experience, perspectives on leadership and cultural aspects. However different thematic groups may emerge according to the unique aspects of individual organisations.

4. Identify dynamic aspects from feedback

This phase brings together the feedback from Phase 3 with steps as follows:

Compare themes from this feedback with the opening dialogue. Align feedback with present and future organisational aims.

(In parallel to Step 3, feedback via questionnaire from external sources e.g. customers, suppliers, would add important information).

Identify paradoxes, ambiguities, competing influences and hidden strengths. Begin to raise awareness of gaps in understanding real life organisational experience. Notice mutual bonds in the organisation.

Summarise these dynamic aspects as a basis for an organisation focused coaching agenda. Begin to raise awareness of dynamic aspects that represent gaps in the organisation that may require attention.

The following examples of dynamic aspects are accompanied by potential sample coaching questions:

Drive for business growth vs. concern for values

How might values important to the whole organisation help drive business growth?

Diversity vs. conformity

What are the obstacles in the way of independent thinking?

Turbulence vs. need for reflective space

What are the helpful / unhelpful aspects of turbulent times?

Bias towards ambition vs. aspects of confidence

What is your personal ambition/ the team's ambition? How might achieving this help the whole organisation/the organisation's stakeholders?

Learning from 'failure' vs. risk aversion

How does that learning benefit the whole organisation?

Scope for contribution vs. perception of opportunity

If you could contribute differently what would you be doing?

5. Agree scope and practicalities

The full scope of organisation focused coaching would involve e.g. inviting participation in coaching, developing an ethical framework, creating feedback mechanisms.

6. Design organisation focused coaching strategy

Reciprocal learning space involves the whole organisation and it is important to agree ways of working and communicating. A starting point might be to focus on a required shift that would create an impetus for further shifts. For example, addressing confidence may be a useful starting point involving team coaching at multiple points in the organisation's structure. However it would be important to listen to how tensions were presented and to creatively explore ways of supporting, challenging and guiding individuals and teams. The overall approach would be to raise awareness of any gaps in the organisation's capacity to adapt and thrive in a changing environment.

7. Review, assess and communicate outcomes

This phase requires a perspective on outcomes that sees success as shifting collaborative working, innovation and leadership in a positive, collective direction. The approach could be based on success criteria created with team members drawn from all parts of the organisation.

It would be important to articulate and communicate outcomes that represent both business and human dimensions of the organisation. Tangible business performance and people oriented successes would be reported alongside one another to provide an holistic picture of successful organisational change and to suggest future opportunities and challenges.

8. Supervision

Professional supervision would support reflection on the multiple aspects associated with organisation focused coaching. The scope of the coaching agenda may require the involvement of more than one coach. This would provide the opportunity for co-supervision. Professionally trained internal coaches would also require regular professional supervision.