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RETURN ON INVESTMENT IN COACHING PROGRAMMES



A CASE STUDY

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Introduction

The opportunity for this piece of research arose when as Director of Executive Coaching for the AoEC, the author contracted to conduct a coaching programme with PITO (Police Information Technology Organisation)¹. Part of the contract was to conduct an evaluation for the organisation.

At an early stage in the research the author decided it would be interesting to go beyond a simple evaluation of the coaching programme and to use data from the organisational context and the evaluation to explore some of the factors which make coaching programmes effective in organisations linked to Return on Investment (ROI). This is relevant to all coach programme providers to help them with their entry, contracting and ongoing contact with the organisation.

This is increasingly relevant now for providers of coaching since there has been a shift in how organisations approach their contracting with coach providers. It used to be the case that there were lots of individual arrangements between coaches and executives and we have now moved to a situation where HR has become much more figural and involved in commissioning coaching programmes or at least commissioning coaches to work within the organisation. It has become an inevitable part of this work that there are then conversations about ensuring effectiveness of the programme, involvement of line managers and a range of structural issues including support on how to evaluate.

The AoEC, an executive coach-training organisation, was founded by a Gestalt psychotherapist and executive coach, John Leary-Joyce in 2000. He had a 25-year background in Gestalt Psychotherapy and designed coach training programmes which drew on his background of Gestalt, linking phenomenology and systems theory within a humanistic framework. I was a graduate of one of the programmes and, given my experience as a therapist and executive in a substantial global company, was appointed to the role of Director of Executive Coaching Services with the AoEC. In that role I was responsible for winning the contract to work with PITO and as coach director I established the programme within the organisation. As part of the entry conversation with the CEO, I sought to understand how coaching fitted with the strategic objectives of the business. The CEO was forthcoming in sharing the particular context in which they were operating.

¹ PITO gave permission for me to name them in this report, in part because the organisation no longer exists.

The organisation had previously run a coaching programme for the CEO and Directors. This was deemed a success and the CEO was keen to provide the opportunity to the next level of management in the organisation. A significant driver in the organisation providing this coaching programme was the context of the planned closure of PITO, and its staff and functions being subsumed into a larger Super-Government Agency. Managers were required to re-apply for their jobs; there was the threat of redundancy and a continuing need for the organisation to deliver on its output requirements until closure. Understandably this placed a degree of pressure on the leaders and managers in the business, and the CEO believed that a coaching programme could address some of these issues.

Owing to budgetary constraints it was decided to only offer four 1.5-hour executive coaching sessions to each coachee. This was justified by the organisation on the basis that the line managers would agree objectives with each coachee, aligned with the organisational objectives, prior to the start of coaching.

The organisation identified a set of overarching organisational objectives for the coaching programme:

Management of change

- PITO legacy management – raising the profile and reputation
- Improve people skills and greater honest and open communication
- The extent managers are actively engaged with PITO's business in the run up to NPJA
- Focus on PITO's competencies as underpinning core values to support the preparation of changing work roles and team structures.
- There should be visible differences and tangible evidence of positive change at the end of the coaching process.

My thinking at the time was that this was ambitious for a short programme and I was interested to see how well the programme delivered on these objectives.

To introduce and set up the programme, I was asked to run an organisational briefing for the 'selected' group of 13 coachees. In order to manage the efficiencies required for the programme, this briefing was combined with a group matching process. I spent five minutes with each individual coachee to initiate the matching process. I had previously identified

three other AoEC coaches who along with me would be the team undertaking this programme of executive coaching. This selection of coaches was based on the qualities of the coaches and their experience of working with managers at mid to senior level.

The coaches were all graduates of the AoEC Advanced Diploma in Executive Coaching and I had complete confidence in the team's ability to deliver a good outcome for both individual coachees and the organisation. In the matching process, if I had not felt confident that these coaches could work effectively with the coachees, I would have drawn from the wider pool of AoEC coaches.

As the contract with the organisation included evaluation of the programme, it was relatively easy to gain the HR Director's agreement to supplement the AoEC standard evaluation process with this Masters research project.

Literature Review

In researching the literature I discovered the relatively limited reporting of coaching evaluation to date and a number of writers who confirm this.

Jarvis et al (2006) note that “ .. rigorous research data is hard to find “ This is confirmed by Kampa and White (2004, p.156)

“ our limitation in making statements about the usefulness of coaching concerns the fact that there are so few studies yet completed”

and Bluckert (2006, p24)

“it is still early days in terms into coaching outcomes. There is comparatively little in the way of reliable, comprehensive research into organisational outcomes”

Not only is there little published research, the CIPD annual surveys (2004 –2009) reveal that companies are not evaluating the coaching that is being provided. For example, in 2004, while 76% of companies surveyed utilised coaching, only 8% conducted any evaluation. Of that 8% only 0.55 sought to identify Return on Investment (CIPD 2004) .

Jarvis et al (2006) implore their readers to take evaluation seriously, with a section heading towards the end of their book entitled “A last ditch chance to persuade you – why bother with Evaluation (p.205)

Their advice to HR professionals and others seeking to establish coaching programmes is

“You’ll have a lot more credibility if you can make a business case for investment (in coaching), based on sound research data that sets out where, and how, coaching will work and what the return will be on that investment”

Bluckert (2006) contends that it is not only HR departments who face challenges around evaluation

“ It is, however, one of the topics that make many coaches feel least

comfortable.....we still don't have standard methods that both produce the desired result and are relatively pain-free for organisations that commission coaching”

So, what is the state of play with regard to evaluation practice and why does evaluation not happen?

How is coaching effectiveness assessed?

Peterson, D.B. and Kraiger, K. (2004, p262-282) set out to “provide a practical framework for examining the effectiveness and value of organisational coaching” (p262) and are one of the few sources to provide a comprehensive overview of “the coaching research that has been done”.

The studies they identified are set out in the table below

Thomson (1986)	150 managers and executives from a range of organisations participants’ bosses reported significant behaviour changes and these changes lasted for at least 1 to 2 years
Peterson (1993a and 1993b)	370 participants ratings on specific coaching objectives by participants, participants’ manager and coach 1.56 standard deviation units (from 50 th to 93 rd percentile) gains still evident 1 to 2 years after coaching
Birkeland et al. (1997) Davis and Petchenik (1998)	AMOCO Historical evaluation of executive coaching over 10 previous years Consistent positive effect on individuals and organisation Compared to other AMOCO managers, coachees- - Increased potential ratings - 50% higher salary increases Participants attributed results directly to the coaching they had received

<p>McGovern et al. (2001)</p> <p>One of the first studies to look exclusively at the impact of coaching</p>	<p>100 mid- to senior-level managers</p> <p>large organisations</p> <p>participants estimated ROI at 5.7 times initial investment based on a conservative formula developed by Philips (1997)</p> <p>Organisational benefits included</p> <p>Better productivity 53%</p> <p>Quality 48%</p> <p>Organisational strength 48%</p> <p>Customer service 39%</p> <p>Retention 32%</p> <p>Cost reduction 23%</p> <p>Profitability 22%</p> <p>Improved relationships with direct reports 77% and peers 63%</p> <p>Improved teamwork 67%</p> <p>Increased job satisfaction 61%</p>
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As a caveat to these seemingly impressive results, Peterson and Kraiger warn that the term coaching is used to represent many different service offerings. They also observe that virtually all research is based on self-report and observer ratings.

That the majority of organisations still use feedback from participants as the primary measure of success is borne out by CIPD surveys. The 2006 survey showed 75% of respondents using this practice, with 61% using appraisal systems.

Despite the paucity of evaluation research and the limited data sources used in the evaluation studies cited, Peterson and Kraiger make strong claims for the success of coaching.

“Coaching works. That much is simple. Based on dozens of case studies, hundreds of personal testimonials in scores of organizations, and diverse threads of research, it is clear that coaching has an impact on people and on business results.”

They acknowledge that this will not be enough for many organizations who will want to know the impact on their organization ‘did it make a strategic difference?’ and the efficiency ‘was it worth the cost?’ (Boudreau and Ramstad, 2003 cited in Peterson and Kraiger (2004))

One of the most famous and often quoted studies of Return On Investment was the Metrixglobal research which identified a 529% Return on Investment (Executive Briefing: Case Study on Return on Investment of Executive Coaching Anderson (2000).

More recently a study carried out by Sherpa Executive Coaching (2009) identified an increase in HR professionals calculating ROI, rising to 13% from 7% in 2006. They include an example formula which is typical of ROI calculations:

1. Estimate the total value of resolving an issue or issues:

Example: Avoided \$55,000 in turnover costs, increased productivity by \$45,000

Total benefit: \$100,000

2. Multiply by the percentage of the improvement attributable to coaching

(in this example, 50% of the improvement comes from coaching)

Coaching benefit \$50,000 (#1 times #2: 50% of \$100 K)

3. Factor in our degree of confidence in our estimates:

(In this example, we are 90% sure that our estimates in steps 1 and 2 are correct.)

Adjusted coaching benefit: 45,000 (#2 times #3: \$50,000 times 0.9)

4. Subtract the total cost of coaching (say, \$15,000)

Net benefit \$30,000 (#3 minus #4)

5. Calculate ROI: Divide net benefit (step 4: \$30k) by coaching cost (\$15k)

ROI = 200%. (#4 divided by #3: 30K/15K = 2.00)

One difficulty with attempts to use ROI is that organisations find it difficult to put a value on change, ie change could be over a longer period so you won't see the value now. (McGovern et al. (2001) cited in Kampa and White (2004 p.153))

A contrasting approach to calculating ROI when it has not been planned in to the intervention is to get coachees to identify personal, organisational and performance gains after the event. (Quilken research presented at Association for Coaching International Conference 2006).

Quilken have developed a model for tracing the link between individual, organisational and performance gains from coaching. A report can be obtained from Quilken at www.quilken.com

The most recent article on evaluating effectiveness of coaching identified by the author was De Muse et al (2009 p117-134). They too acknowledge the paucity of empirical research on evaluation. Nevertheless, they conducted a meta-analysis of coaching evaluation studies.

Their finding is that

*“ Although the Return On Investment (ROI) index provides a straightforward, overall measure of effectiveness, its veracity and usefulness is questioned”
(p.117)*

So, while ROI may be beguiling, the evidence is that it is beset by difficulties.

A new strand in the evaluation literature is to look at the role played by the coach De Muse et al (2009), Kampa and White (2004 p.153) and the role of the coachee in contributing to effectiveness.

Kampa and White suggest *“the ROI can be maximized when coaching is provided by high – caliber coaches”* and Bluckert (2006 p34-42)

"Up till now little attention has been given to the issue of whom coaching works best with, and whether everyone is potentially a suitable candidate for coaching" (p34).

De Mues et al (2009) identify six criteria which should be included in research on coaching effectiveness:

- 1. The purpose of coach evaluation - summative versus formative evaluation*
- 2. Criteria used to measure coach effectiveness-ROI versus coaching objectives*
- 3. Rigor of the coaching evaluation-the research design employed to assess coaching*
- 4. Type of coaching implemented-developmental versus remedial*
- 5. Content of the coaching engagement-skill acquisition and behavioural change versus unconscious discovery and deep learning*
- 6. Coaching methodologies- the interaction between the coaching methods and coaching content*

Why are there so few evaluation studies and so little evaluation practice?

“organizational decision makers do not expect research to prove that a program works, but to provide reasonable evidence that the programme could be responsible”

McLinden (1995) cited in Peterson and Kraiger (2004)

In addressing why there is so little reported evaluation of coaching, the authors signal that evaluating coaching is constrained by cost, lack of research expertise and lack of time and that beyond these constraints (p 265)

“coaching may be even more difficult to evaluate because it is individually customized, shrouded in issues of confidentiality, delivered by a range of coaches who rarely follow standardized procedures (sic), and frequently implemented piecemeal rather than systematically throughout the organization.”

Blakey et al (2006) in a seminar involving 20 HR directors who reported the similar barriers to evaluation

De Muse et al (2009) also cite findings from a recent Harvard Business Review article

“The coaching field is filled with contradictions, coaches themselves disagree on why they are hired, what they do and how to measures for success.”

A conclusion the author draws from the literature review is that much more research is needed covering a wider way of looking at effectiveness before we can actually say we know what makes coaching effective, whether that’s in an organisational context or not. It is hoped therefore, that this report will contribute to that need.

Methodology

The focus of study for this research is a coaching programme (one case) involving 13 coachees and four coaches - all graduates of the AoEC Diploma in Advanced Executive coaching training programme.

This is a piece of qualitative research informed by the ideas of grounded theory, case study and action research.

It is predominantly qualitative, in that it is designed to be ‘research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification’ (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and which “investigates the essential characteristics or nature of the object(s) studied” WBRM Handbook (p31),

In line with Miles and Huberman’s definition (1994, p6.), it is research “conducted through an intense and / or prolonged contact with a “ field ” or life situation” . Furthermore, as this is research into a developing field, where there is scant reported research, this study fits into the grounded theory approach (Strauss and Corbin), where researchers “enter the research situation with no preconceptions “. Instead, the work of the researcher is “grounded in specific observational data; patterns emerge from the data set and are not imposed on it before it is gathered”.

It is also (loosely) connected to Action Research (Lewin, vvvv) in that as Director of Coach Services at the AoEC, my goal is to build and improve contracting and evaluation practice within the AoEC. An implicit aim of this research is that future conversations with clients will be informed by the findings, and future evaluations I carry out will build on the work in this project. Robson’s account of Lewin’s view on action research as “ researching action with the intent of improving actions in the future” (2002, p216), best expresses the connection.

It is relevant at this point to also draw the parallel between the Gestalt approach to coaching and the approach I have taken in this piece of research.

As a coach, my framework encompasses a humanistic viewpoint in which people are seen as having the capacity to find their own solutions to challenges. This means that as a coach I need to privilege *the client’s* meaning from an experience, not mine.

The parallel for me as coach and as a researcher is that the interviewees (coachees) in this research were also constructing and reporting their unique meaning from the experience of being coached. So, as a qualitative researcher, I must ensure that I allow the interviewees' words to speak for the unique meaning each individual has made of the experience (that I privilege their meaning making) while at the same time I am seeking to extract usable findings from these individual meanings.

Robson's account of the features characteristic of relativistic qualitative approaches to social research encapsulates this parallel and the responsibility of the researcher:

Reality is represented through the eyes of the participants

The importance of viewing the meaning of experience and behaviour in context, and in its full complexity is stressed"

The research process is viewed as generating working hypotheses rather than immutable facts

Qualitative methodologies are used

This both reinforced my choice of a qualitative approach and my recognition of my own (previously unknown) social constructivist paradigm as a worker researcher.

Data Collection Techniques

I decided to use semi-structured, face-to-face interviews to gather the data for this research.

These interviews had three structural components:

Element	Rationale
Initial unfocused open ended question	Fits with the desire to maintain an open (non controlling) frame. I was also interested in the subjective experience of the interviewees, so chose a non focused question in order to allow interviewees to respond in a way that revealed their own perceptions. I wanted to hear their responses in their own words.
Eight open focused questions with prompts e.g Q4 How did you feel after the first session with your coach?	These were designed to get deeper information from the coachees on aspects of their experience and the process, which they may not have mentioned in their response to question 1. These questions were designed to be as non-leading as possible and to allow for individual interpretation and response.

All of the questions were designed to allow flexibility of response and interviewers were encouraged to probe responses to gain greater detail.

Nine statements – to be rated on a 0-10 scale	These were designed to tap into the main structural components of the programme such as line manager involvement, clarity of purpose, etc.
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The question design was informed by my understanding that human beings need to make meaning, and that if a question is too clearly stated the meaning making will involve seeking to satisfy the needs of the interviewer rather than giving insight into the lived experience of the interviewee.

Conduct of Research

The research timetable covered a period of three months and included:

- Ensure access for the research
- Design interviews.
- Set up Interviews
- Conduct and transcribe interviews.
- Analyse data.

1. Ensure access for the research

The good relationship I had built with the HR Director supported the ease of access into the organisation.

2. Design interviews

Designing the questions was an iterative process, which took longer than I had originally anticipated. Mirroring good coaching where we use metaphor or allusion to prompt thinking and enable the coachee to come up with their own interpretation, the questions used in the interview were designed to bring forth views but did not directly address these. An example is: *Question 4 How did you feel after your first session with your coach?* – which allowed the coachees to mention the coach, the match, and their own feelings which gave access to their attitudes to coaching.

I decided it would also be useful to introduce questions with a quantitative element, to ascertain how the coachees' had experienced some of the structural elements of the coaching programme e.g the initial briefing.

The questions were submitted to the HR Director for approval prior to the commencement of the interviews. I also obtained agreement from him, and through him individual agreement of each interviewee, to tape the sessions so they could be anonymously transcribed.

As I had coached several of the coachees, it was essential to work with a co-interviewer, so that I would not be interviewing people I had coached. In selecting this co-interviewer I sought someone with interview experience, coaching experience and knowledge of this organisation.

3. Set up interviews

The good relationship I had built with the HR Director was valuable in gaining agreement that an interviewer could meet each of the 13 coachees individually for the interviews which would take up to 45 minutes.

Interviewees were introduced to the interview and interviewers by means of a circular email from the HR Director, which I had drafted, Interviewers were given contact details for each of their interviewees. They then set up interviews directly with their interviewees.

4. Conduct and transcribe interviews

Each of the 13 coachees were interviewed using face to face interviews of up to 45 minutes each. During the interview, each person was asked the same questions in the same order. There were pre-designed prompts for the interviewers to enable them to probe further. Interviewers were also free to follow the interviewee's flow.

Both interviewers mirrored the coaching process taking a few minutes at the beginning of interviews to re-brief interviewees on:

- Confidentiality
- Taping
- Transcribing
- Anonymity
- The invitation to share their subjective experience within a free flow environment
- The mixture of Qualitative & Quantitative questions
- Our hope that they would enjoy the process as best possible!

Interviews were taped and anonymously transcribed by a skilled audio typist. Initially I had planned to do this myself. However, after transcribing one interview, I realised that the work involved was beyond my capacity.

5. Data analysis

Guided by Miles and Huberman (1994) and Thomas, D, (2003) I used a formal coding and categorising procedure to analyse the data from question 1. For other qualitative questions I used a less systematic approach, allowing common themes to emerge as there was less data and greater coalescence of response to the more focused questions.

The process used for question 1 was to allocate codes to identifiable themes then group these into categories. This process was repeated until there was a manageable number of meaningful categories.

This process was carried out by each of the interviewers separately and then we met to review categories and codes.

While each of us arrived at our category definition by different means we both agreed on the eventual categories. One of us used a more recognisable code-to-category-to higher order category approach, the other jumped to higher order categories in the first analysis.

This reflects the different ways of thinking of the two co-interviewers. This approach was successful in identifying useful broad themes, forming a framework for reporting the data.

Results

I have set out below the analysis and outcomes for Questions 1-9. As a summary I did a lot of coding on the first question as it was such a wide open question. On the remaining questions I commented on the patterns and themes that emerged from the data as these questions were more focused, I used a more narrative style. Also, in looking at the responses to questions one to six, it is interesting to note that the fact the organisation was closing down and the possibility of people losing jobs isn't commented on significantly until Question 6:

Q1. What can you tell me about this coaching experience – from initial briefing to ongoing benefits?

Supplementary questions:

Thinking of what contribution did this make / What can you tell me about this?

The organisational Briefing – understanding organisational goals

Your line manager's involvement – explaining why chosen, setting goals and expectations, reviewing progress(mid-point) and outcomes(end)

The AoEC briefing – understanding what to expect from the coaching process

The initial meeting with your coach – suitability of match, climate created by coach

Ongoing coaching – making and keeping agreements, specific inputs from coach

Categories identified from responses to question one were:

- Positive (Experience, performance of others, outcomes)
- Expectations
- Match –(Briefing, Matching Structure-Line Manager)
- Organisational context
- Relationship developed over time
- Benefits

The biggest category identified was Positive. This an amalgamation of three categories: 'Positive Experience', 'Positive outcomes' and 'Positive Self Image'. While emphasising different aspects, all pointed to coaching being seen in a positive light for 12 of the 13 coachees.

Seven people made comments which were categorised as Positive Experience:

“ a very positive experience ”

“the best thing I’ve had”

“Very interesting to learn about myself,

“Thoroughly enjoyable”

Three people mentioned a outcomes in positive terms

“ I received tips and techniques that I’ve put into practice with great results”,

“I now understand how I impact others”

“Lots of practical tips on management of a large area”

Two people referred to enhanced self image,

“ I realised they are lucky to have me, renewed self esteem and recognition of own talents and abilities ””

“ I now feel really positive about myself going forward

The next highest scoring category was labelled Expectations of coaching and brought together people’s views of what coaching might be like, their attitude to coaching. These included both negative and positive comments.

“ I had this dread about it, oh my god, it will be like a psychiatrist”

“I had heard about it and thought ‘Yeh, I could do this’.”

“ I didn’t know what to expect”

This category was more mixed than ‘positive experience’.

The level of involvement (or lack of) by the Line Manager also appeared prominently, comments included:

“ no conversation with my manager ”

“what was unclear to me was who sponsored me that day”

“my line manager spent 10 minutes with me agreeing my objectives but didn’t check in on progress”

I noticed that, in terms of frequency of mention, ‘briefing’ and ‘matching’ were frequently commented on

“Initial briefing was quite good actually”

“ Organisational briefing..not sure.. .didn’t feel there was one”

“Matching OK. Overall, suitable match. Very happy with outcome”.

“My coach was a good match for me”

Three people mentioned the organisational context, a sub-category of the positive experience.

“Interesting decision for the organisation”, “Outcome was not what the organisation expected”

Four people mentioned coaching being a relationship developed over time.

“First session . . . exploratory stuff and then got progressively deeper”

“good relationship that grew through discussion”

“it took at least two sessions to build the relationship and therefore the benefit was lost for the first two”

“As I went through, I realised I could open up and be more effective for both myself and taking the organisation forward.”

I also allocated a code I called Style, which seemed to have two aspects: one was about the style of the **coach**

“personal aspects were brought out and discussed sensitively and diplomatically”

“felt like equal talking”

“my coach was very upfront”

and the other was about the free form, unstructured style of the **process**

“It was different, it was more “why do you?” rather than tips and techniques”. “Quite high level discussion with clever drawing out of patterns and themes”

The use of the word benefits in the question meant the interviews elicited clear mentions of specific benefits from the majority of interviewees.

“very useful to talk through with someone outside the organisation”.

“I learnt my impact big/loud/fast”

“helped me think through how I manage my team”

Other benefits mentioned were about interaction with others, being more effective now, standing back and thinking

“I now understand how I impact others”.

“ I gained one or two tips and techniques that I put into practice”

“lots of practical tips-managing workload, expectations of staff”

“ unexpected aspect-personal aspects brought out and discussed, handled sensitively and diplomatically”

For at least two coachees the benefits seem to have been very personal.

“I have renewed self esteem and recognition of my own talents and abilities”

I also noticed that the one person who didn't mention benefits in that first question was a person who couldn't focus in on their objectives. “ Felt more like a slightly intense chat than part of a process that would assist me in taking forward my skills and abilities in the professional framework” I decided to track this person 's responses to the subsequent questions and have included this in a mini-case study

Q2. What helped the coaching work for you, what didn't?

In looking at *What worked for you* in question two, I again found the theme of Style .

“I liked the approachability of the coach”,

“Sessions were free-form, you get out of it what you put in”

Others talked about “openness” and “nothing- barred, free communication”,

Another theme was developing greater self-awareness

“somebody holding up the mirror”,

“strong feedback”,

“becoming more aware”.

One positive example of somebody who got feedback in a way that was palatable for him or her was: *“I recognise my weakness in a positive way”.*

Finally, safety was also mentioned by more than one person.

“ confidentiality and contracting were very important ”

“ meeting rooms were not secluded/private ”

Other comments were:

“ I was ready, the time is right ”

“ it came along at the right time ”

In terms of what didn't work, time was mentioned by three people

“ four sessions . . . not enough ”

“ Owing to time constraints I lost a session ”

and style by one

“ it felt too nebulous, a bit too personal, a bit too intrusive ”

Q3. Why do you think PITO provided coaching for the chosen group of managers?

What emerged from this question was that a number of people clearly didn't understand why they had been chosen

“ I don't know, I'd like to think I'd been picked out for stardom, but I don't ”,

“ Nobody explained ”

“ somebody must have just thought it was a good idea ”.

Several mentioned the previous coaching programme. It seemed this was their way of making sense of the current programme.

“ It started the year before for the Directors and the decision was made to offer it to a wider group of managers ”

“ The CEO took time to speak to directors about their career aspirations ”

This was particularly the case for those who could make a direct connection with the fact their

line manager was on the previous coaching programme,

“...he thought coaching was a good idea and so recommended me to have the opportunity of coaching”.

Some commented on good support from the organisation for managers

“ They’ve always helped people grow and develop ”

“ . . . does provide good management development opportunities for people ”.

“ it wants to develop staff to reach their potential ”

others commented on the organisation’s performance as a motivation to provide coaching.

“I think they were reacting to comments in the staff survey”

“they want to improve customer focus ”

“PITO wants to improve management because of the constant change within ”

One person prefaced his comments with *“I think it was a development programme for directors ”* and so seemed unsure.

Another stated *“to be invited was a bit of a shock”*.

In summary most did not understand why they were chosen by the organisation for coaching, most linked it to the fact there had been a previous programme.

Q4. How did you feel after the first session with your coach?

Supplementary questions:

Match – right coach for you

Time well spent

Optimistic / reservations about coaching

There were numerous positive responses to this question

“I felt optimistic ”

“It was time well spent. I felt optimistic and emotional. Would liked to have carried

on and do periodically.”

“My coach asked the right questions.”

“Set the scene well. I was looking forward to other sessions. Feeling comfortable.”

“I was optimistic with reservations. I wanted to continue. I felt that I could choose to focus really on the work side.”

“Built good rapport. Couldn’t imagine anyone else doing it better. Time well spent.”

Three people mentioned Match

“The match was right”.

“Good discussion and good match”

“Couldn’t imagine anyone else doing it better.”

Some had mixed feelings and reservations

“I was not convinced it was going to work”.

“Interesting . . . like to take it forward. . . . Not quite clear of the benefit, but open-minded. Probably a bit sceptical.”

another said

“It was fine, I was pleased it wasn’t like cricket coaching”.

Those who reported they felt positive and optimistic after the first session all seemed to link this to their experience of the coach *“my coach asked the right questions”, “My coach was constructively critical”*. *“I couldn’t imagine another coach doing it better”* While a good match appeared important, the credibility and rapport established by the coach definitely had an impact.

Overall there appeared more of a balance between positives and those questioning how they felt. There were six who seemed to be questioning the coaching at this stage, however they seemed to be taking a cautiously optimistic approach

“I might get something out of it”.

“There was nothing to say I couldn’t work with my coach”.

“was looking forward to other sessions, feeling comfortable,”

Q5. How did your perceptions of coaching change over time?

As an overview to Question 5, I recognised that three people's responses indicated an evolving experience of coaching and therefore that's what they commented on. Of these three, two grew more positive and one eventually withdrew.

"I started off defensive and now its more of a partnership"

*"As the relationship developed we were both more comfortable in our roles.
Each meeting it matured"*

"I was now struggling with some of the feedback the coach was giving me"

There were a couple of instances of people who started with a strong positive view and their view was reconfirmed through coaching.

*"I knew what to expect from the outset and that view was reinforced through
coaching"*

"Perception has always been good. Something that should be part of daily life."

The remainder of interviewees responded not in terms of how their perceptions of coaching changed, but how coaching changed them, i.e. by focusing on the benefits

"I ended up with a good degree of confidence".

*"Important changes, not perceptions. My confidence improved. Instead of
wondering, it gave me confidence to decide the best way."*

Q6. How has coaching been of benefit to you?

There were a range of themes that emerged in responses to this question. One cluster was around interactions with other people and increased confidence

"It's helped me build better relationships with work colleagues",

"Coaching helped me see why I don't see eye to eye with others"

"A direct impact on me. . . . opening up and speaking my mind"

"I now have greater confidence in high level meetings"

"I needed confidence and the process helped".

"I've now put myself forward for the work stream lead."

” I have a greater feeling of confidence, this will stand me in good stead for the future”

In two cases the benefit of coaching for people was a positive approach to their future – outside of the organisation

““The way I’ve been working is not how I want to live my life any more . . . (I now have) a positive view of the future outside of the organisation”

“ I’ve applied for redundancy, I’m now confident I can do something else”.

The significance here is they were both very positive rather than simply *“making the best of the situation”*.

Other response showed people were explicitly using the coaching techniques themselves,

“ I now ask, have you thought about this?”,

“It reminds me to perhaps ask why a little more”

“ I now notice and look at other people”

” Coaching has helped me to see people and be constructively critical of others”,

and some had clearly developed the capacity to apply their learning as ongoing self-support

” I realise I have to be comfortable with what I’m doing, and if not, say its not working”,

“ Coaching will always be a benefit for me. It doesn’t stop if you apply it and I’m going to build it into the things I do”,

” I used to leave myself last-now its OK to sometimes put myself first”

There was also one mention of practical learning on self-management

“ I now have a sign outside my door which says I will be busy for 15 minutes”.

Q7. What has changed for you as a result of coaching? What do you do differently?

Question 7 *“what has changed for you”* was designed to build on Question 6 *“How has coaching been of benefit to you?”* by phrasing the probe for outcomes / benefits differently.

I appreciated the need to carefully monitor for overlap in responses to the two questions. So to do a proper analysis of responses to question 6 and question 7, I looked at their responses to both questions side by side.

Eight people made different or additional comments in response to question 7 which **were** different to the responses given in question 6: some were about more concrete behaviours: *“listening more”* and *“taking note of concerns”*, *“I would like to think I listen more to people.”*

Three people referred to listening. Others identified they were doing things differently in performing their role as managers in the organisation

“I’m now more inclined to delegate and step back.”

“I went out and did 360 feedback.”

“I put my case forward more strongly.”

“I now communicate about doubts and difficult times.”

“I am better organised and able to say “No”

Other changes and differences were linked to how they approached things

“I reflect more and stop and think.”

“It did stimulate me to stop and consider the motives of others”

Q8. If a colleague was offered coaching, what advice would you give?

Seven people were very clear in encouraging others to take the opportunity.

“Take it, you have nothing to lose”.

“Do it, jump at the chance”

“Go for it”

“ Do it. Absolutely”

Five people referred to being open-minded

”Take it and go in open-mindedly”

“Be open minded, be prepared to be challenged”

“Be open and honest”

“its an opportunity to think differently and open the box”

“Be completely honest and work out what you can get out of it, look in the mirror - this is someone else seeing and commenting for the first time.”

Four people referred to the developmental aspects of coaching, three showing their personal resilience

“I have always advised anyone to take coaching - it does help people bring out the best, and vulnerabilities can best be dealt with”

”Don’t be afraid to have some weaknesses, everyone can improve”

in contrast with one person (see mini-case study) “ I felt quite battered . . . it can be quite painful knowing your own strengths and weaknesses”

There were also a small number of comments that linked to outcomes and goals

“ try and think about what you expect to get out of it”

“Not to regard it as a cure all, have specific aims and objectives”.

“Think about goals, reviewing goals, whether they are realistic/not realistic”.

Q 9. Can you imagine how you might have gained more from this coaching?

Four people referred to the organisation’s lack of support for the process:

“If there had been more senior support and encouragement..”

“ Lack of support in the organisation”

“If there had been more senior support and encouragement for thinking outside the box”

and five who in particular commented about their line manager

“My manager offered no proactive support”,

“More input from my line manager would have been encouraging”.

“ No sense of my line managers impact”

“The coaching took place in isolation, as my manager doesn’t have a coaching style, so there is now a mis-match!

Others mentioned the missed opportunity for the organisation,

“PITO are not extracting value. They make the same mistakes and are not listening”
“Some follow up in PITO with peers, line managers and HR would have been useful for everyone”

Eight people commented specifically on the number of sessions. Five wanted more sessions

“ I would have liked more sessions”
“more sessions would have been lovely”
“ Two more sessions”

two people said the time was about right and one person said they could have stopped sooner and did (mini case study).

Two referred to the frequency of sessions

“ I would like it to be spread out –two to three years and not such frequency”
“ It would have been good to carry on, although maybe not so frequently”,

In response to this question, some people continued to mention benefits

“I’m coming over as more of an expert in what I’m doing”,
“it was good to find different ways of cracking the same nut”,
“ I’m coming over more as a boss less as a mother”

Mini case study

I decided to present a mini case study of the one individual in this context for whom the coaching programme did not work. I decided to choose this as a case and start to examine at what part of this process were there clues that the outcome would be as it was (The coachee left after 3 sessions). I decided to track back to the initial framing, the matching and also to explore the individual’s attitude to coaching as well as their degree of openness.

When I examined this in detail, it was clear that this was someone who didn’t really want to be in coaching but whose boss, the CEO wanted them to be there. It was clear from my own data sources that the boss was very engaged in the promotion of the programme. It was

therefore highly likely that the case individual probably needed to stay in the programme for their own sake in terms of their status and relationship to the CEO - how would it have looked if the coachee had withdrawn at an earlier stage?

What was interesting about this case was the coach's felt experience of working with this person was at odds with the way the individual presented themselves in words, with the comments made in the sessions. Thus, the coach did not feel that he/she was engaged with the process or getting real value from the sessions. When challenged about the value the coachee responded positively i.e. was not open about their perceptions.

The coach discussed this client in supervision after the first session and challenged her/his commitment to the process in the next session. The coachee asserted they had got a lot from the session and wanted to continue. This and the following session were described by the coach as "challenging".

The coachee withdrew from the programme after the third session.

In the research interview this individual reported that they really would have preferred to work with a coach or a group of peers who knew the nature of the work they did and could give technical tips and advice in direct relation to the specialist aspect of their role. They were simply not interested in the personal aspects that coaching would tap in to or to exploring their role performance in terms of self-management or personal effectiveness,

This case clearly links to the issue of coachee selection and to possibly matching. Both seem to be factors. With regard to the match, it is likely there was a style issue as it emerged they would have been more comfortable with a more structured style, rather than the AoEC coach's emergent style.

With regard to coachee selection, from the face-to-face interview it was clear that the individual would have been better suited to a mentoring relationship. However, as this was not on offer and their boss was strongly in favour of the coaching (because he had had a good experience of the coaching) this individual allowed themselves to go along and enter into a coaching relationship.

Quantitative data

Responses to **coaching statements** where 10 means **fully** and 0 means **not at all**

I understood why PITO provided coaching for some managers.	6.3
I understood why I personally was nominated for coaching.	6.3
I understood what my manager wanted me to achieve through coaching.	4.67
I understood what coaching would involve.	7.25
My coaching goals were directly related to my day-to-day work.	9.3
There was a clear link between my coaching goals and organisational priorities.	7.0
My coaching goals were influenced by my manager's input.	2.83
My coaching goals were realistically achievable in four sessions.	7.75
My work with my coach was focused on my coaching goals.	8.1

The data in this section broadly aligns with the data gathered through interviews. In some cases e.g response to question one, the range of individual scores is quite wide, from a score of 1 – to a score of 9, showing that some people did understand the organisational goals and others clearly did not.

Individual responses for question two show an even wider spread from 1 - 10.

In response to question seven, five respondents score 0 and only four scored above five (two 6s, a 7, and an 8).

These questions were inserted to gauge the experience of the structural elements of the coaching programme and clearly point to elements that were missing for some participants in the coaching programme.

Findings

My research question

“To develop a wider understanding of factors that influence the effectiveness of coaching programmes, through studying one coaching programme, in one organisation.”

gives a clear indication of the direction, shape and purpose of the findings, in that they should clearly reveal some of the critical success factors for coaching programmes. My findings also need to support the achievement of my Research Aims:

- To develop a wider understanding of evaluation myself in order to better support: AoEC clients, AoEC coaches working in client organisations, our ability to win business and our effectiveness in evaluating AoEC coaching programmes .
- To be able to talk knowledgeably with more sophisticated organisations about the purposes and benefits of coaching programmes, and how to structure them.
- To provide the programme organisation with a piece of evaluation.

The conventional wisdom supported by the research to date indicate that to be successful, the administration of coaching programme requires certain elements. According to the CIPD (2004), the important elements for coaching to be successful include:

- How was the briefing process conducted. How could it be done better?
- The choice of coach. Did the coach have the right range of knowledge and skills. Were the coaching models used by the coach effective and appropriate?
- The coach briefing process. Did coaches understand the needs of the organisation?
- Choice of coachees. Were the right people chosen as recipients of the coaching. Are there people who were not chosen but who could benefit from the process?
- Matching process. Did the matching process succeed in matching coachees with a coach who suited their needs and also the needs of the organisation. How could the matching process be improved in the future?
- The attitude and support of line managers. Did line managers support the coaching intervention. Did they allow the coachees time and space in which to try new strategies. Did they support their learning after the intervention?
- Was coaching the right kind of development intervention. Are other interventions

(such as conventional training courses) more effective or better value for money?

I was interested to see whether my findings confirmed the conventional views or showed something different.

In moving from data to findings a key step for me was stepping back from responses to individual questions and see an overall picture, so the findings do not necessarily fit within the questions asked. This was a deliberate part of the interview design. Each finding though can be supported directly by the data.

Finding 1 This was a successful coaching programme

The first finding is that the programme could be considered successful for twelve of the thirteen coachees. These were able to identify clear benefits of coaching, and informal feedback from managers endorsed this. They could all identify either specific behavioural changes or changes in longer term plans such as positive changes in career direction. This is evidenced from responses to questions one, six and seven.

It is also possible to state as a finding that this was a highly positive experience for them because when we asked them what advice they would give to other people about coaching they all said “do it”, nobody said “don’t go there”. They also offered some interestingly insightful bits of advice about how to get the best out of coaching, i.e. the degree of openness of the coachee, being positive, getting out what you put in etc and so overall from the perspective of the coachees this was a successful piece of coaching.

This may not be what the organisation originally envisaged as an outcome, however in the context of the organisation closing and people re-applying for their jobs it is reasonable to see these comments as indicating this was a good experience for those people.

My sense from the responses to Q8, in the way that they commented and the advice they gave, was that for 12 coachees undertaking coaching had been worthwhile.

Finding 2 Outcome Benefits

The next indication of the success of this programme was found by looking at the nature of the outcome benefits the coachees gained from the coaching programme, and the individual changes they made. When seen in the context of their managerial roles and the turbulent and troubled position of the organisation, it is reasonable to assess this as a positive result for the coaching. Key outcomes included:

Coachees who are managers who, indirectly through their exposure to coaching are now taking a more perceptive, aware 'other person-oriented' approach to how they behave within the organisation and how they manage people.

The people for whom confidence was an issue, now as a result of coaching, have gained greater confidence and a greater willingness to state their point of view in a clear way in meetings. This is an important outcome both for them personally and also for the organisation.

The two people who, in the context of a closing organisation where redundancies were going to be made, got to a position of having a clear future direction to move into.

Finding 3 What contributes to the success of the coaching?

As discussed earlier, I wanted to compare my findings with the conventional wisdom on the design of coaching programmes, in order to address my Research Question.

Coachees in this research found that the factors which contributed to the success of the coaching included:

- successful match
- confidentiality
- level of rapport/relationship
- opening up to another human being
- free flow in sessions (i.e. not a rigid process)
- raising awareness / "holding up the mirror"
- coach asking the "right" questions
- coach being able to offer tools & techniques to take away

The key finding here is that from the coachees' perspective, the only structural issue mentioned was successful match. While this was perceived by coachees as quality of coach-coachee match, it could be argued that it was the qualities of the coaches which meant that they would be good matches for most coachees.

Referring back to the CIPD (2004), the coachees in this programme only gave evidence that could be associated with three of the seven criteria, viz:

The choice of coach. Did the coach have the right range of knowledge and skills. Were the coaching models used by the coach effective and appropriate?

Choice of coachees. Were the right people chosen as recipients of the coaching. Are there people who were not chosen but who could benefit from the process?

Matching process. Did the matching process succeed in matching coachees with a coach who suited their needs and also the needs of the organisation. How could the matching process be improved in the future?

So, from the coachees' perspective, my findings indicate that successful coaching is possible with limited structure.

However, I would go beyond the limited vision of what makes for an effective coach – as set out in the CIPD document. Coachees in this programme identified the skill of the coaches in maintaining boundaries, building rapport and utilising an appropriate coaching style for the coachee, as being the factors which contributed towards success. See also the EMCC Competence Framework.

Finding 4 What is the organisations role?

Building on Finding 3 above, it is useful to explore the way the programme was set up by the organisation and to understand, what was going on there, what was that about?

The responses to Question 3 *Why do you think PITO provided coaching for the chosen group of managers?* Seem to offer a clue, as they were quite scattered and unclear. Working from a phenomenological point of view, if people themselves were unclear then its highly likely the

organisation was unclear. The organisation attempted to be clear by producing an email containing their objectives for the programme, and a finding is that the people didn't understand or remember them, there was no clear message.

From my knowledge of the organisation gained as both a coach and the programme manager, I know there were a number of mixed motivations by the organisation for running the programme. Ultimately they were not explicit about the holding message of providing the support for people as the organisation was closing. They dressed this up in a performance message.

The coachees appeared to offer good advice in their responses to Q9 *“Can you imagine how you would have gained more from this coaching?”* Some of this advice directly related to the need for better integration within the organisation, more organisational support, clearer structure, clearer place of coaching within the organisation and the organisations approach to development.

Looking at my original aims for undertaking the research, one was to be able to speak more confidently and knowledgeably with organisations about what makes for effective coaching programmes. As a result of this research, I can say, in terms of contracting with client organisations, that AoEC coaches will deliver great outcomes for individuals. However, if the buying organisation wants to translate those into organisational outcomes, then the organisation has to support the coaching programme.

Finding 5 Matching

As there were only four coaching sessions in this programme, it was not cost effective to the AoEC or individual coaches to undertake chemistry sessions or long matching interviews. The evidence from this programme is that a group matching process was effective and successful, despite the limited time available for matching. The matching discussion was only five minutes with each individual and this was done at the end of the group briefing session. Even with such limited time, the perceived success of the match directly contributed to the coachees being able to report a successful outcome. However, see caveat to this interpretation above.

This doubt about the importance of matching is reinforced by re-examining response to Q4. *How did you feel after your first session with your coach?* and cross-checking with responses to Q1. I decided it would be useful to check whether the three who mentioned ‘match’ in response to Q4 also mentioned match in questions 1. In fact only one of the three spontaneously mentioned match in response to Q1.

This raises an interesting question: what actually needs to happen to match a coach with coachee? When constructing a coaching programme do people need to be given a choice of coach? If the view is that people need to be, why do they need to be? When people are given a choice they make a choice, but if people were simply allocated a coach what would happen? Are they likely to develop a working relationship and progress forward? The question is open.

Owing to the limited time available for professional matching in this programme, it is reasonable to say that as a finding it is highly likely that people will work with whoever is allocated to them, so long as there is some convincing form of matching process. The finding is that it does not need to be lengthy.

Finding 6 The qualities of the coach

From this small piece of research, I can confidently go into the marketplace and say that AoEC coaches are skilful and able to coach effectively for Performance and Developmental outcomes. They have the ability of being able quickly to create an effective working alliance with coachees, which enables important personal and organisational issues to be explored in a useful way.

In this programme AoEC coaches were able to work effectively across a range of client situations. Those coachees who were stimulated to engage in a deeper level of coaching, worked with their coach to explore themselves in their current situation and wider life and gain greater clarity and self-awareness. Equally, because of their own professional working experience AoEC coaches were also able to bring tools and techniques for self-management and managing others to the coaching. The coaching was both profound and pragmatic.

Those who reported they felt positive and optimistic after the first session all seemed to link this to their experience of the coach

“ my coach asked the right questions”,
” My coach was constructively critical”.

While the match was important, the credibility and rapport established by the coach definitely had an impact.

A key finding then is, yes, the quality and qualities of the coaches are a key factor in the success of coaching programmes. Clearly more research is needed to tease out what are the qualities of effective coaches.

Finding 7 The role of the line manger

The findings from the data analysis show clearly that there was limited line manager involvement in this programme. Even where the line manager did participate, the level of input varied to a high degree. Most managers appear to have had a ‘laissez-faire’ approach, both in contributing to coaching goals and in checking progress with coachees along the way.

The organisation claimed the line manager’s input to be crucial, to enable clear goals to be set up front, especially as there were only four coaching sessions in the programme. As can be seen from the feedback, this didn’t happen in a systematic way.

The evidence is that even with very limited line manager involvement and organisational support, coaching can be personally effective for individuals. So in terms of findings around what contributes to successful coaching programmes, I have to ask, does it actually matter that line managers are involved?

Bluckert’s finding seems very pertinent here

“In larger scale coaching initiatives senior executives often have to come up with desired coaching outcomes for their direct reports and due to busy schedules, throw a few thoughts together in a rushed and unconsidered manner”

Bluckert 2006, p14

From the perspective of having set the programme up with the organisation, this was fascinating data. The justification for only allowing 4 coaching sessions (we had recommended 6) was based on Line Managers setting objectives and being closely involved in the programme. Learning for me is that, unless there is proper, informed and effective line manager involvement, it is better to assume there will be none. And unless an organisation can guarantee the quality of line manager input it would be better to press for five rather than four sessions.

Finding 8 The role of the coachee

My research seems to support the CIPD (2004), finding that a key factor for success is:

Choice of coachees. Were the right people chosen as recipients of the coaching. Are there people who were not chosen but who could benefit from the process?

My findings seem to confirm that a significant factor in the success of this coaching programme was the coachee and the coachee's outlook. Specific factors included the openness of the coachee to being coached and their ability to focus, and some good evidence for this came from the advice they would give to someone else about the opportunity of working with a coach:

“Are they really up for it? Be open and honest – if not it's a waste of time.”

“Jump at the chance, have an open mind. It's an opportunity to think differently and open the box.”

“Take it and go in open-mindedly. Be completely honest and work out what you think you can get from it. Look in the mirror – this is someone else seeing you and commenting for the first time.”

“Try and think what you expect to get out of it, and if you are open to listening, suggestions, different ways of doing things.”

“Go for it with clear expectations of what they want to understand – it could include the wider picture.”

“Embrace it wholeheartedly. Be open-minded. Don't be afraid to have “

“Be open-minded. Be prepared to be challenged. You get as much as you put in.”

From an experiential perspective, two of the coachees on this programme could be said to have not really benefited from the programme: one because their real need was mentoring or expert input, the other because overall they were a little vague and woolly. This only became figural for the coach part-way through the programme and, in the context of a four session programme really did not seem worth pushing because of the negative impact this could have had on the individual. What this points to is the responsibility of the organisation to select appropriately and to withstand individual, organisational or managerial pressure to provide coaching when it is not appropriate.

An overall finding based on this study then, is the role of the coachee in ensuring the success of a coaching programme. A question arising from the findings is then, how much focus do organisations and coaching providers actually place on the coachees' role in the success of coaching programmes?

Finding 9 Achieving Organisational Goals?

There were two distinct sets of goals associated with this programme. The first was the overall goals set by the organisation for the success of the programme, which formed part of the organisational background. The second were the individual goals and outcomes for each coachee.

Based on my experience of the limited structural support set up by the organisation, it is appropriate to speculate on their lack of commitment to the stated goals. In part this may be linked to the question, whose goals were they? I knew that HR had to work hard to secure the funding for this second programme of coaching and so probably had to satisfy a number of different people in order to get approval for the programme. Hence the wide range of goals for a four session coaching programme.

The organisation's Corporate & Strategic goals included:

- Management of change
- PITO legacy management – raising the profile and reputation
- Improve people skills and greater honest and open communication
- The extent managers are actively engaged with PITO's business in the run up to NPJA
- Focus on PITO's competencies as underpinning core values to support the

preparation of changing work roles and team structures.

- There should be visible differences and tangible evidence of positive change at the end of the coaching process.

It is interesting to make a link between these organisational goals and the outcomes described by the coachees. My finding is that individual outcomes do meet four of these six goals as set out below.

- **Management of change**

“I have gained techniques to support myself and prepare for difficult situations in advance.”

“I have learned to be more open with staff. I tend to be optimistic, positive. Now I am more likely to share and communicate about doubts and difficult times”.

- **Improve people skills and greater honest and open communication**

“I am more confident with managing my staff and dealing with issues”

“It has helped me to build better relationships with work colleagues.”

Coaching enabled me to reflect on why I don't see eye to eye with others. I now have better working relationships.”

“I've gained some new tools and techniques (for working with my team).”

“Confidence in public speaking. Increased assertiveness.”

“I think . . . and I'm not sure whether coaching did this . . . but I listen more, take note of concerns. I think they were latent competencies and I think I have been thrown into using them”.

- **The extent managers are actively engaged with PITO's business in the run up to NPIA**

“I put my case forward a lot more strongly. I put my requirements out there first time now. That's the benefit. I've had a lot of positive outcomes from that.”

“There was big benefit. Strangely, it made me think a bit more. I had been on autopilot”.

“Having confidence in higher-level meetings.”

“Great feeling of confidence. Will stand me in good stead for the future.”

“I put myself forward for a work stream lead.”

“Greater confidence in my abilities and knowledge. I’m happier about pushing myself.”

- **There should be visible differences and tangible evidence of positive change at the end of the coaching process.**

All the above plus

“It has influenced my management style. I am now more inclined to delegate and step back.”

“It helped me to reach a conclusion about my future. I actually found the way I have been working is not how I want to live my life in the longer term.”

“I applied for redundancy, confident I could do something else. (Absence of positive feedback here).”

While it was not an explicitly stated goal by either the coaches or the organisation, the organisation did want to provide general support to people at this difficult time, as they were aware there was limited line managerial support for this level of managers. The findings show that this was also achieved. This included support for career change, given that there had to be redundancies.

So, while I originally had doubts about the coherence of the Organisation’s wide ranging set of goals, my findings indicate that four of the original six goals outlined by the organisation were achieved across the cohort and this was achieved in only four sessions.

Finding 10 The need for flexibility in coaching programmes

Within the responses to Q9 *Can you imagine how you might have gained more from this coaching?* a significant number of people wanted more time. Two people who said the time was about right and one person who said they could have stopped sooner balanced this.

What I took from this was a need for flexibility, and so a finding is that an ingredient of a good coaching programme is some flexibility about time. Within this finding, it therefore follows that a checking-in process with the coachee and sponsor after three sessions allows the coach to understand whether to stay on track or refocus, or even bring the sessions to a close.

In Finding 8. I discussed the particularity of each person is a key factor. The coachees starting position is as much an indicator of likely success as anything else. So another finding linked in to issues around contracting, and who is the client, the individual or the organisation, is that the degree of freedom and flexibility organisations allow the coachee to pursue personally relevant topics. A degree of flexibility around issues in the coaching, will contribute to its success.

CONCLUSION

Having completed my analysis and listed my findings, I recognise it is now important to draw some conclusions from the project, i.e. what have I learnt?

I identified 4 conclusions:

- 1.) If you want coaching to be effective, have good quality coaches.
 - 2) If you want coaching to be effective, have coachees who are willing, open to change and positive about the opportunity.
 - 3) Manager input and organisational input, don't necessarily have to be there for coachees personally to get benefit from coaching.
 - 4) Matching: its role, who should do it, how it should be done.
- 1) If you want coaching to be effective, have good quality coaches.**

A key conclusion from the findings is that if organisations employ good coaches they can have some confidence that good individual outcomes will be achieved. From the perspective of the AoEC this is positive as we produce high quality coaches. If organisations want to evaluate a coaching programme and they have employed good coaches, they may only need to use a 'light' approach to evaluation.. There is no need to make it complex if good coaches are employed and the right coachees.

One of the key areas of interest for the author in the article by De Muse et al (2009, pp117-134), is the discussion of the type and style of coaching provided, i.e. performance, development etc. This is of particular interest because AoEC coaches are trained to a level of expertise where they provide developmental and even transformational coaching as well as performance coaching. The difference is often not understood by the buyers of coaching. This research re-confirms that coaches whose training encompasses a strong psychological component are equipped to deal with a wide range of coachees and coaching issues.

As identified earlier, most evaluation studies do not describe the nature of the coaching or the coaches' philosophical position and coaching approach. The significance for the author is that

this research project points to the importance of these factors and thus supports the findings of De Muse et al.

“We also should consider the possibility that a more useful measure of validity will be one that is associated with the coach rather than with the coaching process in general” (p.130).

As with other professionals, some practitioners are consistently more effective than others. There is almost no research assessing the effectiveness of individual coaches. In practice, however, the reputations and references of experienced coaches have carried significant weight when it comes to decisions about whom to hire. Buying decisions are strongly influenced by testimonials from senior coaching clients and demonstrable track records. The body of testimonials that now exists within the executive coaching population would be a useful place for a researcher to conduct analysis.

It is also worth noting here that recently major users of coach services of have re-assessed their processes for coach selection and so a piece of future research could be:

How do organisations that are using external coaches construe good coaching?

This would appear to be a significant topic of interest for coach training and accreditation. The author’s experience is that some programmes deliver better outcomes in terms of quality coaches than others. The AoEC has high quality coaches in part because of its rigorous selection processes into training programmes.

In line with my objectives for the research this supports me in my role of Director of Executive Coaching when I am talking to organisations. The AoEC takes in experienced people and the orientation of the coaching is not skills and performance it is to develop deeper skills in coaches, because this is what we at the AoEC believe makes a good coach. And good coaches enable coaching to be effective.

2) If you want coaching to be effective have coachees who are willing, open to change and positive about the opportunity

This research indicates that when evaluating coaching it is important to focus on coachees’

willingness to participate as one factor that contributes to effectiveness. We found that in this programme, coaching with AoEC coaches provided a very positive experience for those coachees who had a positive approach.

In this study one of the 13 coachees was dissatisfied, and one reported only minimal change. The findings from the data analysis seem to indicate one was probably unsuitable for this type of programme and s/he would have been better suited to mentoring or networking with other experts in their professional field. The other was very vague and brought no specific focus to his coaching conversations. In a longer programme, the coach would have brought this to his attention and challenged if he was making good use of the coaching. By session three in a four-session programme, the coach decided that this would be an unhelpful intervention for this individual in this context.

The other coachees all obtained to varying degrees positive outcomes and benefits, some even identified new futures for themselves. Also when asked to give advice the bulk advised in highly positive language to “go for it”

3) Manager input and organisational input, don't necessarily have to be there for coachees personally to get benefit from coaching.

A conclusion in this context links to the Herzberg model of motivation where the ‘dissatisfiers’ define the job context and the ‘satisfiers’ deal with the factors involved in doing the job. The structural items seem to sit on the ‘dissatisfiers’ side, i.e. the idea that “even so, it didn't stop me find it useful personally” came through in the feedback. This seems to be borne out by the remarks, when people talked about the quality of experience it was good regardless of the structure. However, when people talk about improvements they then start to say that poor structural integration, poor organisational support can interfere with personal and organisational benefits.

Here was an organisation that didn't really know what it wanted from coaching. It was also clear from the feedback from individuals and my own experience as a worker researcher in the organisation that there was not an over-arching organisational approach to coaching or learning. So an interesting conclusion is that it is still possible achieve and identify positive outcomes even where an organisation does not know or communicate effectively what it wants. out of coaching,.

4) Matching: its role, who should do it, how it should be done

One of the key conclusions I draw from this research is that I now question how important matching is and what needs to take place in the matching process.

The data from this research suggests that in the context of this coaching programme, the role of the matching process was more about inducting people into some of the processes of coaching and giving them the opportunity to ask questions about coaching than it was about giving coachees the opportunity to test out which coach they wanted to work with. It was not about what typically is present in matching processes, and this did not in any way seem to interfere with the success of the coaching.

The crucial element therefore is the communication/inclusion element, it is not the element of matching coach and coachee. The author's conclusions around this followed on from personal experience of the importance of matching for mentoring. An example being the importance of matching instructors and trainees on the helicopter programmes of the Royal Navy. The author developed a hypothesis around the relationship between depth of inter-personal skills that somebody brings to a paired relationship and the importance of matching: the less the depth of interpersonal skills the more important it is to work at the actual match between the two people. In the coaching context, match (unless there are some very specific and important issues) may be much more about bringing the person in to the coaching space.

This hypothesis can be taken further to include the diminishing need for matching in comparison to the increasing skill of the coach, i.e. with high quality coaches the match is less important because the coach is likely to be able to work with the vast majority of the executive population.

This links in to the author's conclusion above with regard to the quality of the coaches, i.e. the higher the quality of the coach the more likely you are to have a successful coaching programme.

Examining this in the light of (2004) where the focus is on the 'knowledge and skills of the coach', our research would indicate that it is not so much technical or functional knowledge and skills that are important, rather what appears to be more important is the interpersonal skills and the qualities and style of the coach.

In summary, this research has yielded some useful data which throws into question the need for rigorous evaluation of coaching programmes in organisations and has identified two possible additional routes for further research.

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