

COACHING FOR CHANGE IN ORGANISATIONAL TEAMS: RECIPROCAL RESEARCH AND PRACTICE BENEFITS

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Abstract

Emerging disciplines often lack an evidence base and, consequently, sacrifice credibility in practice and impact in knowledge creation potential. Coaching is a relatively new discipline with scope and reach into business and management. Finding ways to facilitate change is one of the challenges facing organisations. In this article, we report on an action research intervention to improve decision-making during individual and team coaching amongst senior managers. Action research appears to be an appropriate rigorous methodology in the sequential process of coaching. Coaching in turn utilises tools that action researchers could employ in their practice to facilitate change. Based on the findings, we propose three key elements to guide future action research of coaching for change interventions, namely individual development, mediated process and collective interaction. The rigour provided through the application of action research could make an academic contribution to strengthening the knowledge base of emerging disciplines.

Keywords: Team coaching, Action research, Coaching models, Organisational change.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is important to retain rigor in practice in an era which calls for evidence-based practice to increase credibility and contribute to theory development in any emerging discipline. Coaching is just such an emerging discipline – one which Cox (2015) has linked to adult learning due to its self-directed focus on change within a facilitating relationship characterised by a dialectic process to ensure learners are open to new learning. In evidence-based practice, balance is needed to facilitate change through the practice of coaching, whilst remaining focused on systematic enquiry into this practice through research.

There are reciprocal benefits in evidence-based practice; to both the exploration of change through coaching and to rigor in the use of action research (AR) as a methodology. The various forms of action research, which have emerged in numerous contexts, illustrate the versatility of the design and its powerful application as a tool for knowledge creation and change that could contribute to the emerging theoretical base of coaching (Davison, Martinsons, & Ou, 2012; Glassman & Erdem, 2014). Davison *et al.* (2012) confirm these dual purposes of action research for amelioration of prevailing conditions and for scholarly advancement; what Coughlan and Coughlan (2008) refer to as

knowledge produced in action. Burns (2014) states that if action research is a process to stimulate emancipatory change, then practitioners of action research need to understand how change happens. Clearly, practitioners of coaching can glean through knowledge created through this process.

One of the challenges when conducting action research relate to a lack of an underlying theory in the action planning phase of their project (Davison *et al.*, 2012). Not having a clear intellectual grounding for an intervention for change may jeopardise the outcome. As change is the key practical focus of action research (Coghlan & Coughlan, 2008), it may be helpful to explore theories which promote change (Davison *et al.*, 2012). Glassman and Erdem (2014) make the link between self-reflection and self-awareness for action and change. Knowing how to leverage these processes for change may be beneficial for action researchers (coaching evidence-based practitioners) working in varying contexts.

The coaching intervention for enhanced individual and team decision-making is the focus of the study reported in this article, as efficient decision-making is vital in an organisational context. Action research was the design employed to investigate the process of change and in so-doing contributes to creating new knowledge (Coghlan & Coughlan, 2008; Zuber-Skerritt, 2002). The definition of coaching of Coaches and Mentors of South Africa (COMENSA, 2012) refers to the professional, collaborative and outcomes-driven learning methods used for developing an individual and raising their self-awareness for achieving specific goals and more effective performance.

Best practice business coaching uses a structured but flexible framework or coaching model to help coachees gain self-knowledge (Dall'Alba & Barnacle, 2007), autonomy and awareness of behaviours affecting their workplace performance. According to Peters and Carr (2013:117), team coaching is different to one-on-one coaching as the "team as a whole is the client and collective performance is the goal". In this context, the coach acts as a thinking partner (Rostron, 2009) using a range of coaching tools to ensure that the individuals and teams optimise their decision-making in the work place. Davison *et al.* (2014) refer to the instrumental theories that guide application in the action research process.

In the coaching profession, an example of an instrumental theory, which is employed to guide practice, is a coaching framework or model. According to Stout-Rostron (2014), this framework is a structure providing coaches with a systemic way of formulating their own coaching approach to facilitate desired client outcomes. Moreover, according to Clutterbuck and Megginson (2011), such a framework is flexible and can be adapted over time and tailored to the coaching context.

The aim of the article is to report on the study by addressing the research question: What are the mutual benefits to both action researcher and coaching practitioner during an intervention to facilitate change? We report on the study where action research was conducted during a coaching process using team and individual learning amongst senior managers for improved decision-making. The objectives were, to design the coaching intervention with a solid theoretical base (coaching model); to implement an action research process; to explore effects on decision-making using business coaching; and to identify elements to enhance change. The action research used during the application of coaching models can contribute to the theory and scholarly development of the relatively young discipline of coaching, which is gaining in popularity worldwide. Reciprocally, action researchers could benefit from evidence of the coaching tools used for enhancing change and improving practice in a given context. Focus on rigour and practice provides mutual benefits in improving credibility and knowledge creation to both action researcher and coaching for change in organisations.

The article starts with a discussion of the instrumental theory underpinning the action phase of coaching. We then describe the research methodology employed and the findings of the systematic process of action and data collection during coaching over four phases. The first author (researcher and coach) reflects on using action research (AR) for coaching for improved decision-making. The article concludes by highlighting key elements that could enhance and facilitate change in an organisational context.

2. THEORETICAL RATIONALE

In scholarly work, there is a need for theoretical foundations that drive actions (Davison *et al.*, 2012). We describe the coaching model and tools designed to guide the action phase of this AR coaching intervention. As noted by Stout-Rostron (2014), coaching frameworks are tailor-made by the coach as a systematic guide for action during coaching. The coaching model, developed by the coach in this study, reflects elements of explore, review, reflect and learn, with immediate application of learning to the next steps in the process (see Figure 1).

Figure 1:
Coaching
conceptual
framework:
Relationship
between
coaching models



The CLEAR (Contracting, Listening, Exploring, Action, Review) model is the primary model shaping the coaching approach used in this intervention, with the Kolb model fitting in as an important part of the CLEAR process, and reflective practice forming an important part of the Kolb model.

Table 1: High level description of the CLEAR model

CLEAR model	Description	Typical questions
Contracting	Set the scope, the desired outcomes and ground rules. Agree what is to be covered.	What would you like to achieve today? Are we agreed on the scope and approach we will follow?
Listening	Through active listening and catalytic interventions, the coach helps the coachee develop their understanding of the situation and generate personal insight.	Have I heard you correctly? What were you thinking and feeling at the time? Could there be other reasons for this?
Exploring	Understand the personal impact the situation is having on coachee. Develop possibilities for the future.	How have you dealt with this issue in the past? What happened and what can you learn from this? How can this learning be applied to future situations?
Acting	Coachee choosing a way ahead and deciding the next steps.	Of the options you have explored, is there something that can help you make progress with this issue? What steps do you need to follow to achieve your aims?
Reviewing	Review what was covered, decisions made and next steps. Review the coaching process, what needs to be different in the future.	Are you clear on the decisions you have made and next steps? What worked and did not work for you in this session? What would you like to change for the next session?

The CLEAR model (Hawkins & Smith, 2007) is a logical model with easy to use questions asked in a step-by-step process. The Kolb model makes a contribution to the listen, explore and action stages of CLEAR.

The Kolb model has two continuums, an axis labelled the 'processing continuum' (approach to a task) and an axis labelled the 'perception continuum' (emotional response). The furthest ends of these continuums are dialectically related models of grasping experience. Kolb (1984) described the four quadrants shaped by these two axes as accommodating, diverging, assimilating and converging (see Figure 2).

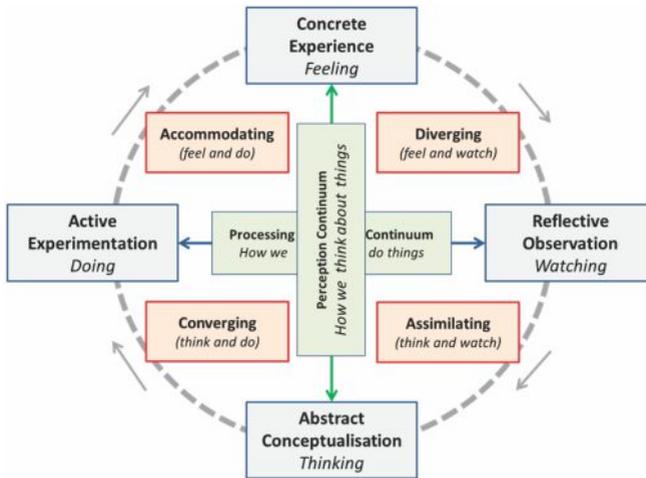


Figure 2: The Kolb model

Source: Chapman, 2005 (adapted from Kolb, 1984:42)

The four quadrants describe different learning styles, which help to describe the preferred style an individual has for learning and engaging with the world. The learning style is important for coaching and for this research, as the style will have an influence on how an individual will make a decision. (The learning styles inventory was applied in this study.) As mirrored in the action research process in the coaching session, the coach helps guide the individual through the four stages of Kolb, turning a decision-making experience into knowledge, which then feeds the next learning cycle. Rostron (2009) considers that only by moving through the four quadrants, is it possible to gain new learning. According to Fyrenius, Wirell and Silénm (2007), understanding is something that is continuously refined and reshaped. This model embodies the key elements of experiential learning, which emphasises the central role that experience plays in the learning process. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience (Kolb, 1984). Cox (2015) has indicated the connection and overlap of Kolb and the cycle of coaching.

The concept of reflective practice, introduced by Schön (1987) and expanded by Mezirow (2000), is a critical process in refining craft in a specific discipline. Osterman and Kottkamp (1993) described reflective practice as a means by which practitioners can develop a greater level of self-awareness about the nature and impact of their performance – an awareness that creates opportunities for professional growth and development. Experience is considered the basis for learning, but without reflection, the development of learning and knowledge cannot take place. Reflection is also a key element of action research and experiential learning (Glassman & Erdem, 2014; Kolb, 1984; Zuber-Skerritt, 2002).

Having presented the theories that guide this coaching intervention, we now describe the action research process applied.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Action research was selected as the methodology, as it presented an opportunity to pilot an approach in a real situation (improving the decision-making of senior managers through an action learning coaching intervention), providing sufficient flexibility for adjustment and learning along the way (Zuber-Skerritt, 2002). The value of action research was that it focuses on participation and developing knowledge practically through a democratic process (Glassman & Erdem, 2014). Coaching was practically applied in this individual and team intervention and action research contributed to scholarly knowledge production (Coughlan & Coughlan, 2008).

We used a five-phase approach with three steps in each phase. The first four phases include, simple cyclical model of action research; the plan-action-observe-reflect stages (Kolb, 1984; Zuber-Skerritt, 2002); and the last phase comprises documentation and recommendations (see Figure 3).

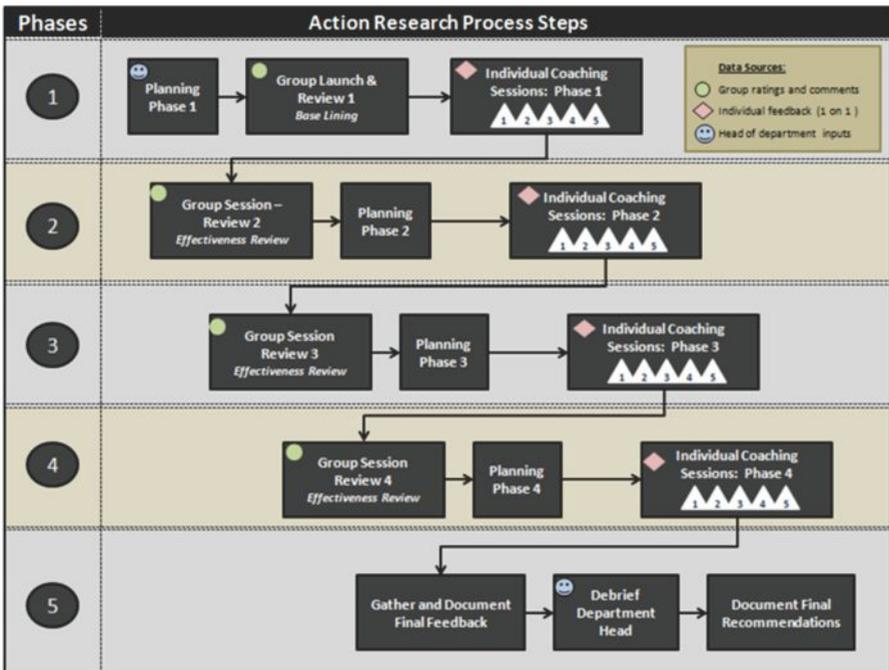


Figure 3: Action research phases and process steps

The 'planning' stage is shown as the first blocks in phases 1 to 4. Inputs for further planning and adjustment of the coaching process were taken from data collected in team sessions, one-on-one coaching sessions and researcher observation. The 'action' stage comprised the individual coaching sessions in phases 1 to 4. In these sessions, the coaching process and tools were used to contribute towards improving the effectiveness of decision-making. The 'observe' and 'reflect' stages were conducted as part of the individual coaching sessions and the team sessions. The CLEAR coaching approach included a review step during which the coach and participant shared observations, reflected on the session, and discussed what to keep and what to change for the next session. The team sessions were important for participants to share observations from their coaching experiences and to reflect collectively on how the process could be improved.

Data was collected and recorded from one-on-one coaching sessions and group sessions. During the one-on-one coaching sessions, the participants commented on progress they had made between coaching sessions and provided immediate feedback on the current coaching session. During the group sessions, participants provided feedback on the process and on the one-on-one coaching sessions. Feedback was obtained in open and facilitated discussion sessions followed by the completion of quantitative questionnaires with Likert scale and limited open-ended questions designed by the researcher on indicators related to decision-making, the decision-making process and the contribution of the coaching tools and process. The researcher took detailed notes in a researcher journal, which were the data sources that facilitated reflection and analysis after the session. Analysis provided input to the planning of the next coaching sessions, enabling changes in focus and approach as deemed necessary.

Although some level of quantitative feedback was received from the structured questionnaires (where descriptive statistics were applied), the focus was more on the qualitative data gathered. Qualitative content analysis was applied which included coding the data, clustering into categories and identifying themes (Henning, 2004). Taylor-Powell and Renner (2003) recommend five process steps for qualitative data analysis. The first step was knowing the data, which was enhanced by the intimate engagement of the practitioner coach and the immediate data analysis. The second step was focusing the analysis (in this case on the effect of the coaching on effective decision-making). The third and fourth steps included categorising information and identifying patterns and connections, which were applied based on the theoretical framework of change and their learning during the intervention. The final step was interpretation. Direct quotes are reported in this article where applicable. The data reported in this article focuses on sequentially highlighting the process of change based on the researcher/coach's reflection during the coaching intervention.

To enhance quality, various aspects were noted and applied (McNiff & Whitehead, 2012). For authenticity, ethical considerations are important. Research participants willingly volunteered their time to participate in this action research and in so doing, shared personal and confidential information regarding their work and personal lives. The researcher, as coach/practitioner, remains a point of debate (Guiffrida, Douthit, Lynch, & Mackie, 2011). However, in action research the close proximity to the research is considered beneficial and using a researcher journal helped the researcher to be reflective regarding the dynamics at play.

As an external coach, the researcher was an outsider to the organisation that would be beneficial in terms of reducing power relations. Strategies, for credibility to ensure quality, included prolonged engagement over time (in this case ten sessions), the participants were included and actively involved in goal-setting and there were persistent observations including multiple perspectives from the coach and coachees using various data collection methods (questionnaires, recordings of feedback discussions and researcher journals). For dependability, comprehensive field notes by the coach/researcher were used and all research partners were involved in the coaching sessions. Strategies for confirmability included reflexivity and methodologically self-critical accounts, as reflected in the concluding remarks in this article.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION: COACHING INTERVENTION ACTION RESEARCH PHASES

The participants were five senior managers from a beverage manufacturing company representing a mix of nationalities, ages, gender, work experiences and tenure at the company. The department head and his direct reports responded enthusiastically to the opportunity to participate in this research, because this team was in a phase of finalising their planning and execution frameworks and associated processes. The concern was that the business frameworks that should guide decision-making had not achieved the desired level of influence and impact. He saw action research as an opportunity to take these managers to the next level of performance. He believed that the participative style of action research would facilitate accountability and ownership for improvement. In reporting the findings in this article, only selected data is included that pertains to the changes during the course of the coaching intervention. We report on the reflections of the researcher (first author) of the learning through the individual and collective processes during the four phases in the coaching intervention.

4.1 Phase One

Participants displayed increased awareness of the issues and factors driving effective decision-making and they commented on how decision-making had largely been an unconscious process. One participant described it as follows:

This is making me think about thinking. In the past, it was purely a gut feeling, but this is a risk. These principles help.' The participants were starting to use a new language of decision-making, drawing from the literature and using words, such as 'decision traps', 'confirming evidence traps', 'reflection' and 'red flags'. The feedback from participants highlighted their willingness to engage in effective decision-making. A participant commented: 'The more we learn about the process, the better we get at it'.

The participants were asked to identify the actions they would take between this coaching session and the next to increase decision-making effectiveness. A common action identified was the need to reflect on decisions being made and to learn from past decisions. They also realised the need to think about the thinking that leads to decision-making. This self-reflection as a pre-requisite for change was also noted by Glassman and Erdem (2014). They identified the need to listen more and to engage with others in the decision-making process, with a participant commenting: 'don't do it alone'. Reflection on this first phase suggests that exposure to knowledge (Schön, 1987), in a mediated space (Engeström, 2001) in collaboration with others (Glassman & Erdem, 2014), helps to create awareness in the foundation before change is possible.

4.2 Phase Two

Reflecting on the findings from Phase Two, it was evident that coaching had yet to have an influence on decision-making at an individual and team level. Participants understood the value of coaching but commented that they were only 'at the beginning' stage and still needed to practise effective decision-making. Examples of comments:

One really needs to apply one's mind and ensure we get the best value. I think there is still a lot of value to be gained. This is still in progress. More coaching equals more effective decision-making.

It seemed as if the process had raised awareness (Glassman & Erdem, 2014) and understanding of effective decision-making amongst the participants. However, coaching and Kolb's learning styles had yet to be seen as effective contributors, although reflective practice at an individual level (Schön, 1987) was already considered to have made improvements and an important contribution.

The exposure of the participants to their Kolb learning styles had effect as reflected in a participant's comment:

This is an unbelievable process. It's a pity I am only learning this now. It highlights bad management practices happening daily. If we managed with Kolb, thinking would be a lot different.

The application of the Kolb learning styles inventory could have created a triggering event (Mezirow, 2000) and acted as a stimulus for reflection. Participants realised that by understanding their learning styles, they could be aware of the blockages to their thinking and effective decision-making as important process in coaching (Campbell, Whitehead, & Finkelstein, 2009). A participant who rated high on the reflection and observation axis commented: 'I spend a lot of time awake at night thinking about whether a promotion will work. I over analyse things sometimes'. Another participant, who rated high on the action/do axis, understood why he made a decision and stubbornly forged on: 'It's my decision and I'm just going to do it'. Both these participants learned to reflect on the effects of their behaviours thus illustrating the benefits of the mediated space (Engeström, 2001) provided by the coaching intervention.

The participants reported being more consistent in defining effective decision-making as including listening, reflecting, considering a wide range of options and a more calculated approach. These new definitions aligned with the view of Campbell *et al.* (2009) who believe the improvement in decision-making occurs through stronger governance, additional experience and data, and increased levels of dialogue and challenge.

The sessions highlighted the need to take a tailored approach to the development of each participant, which is possible in coaching (Stout-Rostron, 2014) and in action research (Zuber-Skerritt, 2002). The need for a tailored approach is reflected the views of McAlpin and Vangen (2012), who believe the coaching approach should have enough flexibility to adjust to what is coming out of the coaching engagements. Concepts and the relationship to effective decision-making were still new and participants would need to continue using and practising good practice before it would become second nature. The third round of one-on-one coaching sessions focused on reinforcing good behaviours and the continued development of personal approaches to effective decision-making.

4.3 Phase Three

The revisions identified in the planning session informed the action in the one-on-one coaching sessions. The focus of the third coaching sessions was to reflect on their journey and to share decision-making experiences in their work lives. Participants were enthusiastic about applying the styles of Kolb to challenges and decision-making. This resulted in new behaviours at work, including managing expectations from others and self in the decision-making process, more structured engagement with other decision-makers and trying new customer strategies. Fyrenius *et al.* (2007) refer to the way understanding is continuously refined and reshaped. Participants identified questioning for shaping decisions and contributing to more effective and calculated decision-making.

Kolb's styles was a tool for the participants to ensure that decision-making was built on reflection and learning from past experiences. Participants were seeing the benefits of their conscious application of improved decision-making behaviour, thus reflecting the view of Eady, Drew and Smith (2015) that individuals perceive issues in a different way. In addition, they were learning how to engage with others in decision-making processes, yet remaining accountable for the outcomes. Participants realised the importance of a structured approach to decision-making, as well as a structured engagement with others in the process. This required a more deliberate approach and communication when engaging with others.

With respect to the coaching sessions, participants reflected that the sessions provided perspective on the journey they were on, allowing them to take stock of where they were, and provided an opportunity for them to reflect on their experiences (Mezirow, 2000; Schön, 1987). These convictions tie in with the reflection component of action research.

4.4 Phase Four

The focus of this final observe-and-reflect team session was to review progress against the objectives set for the coaching intervention and to discuss how the team would continue progressing after completion. Participants commented on a visible improvement in decision-making, coupled with increased levels of confidence.

Kolb has taught us to review, reflect and to learn from past experiences and gathering information to ensure you make the right choice from the options available.

We have opened to each other's options, ideas and thought processes... I am clearer, open and confident in my approach.

The example cited above indicates the value of working in a team as it challenges and helps to develop thinking. Another participant considered Kolb's styles important for transforming experience into learning and then into knowledge through reflection. Reflection became a key contributor to more effective decision-making reiterating the role of reflection in change (Glassman & Erdem, 2014). Participants found the coaching sessions and their own reflection practices as important learning spaces that contribute significantly to increasing their effective decision-making:

It has just proved how important it is to sit back and reflect. There is so much information you can gather through reflection.

Participants commented on how the team members had grown through the process and developed their individual approaches to reflection. This replicates the notion of Eady *et al.*, (2014) that transformation helps

individuals view problems in a different way. They believed they were reflecting more and reported that they could see the change in the team. The experience of the participants matches the view of Osterman and Kottkamp (1993), who stated that practising reflection drives a level of awareness that helps to identify and create opportunities for professional development and growth.

All participants were reviewing the past and basing decisions on Kolb's styles. These styles were described as the glue that helps bring everything to life and encourages participants to take a step back and reflect, to think before doing. A participant commented: 'Amazing how it is working. Decision-making in the past was often based on emotion'. The Kolb process was used in this session to identify experience of change, good and bad, that participants could learn from and apply to their decision-making.

The final step in the adult learning hierarchy of Biesta (2012) is emancipation. We do not claim this level of change based on the limited scope and time frame of this study. It is hard to ascertain whether the change is sustainable and to what extent and depth learning took place. However, participants did identify key anchors for change as being goal setting, routines, decision models, collaborating with others, asking the right questions and reflecting. Participants created their own approaches to decision-making and even developed their own step-by-step models for application that indicated change (Glassman & Erdhem, 2014). The models varied in their structure and approach, but each model was owned and understood by the individual and, importantly, helped them achieve higher levels of effective decision-making.

The application of models for structuring practice could be a reflection of shared learning from the coach as participant in the intervention. As developing models and frameworks is a feature of coaching (Stout-Rostron, 2014), the fact that the participants have grasped the value and are using this tool could indicate effective learning. Gilmore, Krantz and Ramirez (1986) believe that the key differentiator between action research and other types of research is that participants apply their learning and improvements immediately to the world they live in. The behaviour of the participants through the immediate application of their models in the current business world supports this view. The participative style thus contributed to participants' accountability and ownership.

At the start of each team session, individuals defined effective decision-making. Shown in Table 2 below are the key elements of the definitions for each phase, which illustrates how their definitions change over time during the course of the action research coaching process.

Table 2: Elements of definitions of effective decision-making identified by participants across the four phases of the action research process

Definitions: Effective decision-making			
<i>Definition 1</i>	<i>Definition 2</i>	<i>Definition 3</i>	<i>Definition 4</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outcomes • Impacts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outcomes & impacts • It is a process • Reflection is important 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outcomes & impacts • It is a process • Information gathering • Listening to other opinions • Generate alternative options • Reflection is important • Weigh up & consider options 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good preparation & planning required • Clear objectives • Outcomes & impacts • It is a process • Information gathering • Listening to other opinions • Generate alternative options • Reflection is important • Weigh up & consider options

Initially the definitions focused on a simple mix of desired outcomes and the impact of decisions. As action research progressed, the depth and richness of the definitions grew, with the definitions ultimately including purpose, process and outputs of effective decision-making. This demonstrates the deeper understanding of the elements required for effective decision-making gained by participants through the action research process. The learning from this analysis is that the coaching and team processes used and the theory shared and put into practice, were successful in developing a better and richer understanding of effective decision-making. As suggested by McAlpin and Vangenes (2012), coaching successfully acted as the bridge between reflection, awareness, learning, knowledge and action.

5. CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

Action research provides a systematic process for investigating change and improvement in practice in a given context. Coaching is a process that can mediate the development towards improvement and as such can provide action researchers with useful tools to enhance their practice. The Kolb experiential learning model, as part of the CLEAR approach, contributed largely to the action research coaching process. Coaching with Kolb's learning styles enabled participants to grasp and transform the decision-making experience into decision-making knowledge. This knowledge is now useful for more effective future decision-making. Incorporating Kolb's styles into the process earlier could be beneficial due to the identified value of applying the learning styles inventory as a trigger for deeper engagement. Participants found the assessments useful to identify strengths and opportunities for decision-making. Participants quickly learnt to use Kolb's styles both in the coaching sessions and outside coaching sessions and they intimated it taught

them to turn decision-making experiences into knowledge that increased effectiveness.

The use of reflection by participants proved to be valuable both in coaching sessions and outside of the sessions. They reported that taking time out to think about how they were thinking, consciously engaging with their internal dynamics and raising awareness concerning the decision-making processes added substantial value. The experience and feedback from the participants suggest the value placed on reflective practice as a critical process for refining one's craft in a specific discipline. The value placed on reflective practice by participants was a surprise finding and led to the insight to increase the level of focus and practice on developing reflection capability in participants, especially for reflection outside of the coaching sessions.

Towards the latter part of the one-on-one sessions, it became evident that participants found it useful to structure decision-making into simple models and approaches they could apply when facing a decision. These models and approaches differed appreciably, but despite the differences, the positive impact reported by the participants was the same. This was an unexpected output of the coaching process. It would be useful to include an explicit approach to help individuals build their models or approaches as an expected output. This would allow coaching time to test and refine models.

Based on the findings and reflection, we propose the following key elements to guide future action research coaching for change interventions:

Individual development:

- Focusing on strengths and opportunities early in the process
- Goal setting a part of individual's ownership of the process
- Individualised personal learning focussing on agency
- Developing reflective capacity of participants

Mediated process:

- Use of concrete tools which make learning more tangible
- Skills development for application of models and tools in the workplace
- Tailor-made flexible tools and approaches

Collective interaction:

- Participation during team coaching and sharing
- Accountability

The researcher and participants learnt the value of using the action research intervention as it provided an opportunity to pilot coaching in a real situation, offering flexibility for adjustment and learning. The coaching models and tools tailor made for the intervention with elements set out, such as CLEAR, Kolb and reflection, could provide action researchers with examples of instrumental theories to facilitate development in a given context. Future

research can focus on applying coaching tools in other action research projects. Action research for researching other aspects of coaching is also recommended.

This research yielded many opportunities for coaching improvements during the course of the intervention that a less flexible approach could have missed. The use of action research for systematic enquiry into new disciplines, such as coaching, can increase the theoretical base of the field in a more credible way. Likewise, the benefit to action research interventions is the example that coaching provides in using instrumental theories or models, which are tailor made for flexible application in a given context. Focus on rigour and practice provides mutual benefits in improving credibility and knowledge creation to both action researcher and coaching for change in organisations. The key elements that were distilled from the findings of the action research intervention for improved decision-making in the organisational context using coaching tools and models, could provide insights into how to foster change, enhance practice and facilitate change and development of participants in other contexts.

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