

**Coaching for soft-skill development:
an action research study
with project managers**

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**Dissertation submitted to Oxford Brookes
University for the partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the award of
PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE
(COACHING AND MENTORING)**

**September 2018
[Amendments July 2019]**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I acknowledge the generous support given by all participants, since without their investment of time this research could not have happened. I feel honoured to have been supported by their efforts and it is always a pleasure to hear about their ongoing development.

A sincere thank you is offered, to my patient supervisors, Dr Elaine Cox and Dr Adrian Myers, who gave lots of encouragement along the long journey of writing, despite all my challenges. I believe we all must be amazed to have the final draft. Thank you too, to all Oxford Brookes staff, particularly Dr Jan Harwell and Kate Williams who gave helpful guidance in the last few months of writing.

I have felt selfish and privileged to engage in a doctorate; my family and others are patently aware they have come second to my will to complete it; thank you to them for their patience through many reset expectations. I at least paused in my quest for my daughter's wedding in 2016!

Thank you too, to the many other supporters along the way, including those who helped me find participants – PMI UK members, DCaM students, some special supporters from the 2010-2013 MA in coaching cohort at Oxford Brookes, my proof-readers and a host of well-wishers who have consoled, questioned, and inspired.

ABSTRACT

Inspired by the limited literature regarding the benefits of coaching to the coach and prompted by personal experience as a project manager and coach, this participatory action research study takes the situation of professional project managers, who need soft skills, to explore the usefulness of coaching practice as a development approach.

There is confusion around soft skills but coaching uses clearer personal and interpersonal skills, and associates philosophical aims including negotiation of a collaborative relationship. Development of soft skills is similarly unclear though real practice, feedback and reflection are essential components, which are often used in the development of novice coaches. Coaching practice is explored for its relevance to project managers.

The action research included typical introductory coach training for managers, then facilitation of six coaching practice sessions with a previously unknown coachee (also a project manager). A pragmatist philosophy supported a focus on the practical learning from this coaching practice. Interviews elicited the soft skills noticed while coaching and then any changed use of soft skills at work. Data analysis used induction to identify project managers' descriptions of learned and applied soft skills, deduction to group themes according to recognisable soft-skill groupings, and abduction led to a rationale for the application of learned skills.

Findings show project managers benefit in respect of skills, personal confidence and can feel more like leaders, which contributes to the limited work on benefits to novice coaches. After coaching practice, project managers aim to support colleagues and to encourage them to contribute more, showing elements of managers' coaching in the workplace. A general soft-skills framework of personal skills, effective communication and role-related skills is proposed for project managers.

Keywords: project managers, soft skills, soft-skills development, benefits of coaching to the coach, managerial coaching, manager as coach.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Soft skills are not well-defined (Matteson, Anderson, and Boyden, 2016; Claxton, Costa, and Kallick, 2016) but are understood to relate to the effectiveness of interactions between people (Yearley, 2017). In comparison, coaching skills which involve soft skills are clearer (Maltbia, Marsick and Ghosh, 2014). Although coaching literature generally focuses on the benefits to the person being coached (Bachkirova, Cox and Clutterbuck, 2014; Cox, 2013) or the organisation overall (Garvey, Stokes and Megginson, 2014), there are a small number of studies that show coaching practice can benefit the coach. For example, Edwards, Snowden and Halsall (2016) found that confidence was boosted for organisations' internal coaches and Mukherjee (2012) found similarly, alongside improved soft skills. This study focuses on the benefits of coaching to the coach.

Despite their poor definition, soft skills are demanded in the 21st century and considered essential for graduate employment (Cimatti, 2016; Robles, 2012; Hatva 2013; Wahl et al 2012). Consequently, universities are under pressure to improve courses, because employers judge that graduates lack the required soft skills (Velasco, 2014). Meanwhile, organisational training can be found wanting (Boreham, 2018) and recruiters put soft skills at the top of their criteria lists (Jones, Baldi, Phillips and Waikar, 2016). The competitiveness of organisations through innovation is one reason; Weldon (2018) reports the lack of soft skills can stifle innovation as well as individuals' technology-related careers, based on a consultant report (WestMonroe & Partners, 2018). Horth (2018) gives the rationale that major paradigm shifts in technology have made people the major barrier to innovation for engineers. Broadening this view, Cobo (2013, p82) says 'skills for innovation are not restricted to scientific and engineering occupations' and need soft skills. An even broader perspective is that employees now work in teams that communicate and collaborate across diverse cultures (CIPD, 2017). A required outcome is to make effective relationships – to influence, negotiate and lead effectively (McDonnell and Sikander, 2017).

The general need for soft skills is widely documented for project managers too: in academic literature (Ndhlovu and Weeks, 2013; Ramazani & Jergeas, 2015) and by professional bodies such as the Association of Project Management (APM), and the Project Management Institute (PMI). A speaker at APM's 2014 conference called for more balance between hard and soft skills (APM, 2014). According to the front page of PMI's publication *PMI Today* (June 2013), soft skills are 'critical capabilities' for project managers. WestMonroe & Partners (2018) report that 'over 40% of business people pointed to collaboration-based issues [that] hinder work efficiency and timely project

completion' (p3), due to poor communication and teamwork. High project failure rates add pressure to improve effectiveness (Stevenson and Starkweather, 2010), as well as the people issues noted for complexity or change (Egginton, 2012; Thomas and Mengel, 2008). The specific skills often involve communication. Wider adoption of project management (Packendorff and Lindgren, 2014) can broaden cultural expectations: such as non-governmental organisations working in international development (Brière, Proulx, Flores, and Laporte, 2015) and public-sector organisations (Jałocha, Krane, Ekambaram, and Prawelska-Skrzypek, 2014). Often soft skills are embodied within terms such as *leadership* and *business intelligence*; PMI requires evidence of these as part of continuing professional development (PMI, 2017a). Unfortunately, such complex terms are open to interpretation and divert attention away from understanding the underpinning skills and skill-development approaches.

Even if project managers recognise the need for soft skills, they may not receive any training to develop them. Cicmil, Williams, Thomas, and Hodgson (2006) suggest that it is often difficult for time to be set aside for project managers' development because projects are time pressured. On-the-job training is commonplace (Darrell, Baccarini and Love, 2010). Savelsbergh, Havermans and Storm (2016) suggest project managers learn from self-reflection and reflection of others, particularly their manager, but imply this is not routine practice; Egginton (2012) also reports a lack of coaching. For some Information Technology (IT) related projects, the new Agile methodology (PMI, 2017) for software development (Adkins, 2010) is providing some awareness of coaching. Wojtczuk-Turek and Turek (2015) in a study about innovation in Poland, also suggest team coaching is needed. Though it would be more usual to receive coaching (Taylor and Woelfer, 2010; Carbone and Gholston, 2004), coaching skills are beginning to be embraced by the project management discipline (Berg and Karlsen, 2007). Coaching skills are thus relevant to project managers.

Previous research (Thompson and Cox, 2017) has shown that project managers can recognise advantages from being a coach, particularly for projects dealing with change. However, it also showed project managers have mixed experiences of coaching which can depend on the organisational coaching culture; so, there is potential value in introducing project managers to the practicalities of coaching. In addition, Thompson and Cox showed advantages from being a coach as well as from being coached and highlighted the opportunity 'for the development of soft skills for project managers, which are often seen as lacking' (p12). Enabling project managers' development of soft skills is a rationale for this study.

The apparent burgeoning number of people taking coach training (Lane, Stelter & Stout-Rostron, 2014) suggests that coach skills are useful in many situations and can be used alongside other roles. In particular, the need to understand coaching as part of the manager role (McCarthy and Milner, 2013) is a possible contribution beyond the benefits to project managers. Coaching skills are well documented in practice literature (Rogers, 2008) and in skill competency lists provided by professional coaching organisations such as the International Coach Federation (ICF). Coach training for managers is criticised for being oriented to coaches (Rock and Donde, 2008b); nevertheless, coach training appears attractive and provides an approach for developing soft skills in project managers with practice that aligns with their learn-by-doing ethos (Savelsbergh et al, 2016).

Recognising that experience as a coach develops over time (Hawkins, 2010), the current study aims only to introduce coach skills, to explore their direct practical benefit as soft skills for a project manager role. The research question is 'in what ways do project managers develop soft skills through coaching practice'. Project management literature shows some evidence of benefit from acting as coach (Berg and Karlsen, 2016). In addition, coaching is becoming a 'popular organisational development strategy' (Ladyshewsky, 2010, p293) and projects are increasingly used to organise work (Lundin, Arvidsson, Brady, Ekstedt, and Midler, 2015); both reinforce the relevance of introducing coaching to project managers. This study gives the opportunity to explore the specific coaching skills that are useful to project managers, and when they are used. In addition, it is an opportunity to consider the benefits of using coaching practice as a practical, flexible solution for soft-skills development for anyone.

1.1. Researcher's professional interest

This study is prompted by my own experiences of coaching helping with my own soft skills. Maltbia et al (2014) refer to the ICF competencies as 'capabilities of the coach' (p175) and show correspondence with relating and communicating skills. I anticipate that project managers will experience coach skills as new and valuable skills for their work roles.

As a coach practitioner, I recognise that coaching is evolving as an academic discipline and as a profession (Bachkirova, Spence and Drake, 2016; Bachkirova et al, 2014). Professional competencies associate specific ways to use soft skills and coaches are expected to continually develop these skills through experience, feedback and further training (Stober, 2010). The professional coaching relationship is unusual in that it aims to remove power-related issues (Ferrari, 2006) that may normally exist between co-workers – such as status and ability. It demands a contracted adult-to-adult relationship, with an

agreed purpose to help another human-being make changes. Acting as a coach has given me a practical opportunity to become aware of deeper aspects of soft skills; others may benefit too.

I hold current certifications from professional organisations, PMI and ICF, as a project manager and a coach. I was a project manager between 1999 and 2005, running software projects in a global IT organisation, then took voluntary redundancy. I had worked as a first line manager and had been in technical leader positions for many years; I was a typical task-focussed, accidental project manager as described by Darrell et al (2010). I received training after becoming a project manager, but nothing related to acquiring soft skills.

With an initial academic journey in engineering, I feel I am a representative product of the educational intent to motivate those who can *do mathematics* to follow a scientific path that excluded soft skills. Coaching came into my life unexpectedly through becoming a trampolining coach, as a parental contribution to my daughter's hobby. I had already become fascinated in how people learn and are influenced, having had to focus on that when I was a manager during the period 1989-1991, leading my team through change. My coaching practice undertaken since 2005 has supported busy individuals in improving their soft skills related to time management, project management and delegation.

Through education and training programmes, and becoming accredited with the ICF in 2014, many of my coaching practice hours have involved other coaches. It is clear to me that coaches have a better appreciation of how to use the collaborative, reflective space of coaching than other clients, which suggests to me additional understanding and skill. I believe that becoming a coach was the forum where I first understood how to be a coachee, that is the person being coached, even if my managers thought they were coaching me prior to that; I recognise the phenomenon of *coachee readiness* (Kretzschmar, 2010) and believe this takes some adjustment from traditional schooling, training and parenting, but improves learning.

With any project, it is important to keep the end-goal in mind; I desire to contribute value to both the project manager and coach communities. I have indicated a practical need for soft skills in the work that project managers do and that relevant literature suggests valuable soft skills can be developed through becoming a coach. Using coaching practice as a development method is based on my own life experiences and is encouraged by coaching culture and project management potentially becoming more widespread in organisations. I realise there is little research in the benefits of coaching to the coach, yet I recognise my own personal development through acting as a coach – with skills which are

useful in any situation, not just when coaching. If participants show similar benefit, this study would add to the relevant literature.

1.2. Methodology

The aim of this research is to study in what ways project managers develop soft skills through coaching practice and how they utilise the learned soft skills at work. Thus, the intention is to explore the consequences of coaching practice rather than the coaching practice itself. The focus is the soft skills project managers are learning and applying in their work role. Understanding the use of project managers' soft skills in their work environment is a practical outcome for project managers and may shed light on how soft skills are modified or learned and how coaching practice effects the changes. A philosophical stance of pragmatism is taken to focus on this practical outcome. Baskerville and Myers (2004, p331) explain pragmatism recognises that 'all human concepts are defined by their consequences'. The stance embeds the assumption that project managers will apply their learned soft skills at work if skills are useful and thus indicate the influence of coaching practice.

Five objectives have been set for this study:

1. Conduct a literature review of soft skills development, project-manager development and managerial coaching, incorporating the limited literature on how coaches benefit from acting as a coach, to develop a conceptual framework for the study that embraces the question how coaching practice can develop project managers' soft skills.
2. Design and facilitate training to prepare participants for the coaching practice.
3. Design and facilitate an action research intervention which supports the exploration of how project managers develop their soft skills through acting as novice coaches.
4. Gather thoughts and feelings from project manager participants relevant to their development of soft skills, exploring their reflections about coaching practice and how the soft skills are relevant to their project manager roles.
5. Analyse the data to understand how coaching practice influences the development and use of soft skills outside of coaching and thus contribute to the limited coaching literature on the benefits of coaching to the coach, to project management literature on the relevance of coaching practice to project managers and to soft skills literature on how soft skills are developed through coaching practice.

Within the pragmatic frame, participatory action research, (Reason and Bradbury, 2001; Herr and Anderson, 2005) is the chosen methodological approach. The research question suggests a need for action, and action research supports a focus on learning, with a flexible approach that seems important when outcomes of the intervention are unknown at the outset. Reason and Bradbury (2001) explain the 'participatory worldview seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice in participation with others in pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people' (p1), which closely mirrors the action, reflection, and contribution aspects of the research objectives.

Two separate groups of project managers were recruited to support the study. The first group comprised those participants who would be practising as coaches and will hereafter be named 'participants', or 'coach participants' in this and the methodology chapter for clarity. The second group comprised project managers willing to act as coachees (those being coached) and will hereafter be named 'coachees', or 'coachee participants' in this and the methodology chapter. The coach participants were expected to have had no practical knowledge of acting as a coach before, to make learning of skills more likely and thus not waste their time. The coachee participants would have had experience in being a coachee, to make it easier for novice coaches to coach them. There were no selection criteria related to project managers' ages, experience, industry or similar. Coach participants were each paired with a coachee participant in the order that consent was given; there was no formal matching process. The time commitment was significant for most interested prospective coach participants, and the first eight willing participants, who were actively working as project managers but who had no experience as coaches, were selected.

The initial intervention for the action research was a day's managerial coach training. Then, each coach participant was introduced to his/her assigned coachee participant. Coach participants then took responsibility for completing six coaching sessions with their coachee. Herr and Anderson (2005) advise flexibility of approach with participatory action research, in case something unforeseen happens. Two action cycles each covering three coaching sessions were initially outlined with a focus group marking the end of the first cycle. The interview schedule allowed regular contact with participants during the first action cycle, in case something needed to change, such as providing additional training or different action cycles being necessary.

Each planned action cycle was of three months' duration allowing the three coaching sessions to occur approximately monthly. The main data collection came from four interviews with each coach participant; three during action cycle one and a final one held

after all coaching sessions were completed. During the interviews, participants were asked about the skills they were learning and those they were applying at work, with a shifting emphasis towards the latter completed in the final interview. All interviews and the focus group were recorded, transcribed and anonymised. Feedback from coachee participants was also collected in two recorded interviews, though this was not considered primary research data because they would only be asked for informal feedback on the coaching skills.

In participatory action research, it is not only important to consider the researcher in relation to participants for ethical and validity reasons, but also for data collection (Herr and Anderson, 2005). Because the research question is mine, participants were asked to 'cooperate' with me to provide data (p82). I would be an 'outsider in collaboration with insiders' (p39) because each participant would be working in their own context. I aimed to bring my knowledge of coaching, facilitate the participants' introduction to coaching and encourage their interest in decision-making during the study, but any participation they offered beyond their coaching practice would be optional, due to their limited time availability.

Following the three interviews in action cycle one, I summarised each of the interview rounds in respect of soft skills that had been mentioned. This was achieved by listening to the interviews or reading transcripts and recording soft skills as they arose – as a secretary might summarise a meeting; not using formal thematic data analysis. The point of communicating with all participants was to encourage them to feel part of the project through shared experiences.

A qualitative approach to the research was taken primarily because the study is an exploratory one, and also because soft skills are related to the human condition and are not well-defined. The interview and focus group transcripts were used as the data to be analysed. NVIVO was used to manage the data. Thematic data analysis using Braun and Clarke (2006) was done separately on each set of interviews, after completion of coaching practice. The second interviews showed similar learning to the first; data analysis on them was quickly abandoned. Preliminary network diagrams connecting prospective themes and sub-themes were created.

In data analysis, soft skills were hard to separate from one another, and some skill codes could easily shift from one theme to another. Having three data analysis points during the action research process helped me to see if there were any longitudinal changes in the learning, but also complicated analysis. Finding a meaningful way to present the results kept changing and felt challenging. Through trying to write up some of the data,

comparing the thematic networks and rereading the transcripts, I eventually decided to separate learned skills from applied skills and to organise themes into recognised soft-skill groupings. I adapted my thematic analysis method to that of Attride-Stirling (2001), and finally got clarity and stability in the skill themes.

There are several possible contributions to knowledge and practice from this study. Primarily the interest was how coaching practice made a difference to project managers' work behaviour, particularly their use of soft skills. If the coach skills more broadly benefitted the project managers, not just in being able to coach, this could support other coaching literature about the benefits of coaching to the coach. Another contribution possibility was understanding the relevance of coaching to project managers, a type of manager not generally responsible for people development in organisations, which could highlight a new coaching genre.

1.3. Literature overview

The purpose of the literature review in action research is to establish what is already known about the study topic, to be able to demonstrate improvement in practice (McNiff and Whitehead, 2011). Here the research is exploring a potential method of developing the soft skills in project managers, through practising coach skills that organisations typically use. Initially, comment is made on the general coaching literature that shows little coverage of the benefits of coaching to the coach. Then there are three sections that more directly reflect the research question. Firstly, a review of soft-skills development for all workers reflected the challenges in clearly identifying soft skills and their specific outcomes and choosing training activities. Secondly, an investigation of project managers' soft-skills development gave focus to the soft skills project managers need and the development approaches they typically use. Thirdly, managerial coaching was reviewed as the most comparable coaching genre to the project managers' situation, which shows managers' activity, skills and training.

Google Scholar was used as a general search method initially, and specific searches used the Oxford Brookes University library search facility that covers many database collections such as Academic Source Complete, PsychInfo, EBSCO and EmeraldInsight. Specific search terms are given in the review chapter.

Coaching is perceived as a dyadic relationship (Garvey Stokes and Megginson, 2014) yet definition is challenging and evolving (Bachkirova et al, 2016). The process of dialogue with the aim of personal growth for the receiver of coaching is potentially a shared perspective across genres (Bachkirova et al, 2016; Cox, 2013). Practitioner literature

recommends that the person coaching, the coach, builds a trusting relationship with the person receiving coaching, the coachee, and uses soft skills to progress the coachee's agenda (Rogers, 2008). Thinking skills are required to adopt a coaching philosophy (Western, 2016): in organisations coaching may focus on organisational performance (Garvey et al, 2014), and specific criteria such as employee wellness (Grant, 2017). The facilitation of learning emerges as an alignment of employee and organisational agendas (Beattie, Kim, Hagen, Egan, Ellinger and Hamlin, 2014). Coaching is generally understood to have an intention that the coachee learns (Cox, 2013). Despite limited emphasis on coach benefits, coaches are guided towards continual personal development, including coach supervision, which enables them to learn from their coaching practice (Hawkins, 2010). Coaches are thus privileged over non-coaches in their soft-skills development; their learning can also be used in any situation not just when coaching.

In relation to soft skills, there is a generally perceived need in 'today's service-oriented and information-focused market-place' (Matteson et al, 2016, p80). Yet, definition of soft skills is considered challenging (Riggio and Tan, 2014), even a 'humpty dumpty' term without meaning (Hurrell, Scholarios and Thompson, 2013, p161). However, definition is potentially no more challenging than for the terms *coaching* and *project manager role*, due to contextual variability. Development is challenged by the contextual meaning; real practice is recommended with feedback (Levasseur, 2013; Matteson et al, 2016). Soft skills cover a broad set of skills which apply to interactions with others (interpersonal skills) and to individual actions (personal skills; Matteson et al, 2016). Soft-skills development may not be common for adults but more concerted efforts are being made in schools and universities (Koenig, 2011; Humphrey, 2013; Tang, 2018). Levasseur (2013) notes that technical people have mostly trained through personal study, thus soft skills are not naturally gained from traditional courses.

Awareness of the need for soft skills in project managers is emerging from a historical emphasis on the technical skills promoted by professional organisations that focus on effective project delivery (Pant and Baroudi, 2008). Employers aim to recruit project managers with soft skills (Pinkowska and Lent, 2011) but may need to develop staff (Egginton, 2012). Svejvig and Andersen (2015) provide a literature review on the Rethinking Project Management initiative, RPM, with 74 papers dated from 1983 that highlights social and political aspects as one of six themes arising from the desire for project managers' education to take a broader perspective. A modern definition of a project as 'a temporary set of roles tied together by channels of communication to achieve change' (Thompson, 2017) reinforces the importance of relationships and working together, and covers any need for negotiation in social and political situations.

Increasingly universities are offering project management courses that recognise the need for soft-skills development (Shelley, 2015). Literature outside of the search can recommend coaching skills (Berg and Karlsen, 2016). Project managers tend to have self-responsibility for their careers and move positions for different leadership experiences (El-Sabaa, 2001). There is little direction on soft-skills development.

Coaching as part of managerial practice was considered appropriate to review, because project management is done in organisations, and project managers sit at many different levels in a hierarchy, but typically at a similar level to managers or below. Managers may – or may not – act as coach (Conway, 2013; Gilley, Gilley and Kouider, 2010) which may relate to motivation (Hunt and Weintraub, 2010), but is potentially because organisations adopt different cultural approaches to coaching. In an organisation using both internal and external coaches, Ogilvy and Ellam-Dyson (2012) interviewed eighteen coachees and twelve line-managers (who had been trained as coaches) about the content of managerial coaching. They found the manager influential in the decision for a coachee to have coaching (from an internal coach), and in the setting of the goals for coaching, but not involved in the contracting between coach and coachee, nor closure of coaching. In that environment, the coaching was separate to the manager-employee relationship. Rock and Donde (2008a) indicated in another case study of an organisation where over 100 internal coaches were trained, the participating trained managers reported that learned coaching skills affected their behaviour outside formal coaching: examples given are ‘how they run their meetings, organize their time, and interact in daily conversations’ (p12). There is little empirical evidence in general of the results of managerial coaching (Beattie et al, 2014). Rafferty and Fairbrother (2015, p1) highlight ‘the process by which health professionals translate manager-as-coach training into successful practice outcomes, has remained largely unexplored’.

The review shows that coaching depends on maintaining a collaborative relationship and use of communication skills (Rogers, 2008); relating and communication skills are key (Maltbia et al, 2014). Soft skills are not clearly understood (Claxton et al, 2016; Matteson et al, 2016) but relate to human interactions such as coaching. The importance of soft skills in project management (Svejvig and Andersen, 2015) is becoming clear but development may only be ad hoc through experience (El-Sabaa, 2001). A gap exists to explore coaching practice as a soft-skills development approach.

1.4. Definitions

The literature uses different terminology for soft skills. Katz (1974) uses human skills, which relate to non-thinking, non-technical skills, while Fisher (2011) uses people-

management skills that imply the skills used when interacting with people. This study uses interpersonal and personal skills terminology to separate between skills for interactions with others and those for the individual alone. The phrase, *intrapersonal skills*, is occasionally used; Matteson et al (2016) refer to these as interpersonal skills, such as questioning, that one can use on oneself.

Definitions for soft skills are hard to find. There is a lack of 'clarity, consistency and a recognisable theoretical base' (Osman, 2017, p25). Matteson et al (2016) try to base a definition of soft skills on the definition of skill, which has a knowledge base and a set of actions but assert that 'soft' does not clearly pin down the knowledge and actions needed, compared to a skill like knitting. Hurrell et al (2013) suggest that skill needs a different definition to do so, because it 'develops over time, with practice; involves cognitive processes and manipulation of knowledge and includes an element of discretion' (p165). This creates the distinction of soft skills from personal traits through discretion in the act of execution. For example, answering the phone in a friendly manner could be seen as a customer-oriented soft skill which is distinct from a fixed trait like having a personable demeanour on the phone.

Yeardeley (2017) offers a practical definition of soft skills: 'skills needed for effective and productive interpersonal interactions', but this does not make clear the need for thinking skills or self-management. I use aspects of the Hurrell et al (2013) definition and the Yeardeley definition to create my own: *soft skills develop over time, with practice; involve cognitive processes, manipulation of knowledge and an element of discretion in relation to effective and productive interpersonal interactions*. This definition supports the inclusion of thinking skills and managing oneself appropriately in these interactions.

Coaching practice is my terminology for the post-training activities of the participants where they are acting as coach with their assigned coachee. The following ICF definition of coaching implies more competence than participants may achieve in their short period of experience in this study: 'coaching is partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential' (ICF, 2018). My definition uses a small adaptation: *'coaching practice is the partnering with coachees in a thought-provoking and creative process that supports the coachees to achieve more professionally'*.

PMI (2018) offers this definition of project managers: 'project managers are change agents: they make project goals their own and use their skills and expertise to inspire a sense of shared purpose within the project team'. According to APM (2018), a project manager is accountable for the success or failure of a project; where a project is a unique,

transient endeavour, undertaken to achieve planned objectives, which could be defined in terms of outputs, outcomes or benefits. The PMI definition used to be similar to the APM version and has recently been updated to adopt a more social aspect. I have chosen the PMI definition, with the definition of project taken from APM because it is more established.

1.5. Summary and guide to chapters

This chapter has outlined both the professional and theoretical context of this study and has introduced the research design, including the participants who are collaborating in the action research. The rationale for conducting this research is to:

- 1) Explore a practical approach to developing the soft skills in project managers, which is important and underpinned by the theoretical base of coach skills.
- 2) Gain an understanding of the coach skills project managers find useful and the likelihood of a project-manager-as-coach coaching genre.
- 3) Add to the theoretical knowledge of evidence-based coaching regarding the benefits of coach skills in relation to personal and interpersonal skills.

Chapter 2 explores the literature relating to soft skills and their development, project manager development, and managerial coaching.

Chapter 3 details the research paradigm, participatory action research methodology, process, data collection and analysis processes and reflects on the trustworthiness of the results.

Chapter 4 explains the rationale and content of the coach training provided to enable the participants to initiate and complete the coaching practice.

Chapter 5 presents the findings in relation to the soft skills learned through coaching practice.

Chapter 6 presents the findings in relation to the learned soft skills that are now applied in the participants' normal work role.

Chapter 7 brings the study to a conclusion by relating the findings, including the useful learned soft skills for project managers, and contributions to soft skills, coaching and project management disciplines. Limitations are discussed alongside ideas for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature review

The literature review aims to uncover research relating to the research question ‘in what ways do project managers develop soft skills through coaching practice’ and incorporate the limited literature on the benefits of coaching to the coach. The first section discusses the lack of attention to coach benefits in coaching literature. Thereafter the manager as coach (Cox, Bachkirova and Clutterbuck, 2014) coaching genre is chosen for the literature review as the most appropriate one for project managers because they work in organisations. Figure 2.1 shows the three areas relevant to the research question: soft-skills development, project managers’ soft-skills development and managerial coaching practice.

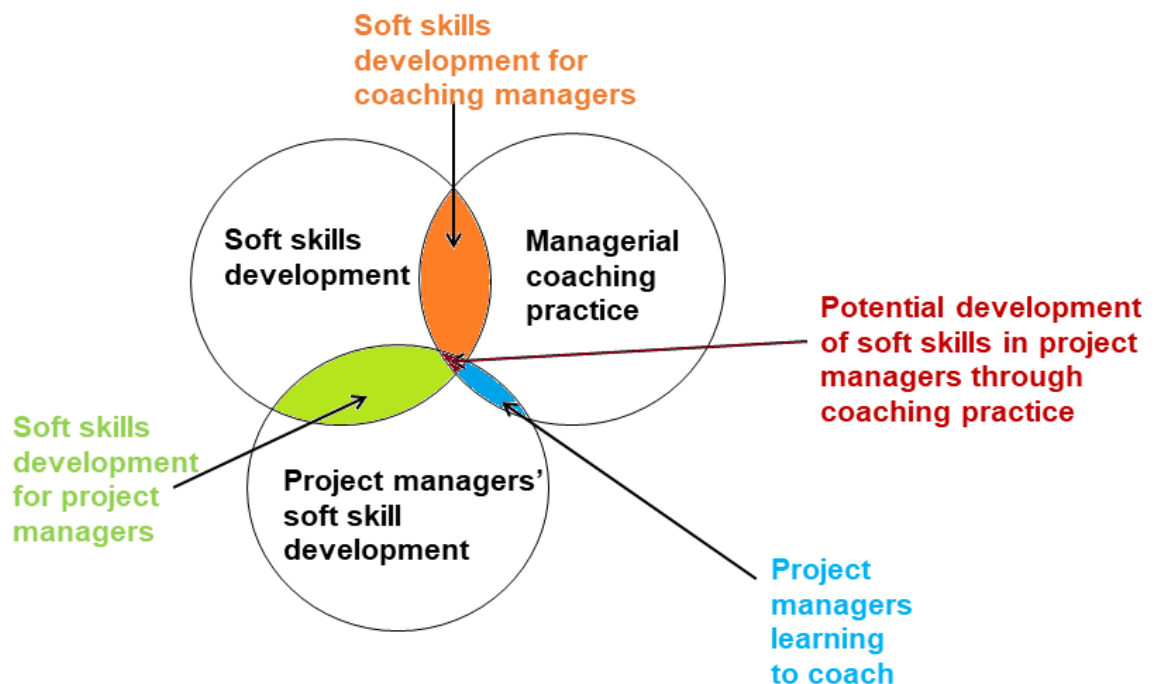


Figure 2.1. Overview of literature search.

The three areas overlap in relation to soft skills. Two overlapping areas are potentially key to identifying both the soft skills used by coaching managers, and those required by project managers. The third overlap area – project managers learning to coach – was expected to be small because previous research (Thompson and Cox, 2017) suggests that project managers do not commonly use coach skills. While managerial coaching is the chosen focus for coaching, any coaching genre would have similar soft skills overlap because professional organisations, such as the ICF, emphasise the coach’s

communication, relational and facilitation skills (Maltbia et al, 2014). The general meaning of coaching and its essential skills initiates this review.

Four sections follow. **Coaching and benefits of coaching to the coach** discusses how coaching ignores benefits for the coach. **Soft-skills development** reflects the apparent need for soft skills across many disciplines yet development challenges due to lack of clarity of meaning. **Project managers' soft-skills development** reflects the perceived importance of soft skills to project success yet little focus on soft-skill development. **Managerial coaching practice** reflects its outcomes, skills used and typical training. Library searches used phrases such as 'soft skills development manager', 'project manager development' and 'managerial coaching' and are detailed in the latter three sections.

2.1. Coaching and benefits of coaching to the coach

Bachkirova et al (2016) position coaching as a professional discipline, but acknowledge the difficulties in defining coaching. They assert that coaching does not conform to the accepted way of defining practice because its purpose, process, context and clientele vary across coaching examples. Instead, they propose that the way coaching sessions are described is potentially common to all coaching situations. Asserting a dyadic relationship as the historical origin of coaching, Garvey et al (2014) similarly suggest this, highlighting the relevance of negotiation of the dynamic coaching relationship and whose agenda is achieved through coaching. Coaching practice has been deliberately chosen as a development method, because coaches are expected to exercise soft skills in their conversations with coachees (Van Nieuwerburgh, 2017; Rogers, 2008). Thus, the soft skills used in a coaching conversation are potentially describable and are an established reference point for the study.

In addition to conversation skills, coaches need thinking skills to adopt an underpinning coach philosophy. Western (2016) suggests there are four discourses that shape how all coaches think and work: 'soul-guide, psy expert, managerial, and network coach' (p124). Professional coaches are encouraged to learn about these different influences and thus understand the breadth of coaching (Cox et al, 2014). The managerial coach combines coach and manager roles and is interested in supporting an organisation to improve performance (Western, 2016). For organisations, Whitmore (2009) also urges a high-performance mindset that believes in the potential of others. The line manager as coach is similar to project managers who work in organisations either as employees or contractors and typically lead a temporary organisation to complete a project. Project managers may

find the conversation and thinking skills of coaching practice useful for project performance.

In the dyadic relationship of coaching there are two people using skills and potentially gaining benefit. The prevalent view is that the coaches 'create coaching interventions that meet the real needs of coaching clients' (Stober and Grant, 2006, p6); thus, coaches have skills, coachees receive benefit. Yet, Stokes (2015) points out that coaching discourse has ignored the required skills of the coachee in gaining benefit from coaching. He cites 'best-selling practice books on coaching' (p22) that recognise different capabilities of clients, including coachability, level of development, thinking, decision-making and emotional awareness. Similarly, the benefits of coaching to the coach are a rarely mentioned aspect of coaching. However, when talking about coach supervision, Hawkins (2010) suggests 'every coachee becomes a teacher' and the coach's 'own development is weaved through every aspect [of] practice' (p381).

The practitioner literature for the coaching profession sets the expectation that coaches are developing themselves and receiving supervision (Zeus and Skiffington, 2002). This supports coaches to reflect on their actions to work with integrity and to learn (Bachkirova, Jackson and Clutterbuck, 2011). The knowledge base for coaching is huge and opinions diverse (Bachkirova et al, 2014); professional coaches are encouraged to broaden their knowledge of coaching approaches and look for the evidence behind techniques (Stober and Grant, 2006). Yet coaching handbooks (Cox et al 2014; Flaherty, 2010) do not detail the skills or knowledge gained that may be useful in non-coaching situations. Coaches can also be encouraged to develop themselves through self-coaching (Flaherty, 2010). Stober (2010) suggests the onus is on coaches to 'integrate the best available knowledge with their own expertise in the service of individual coaches and their contexts' (p405). She relates the 'chaotic and uneven landscape of professional development' (p407), which suggests a lack of consistency and guidance for coaches' careers.

Focusing on coaches within organisations, Bachkirova et al (2014) observe six distinct types of organisational coach: 'line manager as coach [,] expert coach [,] internal professional coach [,]; coaching role model [,] performance coach [and] developmental coach' (p3-4). St John-Brooks (2018) claims that employees who become internal (professional) coaches do recognise personal benefits, though the claims are made after the employees are established with a coach role. Coaching can be initially geared to senior people and those with high performance potential and broader adoption may spread into a coaching culture (Garvey et al, 2014), which may support managers to coach (Hunt and Weintraub, 2010). Agarwal, Angst, and Magni (2009) suggest that giving

constructive feedback, holding the desire for higher performance and dealing with work-life balance for employees are ideal expectations in a supportive coaching culture.

There is apparently no interest in the possibility that some skills may improve faster by coach development than by receipt of coaching. Garvey et al (2014) relate one coaching culture framework and the benefits of a coaching culture, but still focus on encouraging coaches to coach, and coachees to ask for coaching. Yet, they recommend 'integrate coach training for all' (p62), but do not elaborate on the rationale, or on *all* or the specific training everyone should receive. One possible rationale is that coachees might have more readiness for coaching if they had more skills (Stokes, 2015). A question remains about the benefit of a coach development programme for everyone in an organisation.

There is a question about how supervision helps a coach's development alongside the practice. Asking how supervision contributes is similar to asking how coaching contributes to coachee learning; how much can a coachee or supervisee do on their own: for example, through reflection, talking to buddies and getting their own feedback. Many coaches in organisations do not benefit from supervision (Garvey et al, 2014), so they may not be developing. Bachkirova (2016) suggests coaching sessions are 'adaptive systems [with] outcomes largely unpredictable' (p30). The coach has to make decisions on how to handle different situations, many of which are likely to be unique, because humans are unique. Supervision is considered ideal to build learning (Bachkirova et al, 2011).

Organisations may support managers to develop through training and supervision. Garvey et al (2014) cite positive and negative arguments for professional coach competencies but suggest standards are 'a pervasive part of organisational life' (p223). Standards for managers may thus be set by an organisation's coaching culture; Hawkins (2012) suggests that training can then be geared to organisational needs and some companies accredit with professional bodies such as the Institute of Leadership and Management or European Mentoring and Coaching Council. He also indicates that 'some progressive organisations' managers receive coach supervision (p67). Coach training and supervision are therefore two potential benefits for managers beyond what they may learn during coaching activity.

Discussion now shifts to three studies that evidence specific benefits to the coach. Reporting a case study of one organisation in India where some managers were trained as internal coaches, Mukherjee (2012) recognises the benefits to them: 'interpersonal skills, listening ability, confidence level, work-life balance and visioning'. Mukherjee also suggests that for 'technical managers [who] reach higher levels of leadership primarily

based on their technical competencies, engagement in internal coaching may also help in the development of leadership competencies' (p76). Forty managers from the senior management team were selected from self-nominated individuals by considering 'their people skills, past achievements and credibility within the organisation' (p80). Those showing interest wanted to 'build their leadership skills [and] have the opportunity to give back'. Only 19 participants completed their coaching activity of 12 sessions with each of three middle managers, which potentially reinforces the earlier view managers may not do all the coaching they could do. Sixty per cent of the 19 reported that their interpersonal skills had improved, and some other benefits reported as 39% or less. Nevertheless, Mukherjee concluded that 'coaching is one of the most effective tools in building leadership capacity within the organisation' (p85) based on improved skills and confidence. Improved leadership capacity could be attractive to project managers.

Van Nieuwerburg & Tong (2013) used a mixed-methods approach to study 16-17year old 'A' level students who volunteered to participate for a period of nine months. The coach training covered three days on coaching skills that focused on tools the 25 student coaches could use to enhance the study skills and exam preparation of their 'GCSE' student coachees. GROW coaching model (Whitmore, 2002) and behavioural techniques were explained and there was practice coaching in triads. The coaching activity was weekly sessions of 30-50 minutes during the nine months of an academic year. Quantitative analysis showed that coachees benefitted. Fifteen of the 25 students participated in qualitative study, which showed a variety of benefits for the coach. Firstly, the coach training provided learning of the coaching skills they could apply now and in the future. Secondly, they perceived positive developments in themselves, such as improved study skills, improved school behaviours: 'active participation, openness to others, willingness to take advice and helping behaviours' (p18). They also improved personal skills: 'emotional intelligence, self-confidence, perspective-taking abilities and communication skills' (p20-21). Almost all coaches reported better relationships with others, whether teachers, students or outside of school; for example, 'improved relationships with friends and peers as a direct result of improved problem-solving and decision-making skills' (p19). Again, project managers could be interested because they are involved constantly in problem-solving and decision-making; the promise of improved relationships could be beneficial.

Ammentorp and Kofoed (2010)'s pilot study with in neo-natal nurses also shows a coaching course increased self-efficacy. The nurses received coach training in the anticipation of improving 'mindfulness and being-in-relation competence' (p258) that was felt to be needed for the relationship between the nurses and babies' parents who found

the neo-natal care overwhelming due to 'hospital language, culture of the health care providers, busy environment and technology' as well as an uncertain future for the family. The aim of the coach training was to 'strengthen the nurses' ability to listen empathetically, to express their understanding and support and to explore the experience, feelings and expectations of the parents' (p259). Project managers may benefit from an increase in self-efficacy, though supportive, empathetic listening may be considered less beneficial for a task-focused role.

These last two foregoing studies do not make clear whether and how much the coaches receive coaching. Leggett and James (2016) highlight how difficult this can be when coach training is designed to include being coached, because for example, 'a deeper awareness and empathy with the coachee perspective' (p57) results. Their research with alumni of a university coach development programme focuses on coach skills, building self-awareness and coach identity. The course itself embeds coaching practices such as reflective discourse, use of personality psychometric and critical reflective practice. In their findings, coaches in organisations found benefits in the way they approached others in their other roles, not just in the role of coach, and increases in management effectiveness. The coaches felt they had changed and were more confident; thus, coaches benefit from coach development programmes.

Also highlighting the difficulty of separating receipt and practice of coaching, peer coaching has been used extensively in teacher development (Ladyshevsky, 2014) and is generally considered 'an excellent learning strategy for the development of skills' (p293). Individuals at similar developmental levels coach each other at different times, and the exploration of ideas and conflicts in thinking can aid information processing. In comparison, the manager as coach relationship is one where unequal power can be challenging (Ferrar, 2006): a difference in status is clear, but also potentially differences in experience and knowledge including coach training, may be evident.

This section has established coaching as a conversation (Bachkirova et al, 2016; Garvey et al, 2014) that requires soft skills (Rogers, 2008). Despite coach and coachee both using soft skills and having the opportunity for benefit, there is emphasis on the coach's skills (Stokes, 2015) and coachee benefit. Those who have the good fortune to become coaches have better soft skills (Mukherjee, 2012) that are potentially useful in any situation, and are guided towards continual development (Hawkins, 2010). The few examples of studies of benefits to the coach are partially clouded by the potential inclusion of support from another coach (Leggett and James, 2016). However, this limited literature

gives confidence that benefits can include improved leadership skills, self-confidence and empathy despite these advantages over non-coaches being little recognised.

2.2. Soft-skills development

As discussed in the previous chapter, the definition of soft skills is challenging and this study focuses on interpersonal and personal skills. There is one journal with soft skills in the title, with non-research articles from India that has a similar focus. The journal's stated content areas are oriented to management; this literature review maintains a similar but slightly broader organisational viewpoint that includes education and training. This section explains the search strategy, summarises a conceptual framework for soft skills and includes two sub-sections that highlight firstly the prevalent need for soft skills in many different disciplines and secondly, development activities.

Soft skills represent a broad topic area. Just the first twenty papers in one search of the keyword 'soft skills' covered many skills (strategic, cultural, leadership, management, project management, employability) in many business areas (real estate, marketing, software development, consumer goods). After many attempts to focus the search, most referenced literature is based on 'soft skills' in the title or specified as a keyword, for manageability and maintenance of a broad perspective. Breadth is important to embrace the full meaning of soft skills. Yet, skill groupings such as communication, management and leadership have generated their own disciplines that extend beyond skills. This review aims to focus on skills.

History suggests soft skills relate to managing people and their tasks. In the military, soft skills were so-called *transfer tasks* that were hard to convert to procedures (Jacobs, 1973). People were considered unpredictable compared to machines. Whitmore and Fry (1974) in their study within the US army refer to 'actions affecting primarily people and paper' (p1). Axline (1981) similarly highlights people-related skills in accountancy, where auditing partners 'understand, predict and control behaviour [in] the middle of people pressures' (p17). Souder (1983) recognises people-management skills are needed when becoming a manager of engineering projects.

Figure 2.2 shows a simple soft skills taxonomy and related theories to begin a conceptual framework for the study. It depicts an individual's view and an organisational view. For the individual, soft skills depend on traits, attitudes and intelligences, which can be considered part of soft skills, but skills are strictly separate from them. Thus, emotional and social intelligence (Goleman, 2007), and any other of the multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1995) are excluded from skills in this study. Yet confusion is acknowledged. Bacolod, Blum and

Strange (2010) highlight that traits and intelligences support skills learning and that intelligences are more plastic than traits and can be developed. Also, the EQ-I measure, cited in Clarke (2010), one of several emotional intelligence scales includes skills and attitudes: ‘interpersonal skills, intrapersonal skills, adaptability, stress management, and general mood’ (p6). Clarke criticises EQ-I and similar measures, preferring to use the ability-based MSCEIT measure in a study to show the importance of emotional competence in project managers. This literature review is influenced by this critique and adopts the view that emotional intelligence is an intelligence that affects skills, but is not a skill itself. Social cognitive theory and self-regulation (Bandura, 1991) indicates actions are influenced by forethought, thus thinking skills are included, but what motivates individuals to use their soft skills is excluded.

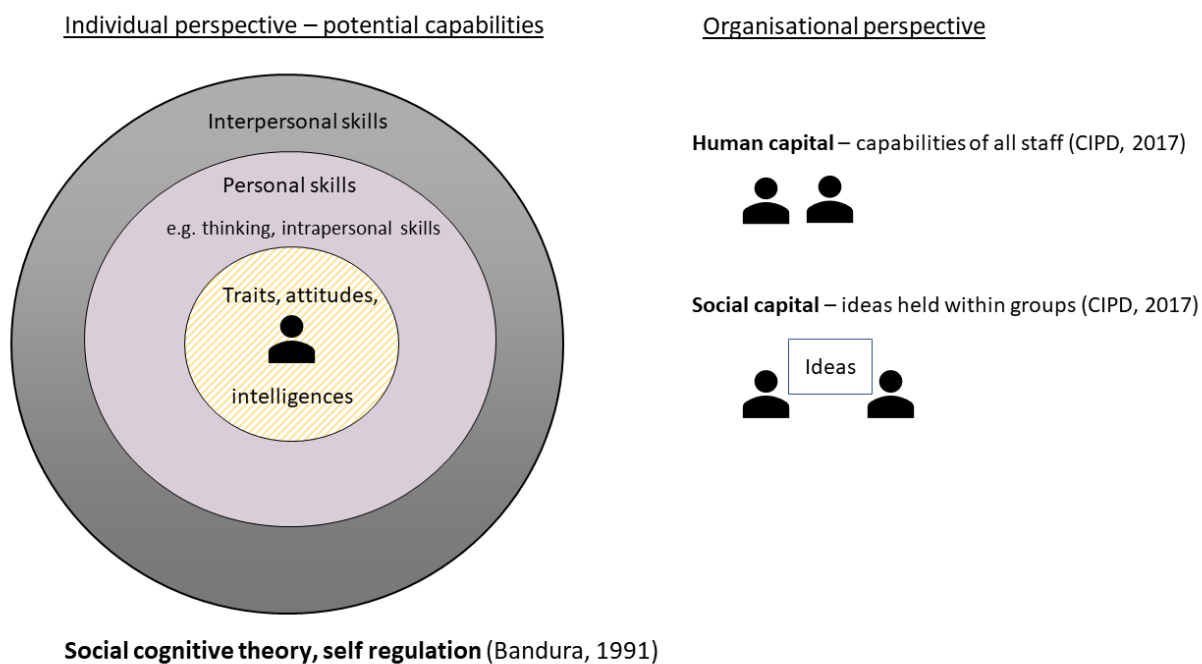


Figure 2.2. Soft-skills-related theories.

The circles in figure 2.2 represent an individual. From an organisational perspective, individuals can be seen as skilled resources. Human capital represents the value of human abilities within the workforce, social capital represents the ideas held by a community; and together they relate to an organisation’s innovative potential (CIPD, 2017). Brown, Adams and Amjad (2007) show that a project manager’s human capital affects project performance and argue development of project managers through

education and experience will return value. Project managers potentially impact human capital as individuals, and social capital as project leaders who facilitate communication amongst team-members.

Two themes emerged from the soft-skills literature and are now presented: the soft-skills need and development approaches. Any discovered articles relating to project managers are included with the project manager literature.

2.2.1. The perceived need for soft skills

This section highlights an aspiration for professionals to have soft skills to work with others. The lack of clarity around soft skills potentially exacerbates the identification of clear requirements and creates a desire for policy and clear taxonomies.

Showing the need for teamwork within IT organisations, Ahmed, Capretz, Bouktif, and Campbell (2015) recognise software development as a collaborative 'socio-technical endeavour' (p171) for their quantitative study that aimed to identify the soft skills needed by different roles. Communication and team-related soft skills were found to be important for all roles. In an editorial, Capretz and Ahmed (2018) similarly call for attention to be given to teamwork, management and leadership, suggesting that all soft skills form part of being a professional software engineer.

Suggesting that the need for socio-technical endeavour arises from a service-oriented marketplace, Oliveri and Markle (2017) report on skills assessment in US higher education and indicate accountants now do more for clients because computers do earlier tasks. Again, for dealing with clients, Becker-Avin (2014) asserts US attorneys need sensitivity in communications and relationship-building. The Lear (2011) article highlights similar needs in an information technology (IT) support role. Any professional role is potentially exposed to this shift in expectation of soft skills.

Universities face a range of soft-skills requirements across different disciplines to support graduates' future success. For hospitality and tourism, Sisson and Adams (2013) used literature to produce a list of required soft skills for US hospitality graduates. Then twelve industry professionals and educators helped to refine the list that includes coaching/developing staff, ethics and a range of personal and interpersonal skills (table 2, p138). In management education, Beenen, Pichler and Davoudpour (2018) showed 'surprising agreement of how interpersonal skills were conceptualised' (p34) across 184 MBA admissions professionals from 24 countries proposing five skill groupings to provide tighter alignment of learning outcomes: managing self, communicating, supporting, motivating and managing conflict. For banking, Abbasi, Ali and Bibi (2018) surveyed bank

officers to identify skills needed in business graduates in Pakistan: listening, problem-solving, communication, leadership, interpersonal, analytical, self-management, numeracy and critical thinking.

Stakeholders of skills improvement may see requirements differently. In a longitudinal study with 20 engineering graduates from a masters' IT degree course in Sweden, Nilsson (2010) interviewed graduates in 2002 and then in 2004-2006. Students wanted 'interpersonal skills, socio-communicative abilities and leadership abilities' (p546), and self-efficacy in them. Their personal skill expectations included business sense, making money, reducing costs, and awareness of quality and customer needs. As employees, graduates experienced less time for reflection, and that organisations can take the view that employability 'lies with the individual' (p540); employees thus must be self-motivated to learn. Consequently, Nilsson suggested skills for lifelong learning be prioritised. He relates getting a job to 'social [and] cultural capital (social networks), and symbolic capital (formal credentials), as well as human capital (knowledge and experience)' (p548).

A policy for soft-skills education may be helpful because Chowdhury and Miah (2016) in a quantitative study of human resources management students in Bangladesh show a mismatch between students' and employers' priorities (table 2). 174 managers and 446 students prioritised 30 skills chosen from global literature on employability skills, including UK policy. Jiang and Alexakis (2017) for the hospitality discipline also show a mismatch yet highlight the importance of universities providing the optimal balance of skills learning, to support graduates to be successful and to recognise employers' expectations. National policy may help to stabilise expectations; in a PhD study about university soft-skills development, Osman (2017, p iii) relates Malaysia's higher education requirement for seven skills: 'communication, critical thinking and problem-solving, team-work, lifelong learning and information management, entrepreneurship, moral and professional ethics, and leadership'. Gonzalez, Abu Kasim, and Naimie (2013) evidence development of these in Malaysian dentistry schools. Oliveri and Markle (2017) relate a similar skillset for US higher education policy.

A broader example of stakeholders perceiving soft skills needs differently is found in an ethnographic study of UK creative industries. Munro (2017) highlights tension behind training policy at the Cultural Enterprise Office in Scotland (CEO), with its remit to improve entrepreneurship skills. Analysis of 67 interviews completed with CEO staff, clients and stakeholders showed that creative practitioners need emotional support as well as broader skills: creative leadership, critical confidence and management skills. Bierema (2016) similarly promotes better understanding of the breadth of ongoing professionals'

needs. She challenges the continuing professional development model which can 'lack innovation and acknowledgement of the dynamics of professional practice' (p56), recognising gaps between 'education and practice realities' (p53) in a marketplace with increased competition, globalization and technological advances.

The lack of clarity in soft skills is challenging and needs more attention (Hurrell et al, 2013; Claxton et al, 2016). Matteson et al (2016) highlight their difficulty in identifying skills for librarians, a technically skilled group like project managers. They show frustration with skill lists, typically 'a heterodox range of skills, knowledge, attitudes and values, too amorphous to be meaningfully applied' (p86), while acknowledging execution depends on personal characteristics. However, in the service industry in France, Bailly and Léné (2012) argue personification demands inclusion of 'personal characteristics, whether psychological or physical' (p83). Thus, the scope of soft skills is contended. New names for similar skills can also easily be created; Hays-Thomas, Bowen and Boudreaux (2012) explain the challenges of developing diversity skills training when little prior literature exists. They use critical incidents and highlight clarity is needed on learning outcomes. Possibly desired outcomes for any soft-skills need must be identified for particular situations, so that training is focused on these outcomes.

The rest of this section shows studies try to establish required soft skills and to use taxonomies for insight but can still produce confusing lists of soft skills. Weber, Crawford, Riviera and Finlay (2010) focusing on entry-level managers in the US hospitality industry, identified 107 skills, based on works of Katz (1974), Sandwith (1993), Rainsbury, Hodges, Burchell and Lay (2002), and Boyatzis (1982). Sandwith argued an evolution of Katz's work for managers. Rainsbury et al studied business students and graduates and emphasised willingness to learn amongst other work skills. Boyatzis was concerned with the competence of managers. Factor analysis produced 20 prioritised skills: 'working effectively with employees and customers, setting a positive example, displaying honesty/commitment, and developing creative solutions to problems' (p359). Matteson et al (2016) complain the list is 'diluted with traits or dispositions, behaviours, and knowledge sets' (p77). The practice-based Robles (2012, p453) article similarly dilutes: 'integrity, communication, courtesy, responsibility, social skills, positive attitude, professionalism, flexibility, team-work, and work ethic'.

Yeardeley (2017), in longitudinal research into first line manager training, notes the difficulty of rationalising three different soft-skill models (from CIPD, Management Standards Centre UK, and a consultancy) to plan training: 'the terminology for non-technical skills was different within the models and the purpose behind each soft skill had to be taken at

face value' (p249). Yeardeley found training providers' offerings did not cover core soft skills; only 66% included communications, and basic soft skills including self-awareness can be ignored in first line managers' training.

Highlighting the lack of structure to soft skills, even in a focused setting, Mahasneh and Thabet (2016) used a literature-based discovery method to identify 120 skills and characteristics in 12 clusters for graduates in the US construction industry. Although many studies have aimed to find soft skills for a particular discipline Kantrowitz (2005) is a possible exception. This PhD thesis using mixed methods with employed students, aimed to develop a workplace assessment tool. Interviews with 18 subject-matter experts produced 107 behaviours. Q-sort by MBA students produced seven clusters: communication/persuasion, performance management, self-management, interpersonal, leadership/organisation, political/cultural and counter-productive work skills.

Potentially clustering of soft skills can increase clarity by providing structure and rationale though the cluster headings need detailed explanation. Koenig (2011) relates work instigated by the US National Research Council, to establish *21st Century Skills* for education; skills were distilled to cognitive, interpersonal and intrapersonal groupings. Yet different lists and taxonomies show that skills are open to interpretation and can overlap. Matteson et al (2016) highlight three taxonomies (Katz, 1974; Evers, Rush and Berdrow, 1998; Klein, De Rouin and Salas, 2006) to debate whether thinking is included. The Katz taxonomy for managers appears outdated; Peterson and Van Fleet (2004) compared it to management textbooks and split into analytic, decision-making, communication, interpersonal, diagnostic ability, flexibility and administrative skills. The Evers et al taxonomy covers management and leadership skills, including self-management. For their interpersonal only taxonomy, Klein et al (2006) use 'content sampling' (p84) of literature to identify communications and relationship-building groupings for interpersonal skills only. Though thinking could be considered a hard skill, compared with the 'affective domain of the brain' (p81), Matteson et al argue that emotions are part of thinking. Thus, thinking must be included.

Another interpersonal-only model, Pichler and Beenen (2014) focuses on managers' skills. These authors began with four skill groupings using an onion-like model: self-management (at the centre), communication, social acumen, and influence. They justified self-management based on emotional intelligence literature, and communication skills on research showing managers spend much time communicating. Social acumen relates to social skills that 'allow managers to understand emotions, motivations and thoughts of others in work settings [and] execute appropriate responses' (p17). Influencing skills are

based on encouraging others towards organisational goals. The authors then interviewed 27 practising managers and distilled 78 categories to five then three clusters: supporting, motivating and managing conflict arguing separation from, yet dependence on, self-management and communication.

Hurrell et al (2013) argue for better clarity of skills rather than attitudes in taxonomies. They cite Bolton (2004) who uses the term 'emotion workers', who present 'the desired corporate image [and create] customer satisfaction' (Bolton, 2004, p19). Hurrell et al argue that emotion workers be assessed on social skills, referring to a social-skill taxonomy: interpersonal, self-management and service orientation (Peterson et al, 2001). Comparing this with the long-established Katz (1974) taxonomy of human, conceptual, and technical skills for managers, suggests consideration of a general taxonomy of interpersonal, personal and role-related skills.

This section has shown how researchers consider it important to establish soft skill needs for teamwork, service orientation and career success. Soft skills are thus critical to both social and human capital (Nilsson, 2010). Researchers show some frustration with a lack of agreement across soft-skill lists and taxonomies (Matteson et al, 2016). Nevertheless, the Klein et al (2006) taxonomy of communication and relationship-building skills is potentially useful generally. Also, Pichler and Beenen (2014) and Hurrell et al (2013) point to the possibility of isolating role-related skills from communication and self-management skills. Because coaching skills use self-management, communication and relating skills (Rogers, 2008), these are potentially useful to any manager.

2.2.2. Soft skill development activities

This section relates themes from the literature for the essentials of a soft-skills development approach. As in the previous section many studies involve students, but it is not clear whether school or workplace provide a better development environment (Bolli and Renold, 2017).

The context of soft-skill activity is critical for development in providing both theory and practical experience to students or employees, but is potentially difficult. Universities must involve others to provide practical context. Clokie and Fourie (2016) report teaching communication skills in New Zealand where perceived good content did not ensure the required competence, resulting in recommendation of more engagement with local employers. For a medical assistants' program, Randolph (2016) reports a collaborative study using 'those preparing students in the classroom and [from a] clinical setting' to

address practice problems. In Nigeria, Oladokun and Gbadegesin (2017) surveyed employers to identify needs for aspiring real estate professionals. Thus, without cooperation with practice and employers, universities may struggle to meet requirements.

At university, Valentin, Carvalho and Barreto (2015) report use of an Agile software-development process incorporated into managing research projects for IT students in Brazil. Matteson et al (2016) would likely consider this 'meaningful practice' (p83), of job-role-related learning tasks with measurement criteria. Valentin et al report that students improved their writing, oral presentation, punctuality, leadership, and transparency, which represents a wide range of soft skills not immediately obvious from the activity. In an article, Andreas (2018) argues that, despite virtual social capital, students' social capital is lacking due to 'decreased involvement in social, civic and religious organizations' (p47). Thus, breadth of soft skill practice is potentially useful for students' future success.

The will to develop soft skills may be less in the workplace. Westfahl and Wilkins (2017) explain how hiring has eroded training offered by US law firms; they consider, in comparison, large accountancy firms offer more coaching and mentoring to graduates. Yet Becker-Avin (2014) argues training is needed in law schools. Similarly, Bailly and Léné (2012, p86) indicate a preference to hire soft skills in the retail and hospitality sector in France, also highlighting the difficulties, particularly cost, access to training and meeting requirements. However, workplace training may be ideal since there is a sense that soft skills represent *how* something gets done reinforcing real practice. Hurrell et al (2013) agree '[a soft] skill cannot be discussed without reference to the work in which the skill is used' (p162). This may also explain why soft-skills performance assessment is considered difficult (Humphrey, 2013) and may only represent an individual's personal traits (Kantrowitz, 2005). Chamorro-Premuzic, Arteche, Bremner, Greven (2010) also suggest improvement in one soft skill is likely to be inseparable from improvement in another.

Within education, learning is a primary focus with the potentially wider availability of skills, resources, methods and support (Hatva, 2013). Kechagias (2011) reports on a European project developing the socio-emotional skills of disadvantaged groups of young people, recommending one-to-one or small group training, learning guides or activity sheets, mentoring or coaching, recording difficulties and successes in workbooks, learning teams and role-play or similar participative activities in formal training. Bierema (2016) similarly promotes more focus on group learning for ongoing adult development, particularly 'in the midst of ambiguity and shifting practice' (p56). However, teachers and lecturers may need soft skill training themselves (Subramaniam, 2013; Tang 2018). Osman (2017) suggests

the need to build students' self-responsibility for learning, which otherwise depends on lecturers' beliefs and attitudes.

Building a positive attitude to learning in an ambiguous world may be essential. Ritter, Small, Mortimer and Doll (2018) report changes to a management curriculum that focused on teamwork and collaboration skills where lecturers needed to use more experiential teaching and learning methods. It was challenging to invest time to develop such methods, then to find students could be negative and to realise experiential learning requires tolerance of ambiguity. Byrne, Weston and Cave (2018) aimed to create a tool to assess students' attitudes towards learning soft skills, in a study with 534 engineering graduates in one college. Despite limitations with their resultant scale, the college use the tool to identify actions. They cite the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) to explain the criticality of attitude to learning.

The various approaches may still not meet required outcomes. Grossman, Thayer, Shuffler, Burke and Salas (2015) propose that training provides information, demonstrates, allows practice and gives feedback. They suggest example methods that simultaneously exercise cognitive skills: brainstorming, storytelling, crystal-ball technique, self-exploration and concept mapping. Alternative methods may suit different people (Dewiyani, 2015; Kim, Erdum, Byun and Jeong, 2011). For business undergraduates in a US university, Anthony and Garner (2016) investigate the effectiveness of five approaches: self-analysis, an interview, a guest lecture, a journal article and a soft-skills video. The researchers noted that 'assignments which engage students or have practical application are the most helpful' (p366). Culpin and Scott (2012) investigated the use of a live case-study for executive education and found that the experiential learning format did not have the desired effects on soft skills. Their quantitative study, involving 19 participants in one building materials organisation, considered the learning of hard and soft skills in relation to strategy. They argue that soft-skills learning is not necessarily immediate, and that soft skills are possibly less relevant to executives. One soft skill did show significant improvement, 'making a flat team effective'; a hierarchical structure was currently dominant in the organisation. These studies show the value of comparing actual outcomes to expectations and the skills gap.

Engaging learners is ideal. Szilárd, Benedek and Ionel-Cioca (2018) relate a group study with representatives from five countries suggesting a blend of e-learning and face-to-face workshops, training and coaching for those in IT micro-businesses. The small 'learning snacks' (p97) and use of mobile devices apparently motivated learners. In their quantitative study, Kim et al (2011) showed that the extrinsic motivation of positive

outcomes helped to overcome any technology anxiety. Charoensap-Kelly, Broussard, Lindsly and Troy (2016) echo the need to inspire learners about benefits in their evaluation of a branded soft-skills training related to social styles with employees in a US hospital. They also suggest soft-skills training needs 'real-time, personal interactions' (p170), though online training is attractive to organisations, so a blend is likely to minimise face-to-face time.

Change may need ongoing support to give motivation and feedback. Lim and Ling (2011) in their quantitative study with construction contractors in Singapore, show that regular communication with superiors, after training, supported employees who 'become more competent and have more confidence, enabling them to work in teams or independently' (p241). Brainstorming sessions were deemed useful and promoted a culture of thinking outside the box. A mentoring scheme for new recruits and recently promoted employees is also highlighted. Ahmad, Ameen and Ullah (2017) show mentoring as a preferred development method in a quantitative study with 372 responses from information professionals in libraries in Pakistan, though additionally found formal online courses were statistically significant for those with 1-5 years' experience and self-training for those with 11-15 years' experience. Meola (2016) highlights millennial employees desire communication and feedback and shows equine-assisted learning can provide understanding, particularly of empathy, in mentoring relationships.

Self-awareness is also important. Levasseur (2013) says 'real development comes from continually practising the skills and processing performance feedback, based on self-reflection or constructive inputs received from others, which fosters ongoing development of those skills' (p569). Boyatzis and Saatcioglu (2008) show feedback given from various assessment tools with MBA students improved awareness on 'strengths and gaps as a manager and leader'; similarly, support to 'write a learning plan' (p95) improved understanding of expected standards. The authors write 'self-assessment is an important attribute of lifelong learners [to] take responsibility for their actions and to improve their performance' (p114). Claxton, Chambers, Powell and Lucas (2011) similarly recognise the importance of school students gauging their own progress for self-motivation and argue for measurement of learning progress.

Some universities adopt an andragogical approach (De Villiers, 2010; Osman, 2017) and use coaching thus reinforce self-responsibility for learning, but this may be more likely in organisations. Gardner (2017) in a multiple case-study approach, with three regional accounting firms in Texas proposed improved performance based on human capital theory and shows the importance of development of employees, using coaching for

ongoing learning. Ingols and Shapiro (2014) indicate MBA students produce individual action-plans as part of coaching and also report use of a 360-degree-feedback assessment tool for students to 'develop enhanced self-knowledge and skills to lead diverse teams and organizations' (p418). Ibrahim, Boerhaneoddin and Bakare (2017) in their quantitative study with 260 managers in Malaysian private companies recommend supervisor support alongside time-spaced learning that allows practice to 'apply and internalise what they have learnt' (p388).

In summary, there are challenges to soft-skills development including the training skills needed, the breadth of soft skills that prompt various development methods and desired outcomes may not be achieved. A preference by organisations to hire soft skills may result (Westfahl and Wilkins, 2017; Bailly and Léné 2012). Creating a learning environment with real practice (Clokier and Fourie, 2016; Randolph, 2016) and a desire to learn (Ritter et al, 2018) are fundamental. Motivation, feedback (Lim and Ling, 2011) and improving self-awareness (Levasseur, 2013) are ideal; coaching practice can embrace these.

2.3. Project managers' soft-skills development

A search of 'project manager' and 'soft skills' and 'development' revealed two themes similar to those for soft skills: the soft skills needed and development of project managers. Very little theory was found in this search; Koskela and Howell (2002) are critical of the lack of explanation of a theoretical base for project management. They suggest a theory of project, which is essentially scope management, which relates to negotiation and establishment of desired project outcomes, and management, subdivided as planning, execution and control. Relating back to the definition of project managers in the previous chapter, project managers adopt project goals as their own and inspire the temporary team to achieve them. This puts more emphasis on task achievement than the employee development expected of other managers (Hunt and Weintraub, 2010). Yet, unless project managers can select or exchange staff with appropriate soft skills, there is an implication that project managers have a similar role to managers in consideration of team development. At least for the term of the project, collaborative teamwork is needed to deliver required project outcomes.

2.3.1. Soft skills needed by project managers

The searched literature shows the same general confusion about soft skills and that skills may be hired rather than developed. Leadership, traits and attitudes can be included in

skills lists, which vary from large to small as in the soft-skills literature. For their instructional design university course, Brill, Bishop and Walker (2006) used a Delphi technique, surveying 147 experienced project managers about what makes project managers effective. A list of 78 trainable skills was produced that includes problem-solving, leadership, analytical skills, people skills, and communication skills. Van Rooij (2011) in another instructional design study, with data from eight chief learning officers within US professional services, highlight interpersonal skills with clients, team-members and stakeholders and accountability to keep projects moving forward. Pant and Baroudi (2008) lobby for universities to simply do more about human skills to focus on human interactions and personal learning. They provide a literature review that suggests emergence of softer thinking about projects, meaning the use of emotional and social intelligence, and continual learning. The authors consider these will improve the vital communications between team members and project stakeholders 'to support shared understanding of the project and its goals' (p124).

Hiring criteria offer a practical viewpoint on required skills. Focusing on US industries, Stevenson and Starkweather (2010) received 32 responses from IT recruiters to the 'characteristics and behaviours that their employers most valued' (p666) in project manager applicants. Analysis produced 15 selection criteria that included skills, attitudes, education and work history. Then US IT managers were asked the relative importance of each of the criteria. The resultant top five were all soft skills: communication at multiple levels, leadership, verbal skills, written skills and the ability to deal with ambiguity or change. That IT managers sought communication skills as much as leadership, surprised the authors. Communication was phrased as the ability to communicate at multiple levels and this specificity may also be expected of leaders. From 762 job advertisements for project managers in Australia and New Zealand, Ahsan, Ho and Khan (2013) prioritised a list of knowledge, skills, and abilities for project managers across different industries. They challenge the Stevenson and Starkweather findings, suggesting differences in priority of individual skills across geographic regions because of slightly different role definitions. Communication and stakeholder management were found to be common and highly important skills. Pinkowska and Lent (2011) used a list of 78 skills sourced from literature review, to search for mentions of them in Polish, Swiss and Thai advertisements. The list was grouped into human resource management, team management, conflict management, communication and leadership skills. The authors note that advertisements show an absence of human resource management, suggesting a lack of importance in practice, and little mention of conflict management. Also, they considered conflict

management and self-management skills under-represented in the literature. Thus, management, leadership and communication are clear requirements.

Using an analytical approach to identify required soft skills based on what project managers do, Pinkowska, Lent and Keretho (2011) list six groupings: human resource management, team management, conflict management, communication management, self-management and leadership. El-Sabaa (2001) created an initial list of skills from interviews with 85 project managers who were asked about the personal characteristics, traits and skills they perceived the best project managers should have. El-Sabaa then asked 126 project managers in Egypt to prioritise the resultant list of 18 items. Analysis showed human skills have the greatest influence, particularly 'mobilization, communication, coping with situations, delegation, political sensitivity, high self-esteem and enthusiasm' (p3). The interpersonal skill of mobilisation relates to the ability to 'mobilize the mental and emotional energy' of subordinates (p4). The other two, communication and delegation relate to listening to, persuading, understanding others, and allowing them to participate in decision-making. Both studies highlight management, leadership, communication and self-management.

Reinforcing the particular importance of communication, Skulmoski and Hartman (2010) interviewed IT project managers and business leaders in Canada to understand if skills change throughout a project's lifecycle. The researchers used a ranking process where interviewees had 25 points to weight individual skills or attributes in a list identified from a preliminary set of interviews. This list included communication, leadership, negotiation, professionalism, social skills, project management professionalism and personal attributes, with 8-16 individual skills under each heading. The comparison of skills across to initiation, planning, implementation and closeout stages of a project shows the pervasive importance of communication, and also consensus-building and honesty in at least two phases. The latter two skills suggest that relationship is relevant too, which is reinforced by De Carvalho and Junior (2015) who identified hard and soft skills necessary after analysing more than 3000 papers, just focusing on project risk management. Four soft skills related to risk: communication of risk information, the strategic approach to risk, relationship with and attitude to stakeholders, and crisis management. The authors then surveyed 263 projects and showed that soft skills impacted both hard skills and overall project success.

Uncertainty in projects highlights the significance of effective relationships through the need for collaborative teamwork, also shown by Saunders, Gale and Sherry (2015) for safety critical projects. The authors' interviews with practitioners concluded that

uncertainty needs to be aired with team members and stakeholders. A wide range of soft skills are suggested to improve discussion and team spirit, including communications, influencing, facilitation, conflict management, collaboration and dialogue with stakeholders. Azim, Gale, Lawlor-Wright, Kirkham, Khan and Alam (2010) in their qualitative study interviewed practitioners in the aerospace industry about complexity in projects. They showed the biggest contributor to complexity is the people element, particularly, 'the participation, reactions and interactions of people' (p388). This is similar to the historical view that people are unpredictable (Whitmore and Fry, 1974). Jalil and Shahid (2008) suggest for the software industry in Pakistan that the more complex a project, the better soft skills needed by a project manager, to avoid micromanagement, reinforcing the need for good relationships and collaborative skills.

Regarding leadership, Clarke (2012) in a three-part literature review considers the effect of project managers' styles, behaviour or roles, and traits on project outcomes. Clarke concludes there is inconclusive evidence to establish leadership theory on projects. Competence and personality are considered to have limited effect on leader effectiveness and are dependent on contextual factors. Awan, Ahmed and Zulqarnain (2015) in their quantitative research challenge the lack of focus on leadership soft skills. The authors show five required skills: communication, interpersonal, coordination, teambuilding/delegation, and problem-finding/analysing/solving. Using a visual tool that separates strategic-execution aspects of leadership, interpersonal leadership and personal craftsmanship for the project manager role, Ingason and Jónasson (2009) adopt skill groupings from literature: leadership, conflict management, negotiation, problem-solving and teamwork. Polar plots show coverage of the 18 skills in journals, university education programmes and textbooks, which all highlight interest in interpersonal skills and relationship management. Relationship management includes teambuilding, information and communication management and reporting. Geoghegan and Dulewicz (2008) analysed 52 responses to two questionnaires from project managers and project sponsors in a financial services company. One was an established leadership questionnaire and the other asked about project success criteria and client acceptance. The quantitative analysis recognises that highly significant skills for project success are 'managing resources, empowering, developing and motivation' (table 4). It will be shown in section 2.4 that empowering, developing and motivation are relevant to managerial coaching, too (Hunt and Weintraub, 2010).

Reporting the importance of critical thinking skills, in a grounded-theory study, Ramazani and Jergeas (2015) say these are essential in dealing with complexity, change, leadership and team-working. They argue 'there is a need to realise that a one-size-fits-all approach

to project delivery is not practical any more' (p46). Thomas, George and Buckle-Henning (2012, p377), based on a phenomenological study, also suggest different types of thinking are required to address ambiguity: 'intuitive, holistic, and relational'. These non-rational forms of thinking may be new to task-focussed project managers; Clarke (2012) cites a study that suggests task behaviours are more common in project managers, despite other studies indicating differently.

There is remarkably little research on communication skills, despite their importance to project management. Hagen and Park (2013) in a quantitative study show project outcomes depend on open and frequent communications between project managers and project stakeholders, emphasising openness and acceptance of ambiguity. Yet, De Carvalho (2013) finds that communication practices, are 'neither followed nor prioritised by project managers' (p36) in a case study of a Brazilian IT service provider. More detailed understanding of communication requirements may be needed. For example, Ramaprasad and Prakash (2003) suggest interest in understanding the local context in global projects. In a case-study of a 1993-2003 World Bank project to construct a pipeline in Africa, Ika and Saint-Macary (2012) show the difficulties that needed strategic understanding and excellent negotiation skills. Bourne and Walker (2004) in comparing three project case-studies also highlight political issues and produce a tool to support stakeholder relationships. Skills involved are awareness, relationship management, understanding power and potential conflict, and communication. These examples suggest communication and relationship are interrelated.

There are views that soft skills originate from emotional intelligence, EI, as stated by Zuo, Zhao, Nguyen, Ma and Gao (2018), implying a causal effect on all soft skills. Their quantitative study in the Vietnam construction industry shows that project managers' conflict management, teamwork and achievement motivation particularly influenced project success, as well as cognitive skill, leadership and communication. Clarke (2010) also shows EI is important for teamwork and managing conflict. In addition, his UK quantitative study suggests empathy is important for project manager competence and attentiveness. He argues that emotional thinking, compared to cognitive ability is more important for relationship management. Pryke, Lunic and Badi (2015) note that the construction industry is characterised by adversarial relationships and conflict and Clarke's view that emotion is important. Their quantitative study particularly studies the effect of emotional sensitivity and emotional expressiveness on team rapport (p4) and concludes these skills are important for predicting good relationships. Fisher (2011) similarly focused on relationships with team members, creating a skill 'authentizotic behaviour' (table 2), described as concern for others and accepting people for who they

are, while inspiring and empowering them. Other skills are understanding, inspiring and influencing others, conflict management and cultural awareness.

All of these studies are a reminder that soft skills are open to interpretation and can be named and put into different groupings as selected by researchers. There is criticism of PMI and APM bodies of knowledge that they fail to explain the soft skills necessary (Pant and Baroudi, 2008). The PMBOK Guide 5th edition (PMI, 2013) introduced a new appendix, to list the interpersonal skills needed: 'leadership, team-building, motivation, communication, influencing, decision-making, political and cultural awareness, negotiation, trust-building, conflict management, coaching' (p513), with just a brief description of each. Coaching is described as '[taking] many forms [,] it can be used to address poor performance due to lack of skill, knowledge or experience, [and] is a powerful motivator' (p519). In the latest PMBOK 6th edition (PMI, 2017), Agile and traditional project management are combined. An Agile project manager may need to coach the team to follow the Agile process.

This section has highlighted a range of required soft skills which can affect the success of a project. Yet lists are confusing and there is a lack of specific detail from the project management profession. Communication has been identified as a high priority interpersonal skill (Skulmoski and Hartman, 2010; Stevenson and Starkweather, 2010; Pinkowska and Lent, 2011), as well as leadership (Awan et al, 2005), relationship-building (Skulmoski and Hartman, 2010) and critical thinking (Ramazani and Jergeas, 2015). The long lists are not particularly helpful since each skill's meaning is unclear, and attitudes, emotional intelligence and leadership can confuse skill lists. However, the desired outcomes of effective communication and cooperative teamwork are clear.

2.3.2. Project manager development

Project failure can be blamed on soft-skill gaps (Kilkelly, 2011), yet there seems little formal soft-skills development for project managers (Ballesteros and Chavarria, 2016). Although Muzio, Fisher, Thomas and Peters (2007) piloted an assessment tool for soft skills, SSQ, claimed as statistically stronger than manager observations, with managers 'blind to strengths in weaker performers and weaknesses in stronger performers' (p37); there is no further literature on it. This section relates the wider development of project managers, to try to understand what soft-skills development approach might fit.

Development can be haphazard. Darrell et al (2010) give an insight into new project managers' opinions of the effectiveness of the development of interpersonal, technical,

project management and general management skills in the Western Australia public sector, using a quantitative assessment of 46 employees 'involved in project management in an *accidental* way [and] for no more than two years' (p59). Participants felt they had no preparation for the role and 70% felt they had a part-time project manager role with operational duties. The results showed the organisational support offered (with the percentage of participants saying this was effective; the percentage saying this was ineffective): education and training (43%; 11%), opportunities to gain experience (50%; 22%), assessment and feedback (46%; 11%), on-the-job training (28%; 20%), recognition of role or work (37%; 9%), coaching or mentoring (22%; 9%). Savelsbergh et al (2016) agree informal learning experiences occur most often. In their mixed-method study, the authors interviewed and surveyed 31 project managers who were at various stages in their careers and worked in the Netherlands and UK. The authors found that learning from experience and 'self-reflection complemented with reflection with others and in particular with the line manager' (p566) were advantageous because learning became innate.

The career of a project manager is potentially haphazard. Learning by doing is inevitable in certain offshore outsourcing situations, according to Clott (2007) who complains stakeholders can ignore cultural and communication issues to save training expense. In a grounded-theory study about experiential learning, Turner, Keegan and Crawford (2000) report 'broad-sweeping careers' and being moved horizontally and then vertically, as a 'spiral staircase' (p12) to maximise experience. The authors highlight the considerable time to develop a project manager capable of handling very large projects, despite projects being ideal learning vehicles, especially if project reviews are used effectively. El-Sabaa (2001, p4) similarly found careers 'characterised by more mobility and self-governance' with career motives of 'team-work, creativity, people development and cross-training' (p4). suggesting that mobility can provide development through new experiences.

Coaching and mentoring emerge as approaches that could fit with the haphazard nature of a project manager's development. Bourne and Walker (2004) suggest coaching and feedback are necessary to support project managers through failure and challenge. Hans and Rwelamila (2012) talk of accidental project managers and argue for coaching and mentoring programmes in South Africa, to encourage the required reflection for learning. In a grounded-theory study, Marion, Richardson and Earnhardt (2014) investigated career-drivers from interview data with experienced project managers students in a graduate-degree programme. Inexperienced project managers are advised to be self-driven, to learn how things can get done in organisations, to take responsibility, to network and to get a mentor.

Carbone and Gholston (2004) aimed to identify benefits from formal training, but also recommend coaching in organisations, particularly for soft skills. Their US-based research benchmarked 30 graduate programs, 120 project management certificate programs and seven companies with a training scheme. A set of practitioners also completed a web survey. The results showed little confidence in the existence of organisational development: for example, '73% of respondents agreed the training they have received to date has helped prepare them, yet only 41% feel that their organization prepares them for their positions' (p14). Four companies showed no training, three used a master's certificate and one used PMI's PMP certification (that expects continuous personal development). This study recommended organisations take some responsibility: 'commit to the evaluation of courses, invest in the development of supplemental courses [such as for soft skills], and provide meaningful coaching and opportunities' (p15). Also promoting organisational involvement, Egginton (2012) in his longitudinal study over two years used surveys and one-to-one interviews with military students. He highlights barriers to getting benefits from training and recommends organisations promote active team- and work-based learning. Lee-Kelley and Blackman (2012) suggest organisations need to be clearer about training outcomes to improve effectiveness of training.

Meanwhile, universities are adding soft skills learning to courses. Alam, Gale, Brown and Khan (2010) in their quantitative study aimed to show the benefits of their UK MSc in Project Management course, 'giving particular attention to soft elements such as people, culture and organisation' (p499). The researchers found that course graduates were 'more confident, effective, reflective/creative and assertive' (p513), suggesting adaptability in conflict, decision-making and negotiation. In Australia, Shelley (2015) highlights the benefits of students running projects as real practice. Success of the approach is attributed to integrating principles from a wide range of interdependent disciplines including action learning, leadership, project management, reflective practice, sense-making, stakeholder engagement, problem-based learning and knowledge management. Crawford, Morris, Thomas and Winter (2006, p730) review drivers for change to academic courses which require that students 'think on their feet' and 'plan the next move' and 'adapt to complex and uncertain situations'. They suggest coaching is useful to question underlying assumptions and to broaden perspectives, though not that students learn to coach.

Similar to other disciplines, Ramazani and Jergeas (2015) recommend encouraging an attitude for continual personal development and real practice to 'prepare learners to be adaptable, thoughtful [and] start a learning process that will continue' (p48), recommending 'simulations and problem-based learning [and] joint participation of

universities and industries' (p50). They emphasise enablement of learners 'to select appropriate combinations of knowledge, practice and behaviors [to] foster continuous change, creative and critical reflection' (p50). Reinforcing reflection, Thomas et al (2012) assert a necessity for opportunities 'to practice and develop intuition and expertise through both practice and reflection on practice' (p393).

This section has highlighted an on-the-job, soft-skills development approach could be ideal for the haphazard nature of project managers' development. Though training is encouraged (Carbone and Gholston, 2004) and may happen at university (Alam et al, 2010), it may not give practical benefit (Egginton, 2012; Lee-Kelley and Blackman, 2012). Coaching is recommended for feedback and ongoing support (Bourne and Walker, 2004). This study aims that project managers adopt the philosophy and skills of coaching, which could help to reinforce the value of feedback and support. There are many stakeholders who influence development outcomes and approaches: professional organisations, project managers, universities, training providers and employing organisations, which currently means that project managers may have a variety of experience but no expected standard of soft-skills ability or development path.

2.4. Managerial coaching practice

Despite many genres of coaching (Bachkirova et al, 2014), none align directly with project managers, who typically work across departments and organisations. Team-coaching, peer coaching and cross-organisational coaching are considered within the remit of managerial coaching practice (Beattie et al, 2014), which could be useful to project managers. Encouragingly, Garvey et al (2014) suggest that 'coaching is widely seen as a mainstream way of managing' (p61), thus potentially relevant to project managers. In addition, Ellinger, Beattie and Hamlin (2014) suggest managers have a wider responsibility to the organisation in developing and retaining talent, which may be less applicable.

Cox et al (2014) provide a map of coaching as 'a variety of disciplines and subject areas' (p146) that recognises coach and client as individuals, the coaching processes and the organisational context. Three underlying theories are identified: andragogy, experiential learning and transformative learning. Andragogy, the theory of adult learning from the work of Knowles (Holton, Swanson, and Naquin, 2001) is hardly mentioned in soft-skills literature, though De Villiers (2010) and Osman (2017) suggest it for university education.

Management and leadership behaviour outside of coaching can be claimed to achieve similar outcomes to managerial coaching, adding weight to the view that coaching involves conversations with a particular mindset and aim(s). This challenges comparison between coaching and other conversations. For example, Mikkelsen, York and Arritola (2015) show good relationships, communications, and goal management can affect US employees' job satisfaction, motivation and commitment. Joo and Ready (2012) in a study of Korean employees' career satisfaction highlight relationships with supervisors and the organisational culture, arguing both for the use of coaching and broader organisational efforts. They point to theories of social exchange and leader-member exchange. Social exchange theory is considered to underpin organisational commitment of employees. Leader member exchange, LMX represents that attitudes of followers depend on the leader. At the team level, Liu, Keller and Shih (2011) show team-member-exchange, TMX (Seers, 1989) that impacts project performance. Both LMX and TMX influence social capital through the will to share information.

Search terms of 'managerial coaching' and 'manager as coach' were used for peer-reviewed journals. Two themes emerged: outcomes expected from coaching practice, mindset and behaviour. Subsequently 'training' was added for literature in the third theme, coach training. Practice literature has then been included. Adoption of managerial coaching by organisations may vary; Hohenstein, Feisel and Hartmann (2014) reviewing literature about human resource management issues in supply-chain management, highlight just one paper relating to managerial coaching. The coaching by individual managers may vary (Hunt and Weintraub, 2010), though may be encouraged by an organisational coaching culture (Ellinger, 2013), which expects that managers coach (Garvey et al, 2014). The three themes are now presented; followed by a summary of the literature review.

2.4.1. Outcomes from managerial coaching

Grant (2017) details a history of managerial coaching, from a directive style, reflected by command and control-type management in the 1990s, followed by a more humanistic approach from 2000, to a mindset balanced between performance and well-being that reflects the contemporary workplace. There is still debate, though, about specific outcomes.

Whereas improved organisational performance is an ever-present expectation, there is debate whether managers help employees to grow and how that is judged. Beattie et al (2014) provide a literature review that suggests coaching can be 'effective facilitation of learning' (p188), though highlight a lack of research evidence. They suggest managerial

coaching focuses 'on improving skills, competence, and performance' (p186). It includes team-coaching, 'potentially the most challenging for line managers' (p190), with team empowerment and team learning expected. Yet, the literature review provided by Lawrence (2017) searching 'manager-as-coach' and 'leader-as-coach' is critical of managerial coaching being presented as the facilitation of learning, since it lacks clarity of important skills like team coaching. Learning is relevant to projects which are expected to facilitate lessons learned reviews for absorption into organisational knowledge (Duffield and Whitty, 2016).

Adopting the facilitation of learning view, Ismail, Ahmad and Zainol (2016) suggest managerial coaching represents a transition to a more collaborative relationship between managers and employees that includes encouragement to learn. Their quantitative study in the Malaysian military with 92 survey responses showed that managerial support affects employee motivation, but communication does not. Team motivation is relevant to project managers but managerial support in the study unfortunately appears to conflate employee welfare with coaching activities. Because project managers are particularly susceptible to burnout (Jugdev, Mathur and Cook, 2018), due to the focus on delivery, support of others may not be a priority concern. In addition, Lalsing, Kishnah and Pudaruth (2012) in a study about people factors in an Agile environment suggest team wellness is judged by cohesion, motivation, collaboration and communication, which imply more task-orientation than employee welfare.

With a focus on sales performance rather than learning, Dahling, Taylor, Chau and Dwight (2016) criticise the multiple definitions of managerial coaching, the lack of evidence for claimed outcomes and the lack of clarity on how well and how often coaching is performed. Their quantitative study with 1246 sales representatives in a US pharmaceuticals organisation shows 'coaching has tangible value for sales organizations' (p884); particularly team-role clarity. They assert three features of coaching that focus on improving performance on work goals: 'an open exchange of feedback [,] behaviour modelling, [and] setting challenging and engaging goals' (p866-867). Behaviour modelling is based on social cognitive theory where learning experiences include social persuasion through comparing oneself with others. Goal-setting theory is considered to explain the motivation to focus on and to strive towards better performance. This relates to projects which have clearly defined success criteria and project managers who must lead their team to have success. (Geoghegan and Dulewicz, 2008).

Reinforcing the value of developing individuals, Badrinarayanan, Dixon, West and Zank (2015) using in-depth interviews with ten sales managers, identify positive coaching

outcomes: 'sales capabilities, career advancement potential and customer service orientation' (p1104). More generally, Chong, Yuen, Tan, Zarim and Hamid (2016) suggest effective coaching managers aim to 'build a world-class workforce' (p122). Their quantitative study used 140 responses from managers in the Malaysian telecommunications industry. The top three topics for developing staff (and percentage of managers saying this) were 'leadership (83%), communication skills (72%) [and] career advancement (57%)' (table VII). Pousa and Mathieu (2015) in a quantitative analysis of 122 survey responses found that self-efficacy of financial advisers was improved. Shinde and Bachhav (2017) in a brief literature review highlight both work-engagement and self-efficacy outcomes for employees but assert the need for more research. Getting employees to reach their goals and ensuring associated confidence may be two appropriate intentions for managers or project managers.

Empowering others can be considered performance- and development-related. Ellinger, Keller and Baş, (2010) suggest it is part of the 'day-to-day relationship between employee and supervisor' (p81) in their study about empowerment of frontline staff in third-party logistics companies. Managerial coaching is used to prioritise market orientation as an organisational outcome, wanting individuals to become more customer-oriented and to be empowered to build effective customer relationships. Similarly, Joo, Sushkoo and McLean (2012) suggest empowerment for challenging jobs that are difficult to monitor because micro-management can upset staff. Also, Hunt and Weintraub (2010) argue that coaching enables 'accessing the eyes, ears and brains of your team members without micromanaging them' (p6). Emphasising the associated personal growth, Batson and Yoder (2012, p1662) assert empowerment and role-modelling for nurses can 'promote a sense of positive accountability for actions [and] challenge/broaden perspectives'. Team processes can be an intermediate, additional path between managerial coaching and individual learning. In a quantitative study with 506 responses from 98 teams in two Japanese manufacturers, Matsuo (2018) shows that managerial coaching affects both team reflexivity and individual reflexivity and these both affect individual learning. A resultant recommendation is that team leaders have coaching skills.

Similar to empowerment, other individual outcomes can contribute to organisational performance. In a quantitative study, Kim, Egan, Kim and Kim (2013) hypothesised various correlations between the manager's perceived coaching behaviour and employee attitudes. From 482 respondents in a public energy organisation in South Korea, results showed a direct influence of coaching behaviours on role understanding and an indirect influence on 'employee satisfaction, career commitment, job performance, and organization commitment' (p326). Kim, Egan and Moon (2014) compare the results

between these and earlier studies with employees in US public organisations. There was a negative correlation between managerial coaching and employee performance in the Korean study. Cultural differences were asserted for this unexpected result, particularly around role clarity. Managerial coaching, then, does not guarantee role clarity and may not guarantee performance improvement, but can improve employee attitudes. In a similar study of 280 manager–employee pairs in the insurance industry in Taiwan, Kim and Kuo (2015) hypothesised and showed that coaching relationships affect employees' organisational commitment behaviours and a managers' trustworthiness has a significant effect on employees' performance. The authors consequently assert social exchange theory underpins managerial coaching.

Beattie et al (2014) list organisational outcomes claimed from managerial coaching: induction, good people management, job satisfaction/commitment, improved communication, reduced stress, team-working and improved performance. Yet, Kim and Kuo (2015) say few studies provide evidence of claims or effectiveness of coaching skills needed. Matsuo and Matsuo (2017) compared the effect of managerial coaching and management control systems on critical team reflection in a quantitative case-study in Japan. At the outset they suggested that because team leaders and managers coached their teams, this would naturally improve team reflection. However, it was found that interactive management control was influential. This control, including 'surveillance, dialogue and debate' (p410), promotes generative learning. Katsikea, Theodosiou, and Morgan (2015) also advise a 'control dashboard that is used to monitor behaviour' (p377). By its definition project management recognises the need for performance control (APM, 2018).

High-performing employees, and retention of them, are ultimately important to organisations. Katsikea et al (2015) used quantitative analysis in an export-sales environment and categorised managerial coaching as a means of behavioural control, whereby sales managers gain better understanding of required strategy, end-results and day-to-day customer demands. They describe activity control as the performance-based process for monitoring routine activities, and capability control as the development of individual skills and abilities. The study from 160 exporters' responses found that managerial coaching is 'more effective at reducing perceptions of role ambiguity among less-experienced export sales managers' (p377). Managerial coaching early in a sales manager's career is recommended. Yet, Pousa, Mathieu and Trépanier (2017) in another quantitative study found that selling experience does not impact the value of coaching on performance. Their sample of 318 financial advisors compared three different experience groupings: 1-7 years, 9-15 years and >15 years. They now promote managerial coaching

for all employees. In their limitations, they acknowledge using a purposive sample of those receiving coaching.

This section has suggested a lack of evidence regarding the outcomes of managerial coaching (Beattie et al, 2014; Kim and Kuo, 2015). Facilitation of learning, empowerment, or control are potentially appropriate principles rather than certain outcomes and are debated; team coaching may also apply (Lawrence, 2017). Yet, learning and empowerment have already been shown relevant to project managers. While organisational performance criteria such as high staff retention matter (Katsikea, 2015), these may require prioritisation of individual learning (Beattie et al , 2014) and attitude (Kim et al, 2013). Yet, project managers may be more motivated towards immediate project goals. Coaching overtly aims to change something, such as employees' role clarity (Dahling et al, 2015). Coaching can operate alongside control (Katsikea et al, 2015) and thus potentially alongside project management control.

2.4.2. Managers' mindset and behaviour

Grant (2017) highlights a mindset of quality conversations, such that any employee meetings support 'spontaneous, goal-focused conversations' (p46). Bommelje (2015) commenting on the literature agrees the manager is a 'facilitator of dialogue, fostering discussion among parties that can lead to mutual learning, deep understanding and insight, and collaborative consciousness and action' (p70). Conversely, Lawrence (2017) makes a distinction between formal coaching by managers and the informal conversations that managers may have at any time. He argues that without formality there may be 'no substantive differences between managerial coaching, training or performance management' (p60). He urges consideration of a continuum of roles, between a manager acting as teacher, who gives advice and sets goals, to being more facilitative with focus on relationship-building. Thus, the fluidity of meaning of managerial coaching is evident in what managers are expected to do.

Separating roles may be helpful. McCarthy and Milner (2013) in their literature review assert 'both manager and team members need to know what role the manager is adopting' (p773). They regard the manager's 'willingness to listen and accept the ideas of the employee' (p772) as a potential shift in mindset. Alternatively, the relationship between manager and employee may not support coaching; the power differential and need for openness may be problematic for maintenance of confidentiality. Optionally, internal coaches can provide formal employee coaching, which may affect managers' intentions (Rock and Donde, 2008a) but offers an alternative route for coaching.

Amplifying differences between the manager and coach roles, Spaten and Flensburg (2013) report a mixed-methods study with 15 middle managers in a Danish company. The managers coached five employees, five times over three months. The quantitative results indicated trust in the relationship is key and the qualitative results showed potential difficulty with equality while coaching. Yet, both the coach and coachee were seen to gain from the coaching, personally and professionally, because the relationship was an equal one. In relation to skills, three requirements were recognised: to 'create a clear framework for the coachee and the coaching session, [to] identify the problem clearly and explicitly, [and to] create an empathetic relation with the coachee' (p24); implying potential changes to managers' normal behaviour.

Amplifying the trust issue, Zhang (2008) in a quantitative study of coached employees in China reports some difficulties in 'open mind, in-depth communication, and establishment of mutual trust' (p981). Also, Hunt and Weintraub (2010) suggest employees may not request coaching, because they do not trust their manager to help them. Ladyshewsky (2010) too, reports the chance of failure and employee disappointment due to the lack of trust in relationships. The study participants were 74 postgraduate students with work experience, where coaching gave 'opportunities for an individual to gain insights into their performance' (p293). A 'trust crisis' (p 302) is claimed, with the recommendation that managers demonstrate psychological security through 'capability, predictability and integrity, shared interests and benevolent concern' (p 296). Chong et al (2016) also recommend that trust and mutual respect are considered 'essential for constructive conflict resolution' (p134).

A mindset that 'employee abilities are malleable' (p589) is promoted by Özduran and Tanova (2016), in a quantitative study with five-star hotel staff in Cyprus. They explored its effect from managerial coaching for employees' organisational citizenship behaviours, defined as 'positive behaviours in the workplace that are not formally rewarded' (p591). They found a positive effect with managers more likely to expend effort toward developing employees and themselves. Suggesting a self-development mindset, too, McCarthy and Milner (2013) argue managers may be sceptical if they have not received coaching themselves. There are potential personal benefits; Hunt and Weintraub (2010) report three: 'do a better job as manager [,] evolve as leader [and] learn about employees' strengths and weaknesses [and] motivations' (p5), 'learn about business [,] customers, processes and opportunities' (p6). Gomez and Gunn (2012) also showed that managers who coach are likely to be better leaders, with 'stronger relationships, better communication, self-efficacy and self-awareness' (p63). Unfortunately, only three managers were observed in this mixed-method study.

Regarding skills, Chong et al (2016) show co-creating the relationship and effective communication are critical, while active listening and powerful questioning are important, reflecting activities grounded in coaching tradition (Anderson, 2013). Hagen and Peterson (2014) provide a literature review of managerial coaching-skill assessment tools and highlight two – but found neither one reliable. The Park, McLean and Yang (2008) tool, considered better for managers, has five assessment dimensions: ‘open communication, team approach, value people over task, accept ambiguity and facilitate employees’ development’ (p2-3). David and Matu (2013) relate criticism of this tool and others, describing their initial validation of a new instrument, which covers seven facilitation skills that relate to different uses of communication and four empowering skills that include assessment and feedback. Though potentially consistent with professional coaching skills, Breitmeyer (2016) comments the tool is ‘grounded in psychological theory [and] overall usefulness in businesses [remains] largely unexplored’ (p243).

Many required soft skills may be challenging, such as giving feedback, and contracting (Lawrence, 2017). McCarthy and Milner (2013) also include authentic listening, non-directive questions and goal setting. Katsikea et al (2015) suggest the provision of constructive feedback; guidance and support from supervisors should be formally specified in recognition of its importance. Yet, Hunt and Weintraub (2010) say managers can have anxiety with coaching in dealing with ‘severe persistent performance problems’ (p5) and employees may have an apparent lack of interest in personal development. Steelman and Wolfeld (2018), highlight the importance of a manager’s orientation to feedback and how it can affect a coachee’s attitude.

This section has highlighted challenges for managers in mindset and skills. Ideal intentions are quality conversations, mutual trust and respect, an equal relationship, to give feedback, to want to develop others and to empower, which could relate to coach training. The apparent challenges, including a coachee’s attitude are potentially off-putting and may be driving the use of internal coaching (St John-Brooks, 2018). Yet, managers have to use communication and relating skills effectively and coaching brings an alternative perspective to traditional command and control (Grant, 2017).

2.3.3. Coach skills training

Very little literature analyses effectiveness of results from different training approaches. Mukherjee (2012) promotes formal coach training for managers, suggesting life- and performance coaching skills that include recognisable ‘coach skills, personal attitudes, coach process and coaching environment’ (p80). A transactional analysis coach process

was chosen for their case-study in a large production company in India to use a specific analysis tool using transactional analysis ego states for relationship dysfunction. Training on skills covered listening, questioning, giving clear feedback, establishing rapport and providing support. Training on process included creation of a safe, supportive place to discuss confidential and sensitive issues, providing time and space for the coachee to think and reflect, so providing mental challenge and growth opportunities for the coachee. The findings showed that 60% of participants improved their interpersonal skills.

Rather than train managers as coaches, Rock and Donde (2008b) indicate a range of skills and coaching content may be appropriate at different management layers, so the organisation ideally identifies training needs. McCarthy and Milner (2013) suggest training must support the necessary role-switching between 'teaching, training, mentoring or consulting' (p773), and team coaching may need more training to handle team conflict. They suggest that not all managers get training and if they do, complain 'it is often the same training programs that full-time coaches attend' (p774), rather than considering their own specialist needs. They recommend a focus on listening and genuinely being interested in what is being said, rather than on a coaching model. Milner and McCarthy (2014) surveyed '8834 HR managers and general managers focusing on Australian organisations with 200+ employees' (p6), with 580 responses. They report that 40% had trained themselves, while 25% received informal training by a colleagues or supervisor. Regarding those who had received training (35%), 34.7% of those had training of less than one day. Milner, McCarthy and Milner (2018) later surveyed 580 managers in Australian companies, finding that 38% were self-taught or had learned on the job. 'Learning also happened via videos or observing others who demonstrated what they thought were appropriate coaching skills' (p191-192). Training is recommended to be tailored to managers, helping with *when* and *when not* to use coaching. Ongoing support with implementing coaching skills is also recommended.

Recognising that some training is needed, but that specific requirements are not clear, Grant (2007) compares the outcomes of short-term (two-day) training over three weeks and a 13-week programme of weekly workshops and action learning, with two separate groups of participants. Participants completed self-reporting questionnaires on their goal-focused coaching skills and emotional intelligence, EI, before and after the training. Results show that goal-focused coaching skills improve in both, though less so for the short programme and EI improves over the longer programme, which is interesting when EI was 'not even mentioned' (p263) in the training. Alternatively, Ladyshevsky (2010) suggests training should include EI, and 'building trust, understanding the role of values and how these inspire and motivate staff' (p303).

Adopting the idea of extended training, Conway (2013) reports on a 12-month leadership coaching program for senior nurses and midwives. The training consisted of 'a two-day workshop in a conversational model of coaching followed by coaching others, being coached, emailed tips and group coaching sessions via teleconference' (p6). The program covered 'basic coaching theory and skills, plus essential management skills; such as how to provide constructive feedback and meaningful acknowledgement using the coach approach' (p6). Conway's grounded-theory approach, using 20 participants, generated a theoretical model which recognises managers must have courage, motivation, commitment and confidence, and suggests success may depend on managers' pre-existing individual perceptions being moulded by the training. Rafferty and Fairbrother (2015) later reported how participants integrated learning into their routine practice, through gathering data from nine coaches' reflective journals. The individual and group coaching appeared to give more powerful insights than the training. The skills were felt 'useful to their roles' and managers 'felt buoyed by exposure to them' (p8) and used them in 'a variety of conditions and circumstances' (p7).

Lawrence (2017, p57) suggests that the first challenge is 'helping managers to understand what coaching is and its value'. Managers may need help to make the switch from command and control style (Joo et al, 2012). Similarly, Ladyshevsky (2010) suggests that staff development may be 'quite transformational [requiring] a paradigm shift' (p303). Not only must the training explain, it ideally must create motivation to encourage growth in employees, according to Gilley et al (2010). In their survey of employee perceptions of managers' knowledge and use of coaching, answered by 485 postgraduate students working across a range of industries, Gilley et al suggest a lack of skills and intention to motivate employees' growth.

This section has shown that managers receive very little coach training, but there is an emphasis on the coach role being separate to the manager role. Thus, managers must at least understand what coaching is (Lawrence, 2017). Practice is important, especially when training is minimal (Grant, 2007). These points have supported the choice of training for the study, which is detailed in chapter four, and the emphasis on coaching practice.

2.5. Summary of literature

This summary outlines the main literature gaps this study might contribute to. Then a model for soft skills is discussed, followed by the conceptual framework for the study. In general, this review has highlighted that technical professional roles are exposed to a major shift in expectation of soft skills due to market forces and soft-skills performance is of interest to many organisations.

At the outset this review identified a gap regarding attention to the benefits of coaching to the coach. Perhaps it is to be expected that coaching carves a niche for itself, in respect of its prime intention to support another person, rather than explain the operation of its combination of skills and philosophy to provide knowledge to other disciplines. This study specifically aims to explore the combination of coaching mindset and coach skills as a benefit to the coach.

The soft-skills literature highlighted a gap in the understanding of soft skills (Matteson et al, 2016) and how to develop soft skills (Grossman et al, 2015; Anthony and Gardner, 2016). Yet soft skills are important to success at work through working well with others; thus, to human and social capital (Nilsson, 2010; Gardner, 2017). Universities are challenged in preparing students for career success (Ritter et al, 2018), and little development may happen in organisations (Bailly and Léné, 2012). Different disciplines work separately on soft skills, suggesting context dependence. However, there is some evidence that soft-skills performance is consistent across disciplines (Kantrowitz, 2005; Chamorro-Premuzic et al, 2010).

In the specific case of project managers, there is a similar gap. Long lists of required skills can be generated, though the need for communication (Skulmoski and Hartman, 2010) and cooperative relationships (Saunders et al, 2015; Azim et al, 2010) is clear. Development of project managers appears haphazard with a potential view that development is considered a personal responsibility (Clott, 2007; Savelsbergh et al, 2016): to evolve through experiential on-the-job learning. Coaching practice as a development approach could fit well in this context.

Managerial coaching practice shows a gap in understanding what activities lead to successful outcomes. Principles are clearer than outcomes, such as facilitation of learning (Beattie et al, 2014), empowerment (Ellinger et al, 2010) and quality conversations (Grant, 2017). Not all managers receive training but those that do are likely to be given typical professional coach training (McCarthy and Milner, 2013), though this may not be ideal (Rock and Donde, 2008b).

A potential gap is making sense of managers' motivation to coach because some may be reluctant (Gilley et al, 2010). Understanding the barriers, and benefits to coaching that project managers experience may be a useful contribution to clarifying motivation. It may support that manager and coach are separate roles (Lawrence, 2017) or that coaching is a way of managing (Garvey et al, 2014) which could establish management as a boundary of coaching skills.

The criticisms of soft skills (Matteson et al, 2016; Hurrell et al, 2013, Claxton et al, 2016) encourage a better understanding of soft skills. Figure 2.3 shows a model for an individual's soft skills that has emerged from the discovered taxonomies, particularly Klein et al (2006), Pichler and Beenen (2014) and Maltbia et al (2014). Compared to figure 2.2, this model hides personal traits and attitudes because these are not skills, though may influence how skills are used. The model shows soft skills as a combination of personal skills, communication and relating skills as interpersonal skills, and other skills that use the foregoing skills. These other skills seem to relate specifically to the role in which the soft skills are used and are thus called role-related skills. The model is not yet clear about the separation between role-related and interpersonal skills but recognises that existing taxonomies can align with this model. Some examples are shown in the figure. Pichler and Beenen (2014) separate supporting, motivating and resolving conflict skills, recognising these depend on communication and self-management skills. This is why the model uses concentric circles because the outer layers are dependent on inner layers. The social skills of a hospitality employee (Hurrell et al, 2013) or the facilitation skills of a coach (Maltbia et al, 2014) could also express role-related skills that express the aims for the use of communication and relating skills.

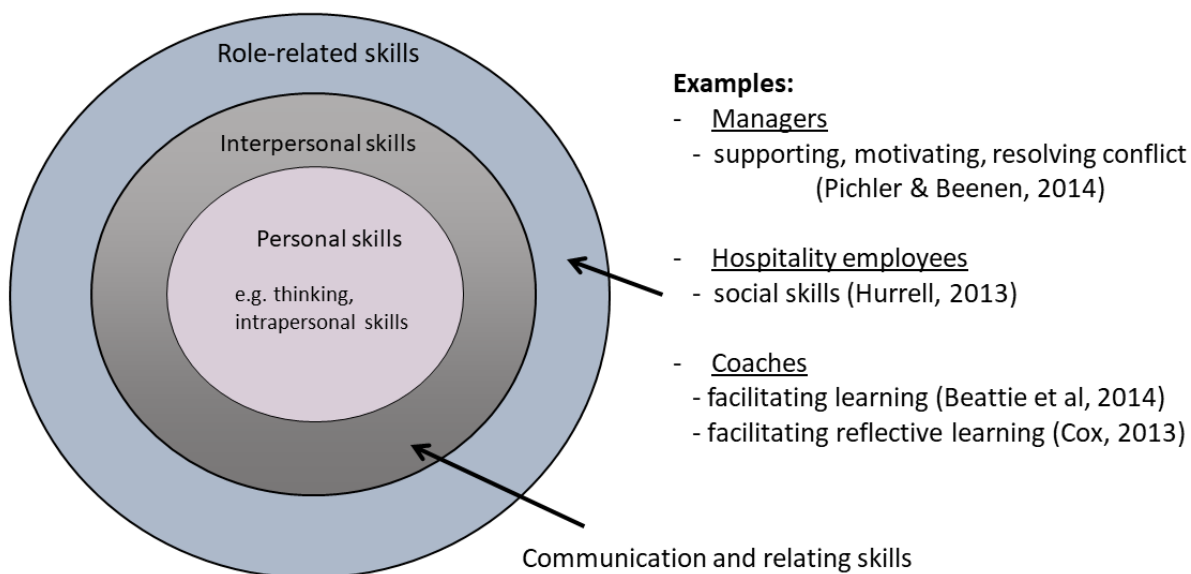


Figure 2.3. Soft-skills model.

There have been many sections to this review but it has been important to be clear about the gaps. Considering soft skills and their development both generally and in project managers may have repeated the confusion of soft skills, but it has been established that how soft skills are exercised depends on the context of use. Also, the project managers'

role is established as task-focussed with leadership expected (Geoghegan and Dulewicz, 2008). Having proposed the new soft-skills model for better clarity, coaching more clearly looks like principled communication; with expressed aims of the coach role. Cox (2013) indicates the aim is to enable reflective learning. For managerial coaching, Beattie et al (2014) similarly express the aim as learning. The aims for a project manager role include delivery to project success criteria (Geoghegan and Dulewicz, 2008), and learning from experience (Duffield and Whitty, 2016).

The three sections in managerial coaching also seem extensive, when debates suggest managerial coaching is evolving and principles may be necessary to support breadth of interpretation (Backhirova et al, 2016). Yet, the separation of outcomes and skills has reinforced that coach skills, like soft skills, reflect how something is achieved. Thus, coach or manager as a role is separate to communication and relating skills and may include skills to use a particular coaching or management process for example. This study adopts the possibility of separating communication, relating and personal skills from purpose-driven role-related skills.

Many different soft-skill development methods are used, but real practice and feedback to build self-awareness are emphasised. The appeal of the developmental approaches may be as important as effectiveness, so that learners are encouraged to develop themselves. Project managers often learn on-the-job, though training is recommended to broaden knowledge. Many managers receive little or no training to coach and there is some criticism of using the same training as that for coaches.

Reconsidering the conceptual framework for the study, Figure 2.4 updates figure 2.2 and amplifies the organisational viewpoint linking each literature area, with new theories marked in bold. Organisations are concerned with employee retention, thus employees' commitment to the team and organisation are studied and theories relating to social exchange are relevant, including between leader and individuals or within teams. Managerial coaching being the facilitation of learning gives the potential of organisational learning being the consistent principle that amplifies the theoretical underpinnings of the review areas, because soft skill development is about people development. There are differences of perspective, however, regarding people development approaches; soft-skills literature suggests mostly pedagogy, manager-as-coach andragogy, and project managers are not necessarily considered responsible for the learning of others. However, the move to Agile development in projects is starting to introduce a learning and coaching ethos (Adkins, 2010).

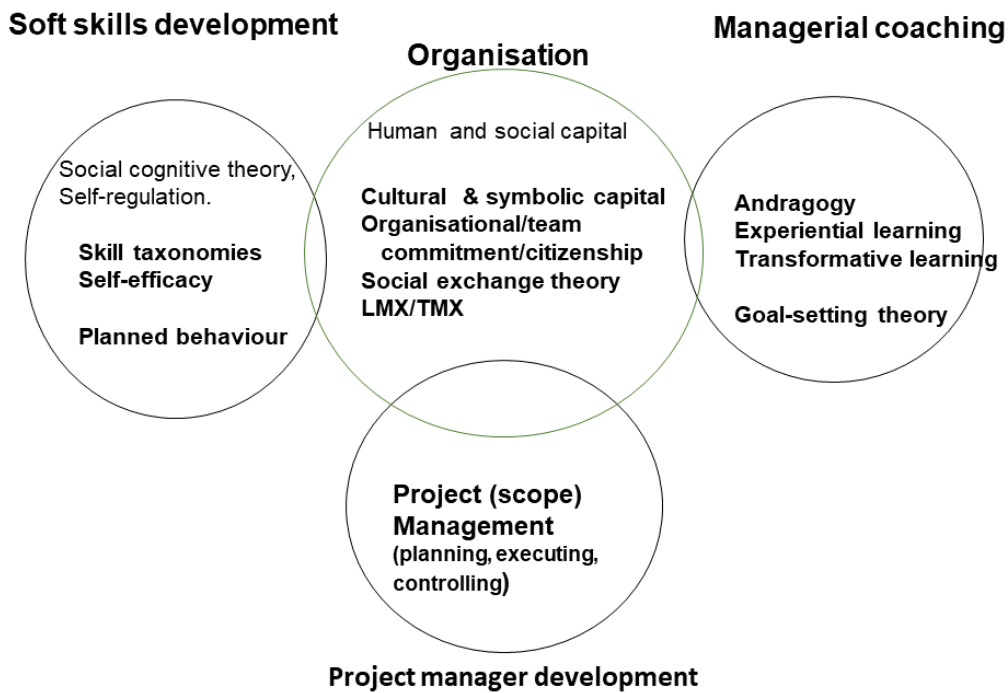


Figure 2.4. Updated conceptual framework.

By considering the organisational environment, overlap is more apparent through people working together towards organisational performance. Goal-setting theory in managerial coaching is also potentially similar to the theory of projects and to the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). Experiential learning (Kolb, 2014) is implied by on-the-job training of project managers.

The rest of this summary refers back to figure 2.1, and specifically the soft skills that are of interest to project managers and used by managers who coach. Considering the literature overlap between soft-skills development and project manager development, appendices 2.1 and 2.2 summarise interpersonal skills and personal skills from references of both literature areas, using only the first author for brevity. Skills that seem related have been grouped using one skill's name. Regarding interpersonal skills, the groupings are service orientation, communications, leadership, working with others, managing, motivating, conflict management and developing others. In project management literature, communication is a priority, as well as managing, conflict management and working with others. There is a possible preference to consider leadership rather than interpersonal skills. There is relatively low interest in delegation and empowerment, though these may be considered part of leadership. There is no interest in supporting skills or service orientation. Regarding personal skills, the groupings are social acumen and problem-

solving. A decisive, socially aware project manager who is prepared to lead collaboratively and solve problems may be sought to develop through experience.

Considering the overlap between managerial coaching and soft-skills development, professional coach competencies potentially have clearer detail of soft skills for coaches and standard coach training is often used for managers. Appendix 2.3 summarises skills from the managerial coaching literature, grouped according to the taxonomy from Maltbia et al (2014): communication, relational and facilitation skills. The table includes aspects of the expected mindset, and also employee skill outcomes since these are expected of managers too. Regarding skills, managers may only need to facilitate goal-focused conversations, through good dialogue with trust and respect, and to give feedback. The mindset adopted potentially reflects the debate about managers' coaching role. It covers valuing people over task, the willingness to develop and empower others, the power relation, confidentiality, belief in self-development and that others are malleable. The extent to which either project managers or managers enable learning is not clear.

Considering both overlaps, communication and relational skills seem important; this study aims to better understand project managers' use of these soft skills. The reference to trust and power for coaches, yet being missing for project managers, is potentially relevant; also, little attention being given to soft-skills development and more analysis needed of training and outcomes. This study in using coaching practice is providing real practice that demands trust and an equal power relationship. There is opportunity to build self-awareness through self-reflection, and request (coachee) feedback that the literature deems important.

Herr and Anderson (2005) recommend the literature review not being too narrow because action research may uncover more than the expectations set in the literature. Looking beyond the overlap areas, soft skills may not be valued or considered innate, with resultant resistance to development. Investment costs and long lists of soft skills may also discourage development. Soft skills may be more easily defined as part of a recognised role or discipline, enabling practical rather than theoretical knowledge. However multiple roles imply clarity of role is needed with flexibility of mindset. For managers, the roles of coach and manager can conflict, because of the power relation, and potentially because of the co-dependence between manager and employee through organisational commitments. This may naturally emphasise performance rather than broader development. Yet, development of individuals and empowerment contribute to organisational performance criteria such as staff retention.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

The methodology chapter addresses the research design to meet the remaining research objectives. It introduces the initial choice of action research methodology. Then, the choice of paradigm is discussed, followed by the research methods including the participatory form of action research and the data analysis approach. Finally, trustworthiness, reflexivity and ethics are reviewed.

The research involves coaching activity by project managers who will notice their use of soft skills in coaching practice and at work. The aim is to investigate the benefits of coaching to the coach. Because coaching programmes for project managers are not common and project managers know little about coaching (Thompson and Cox, 2017), this study needs to create opportunities for them to practice and also to provide coach training. The coaching training and practice are not necessarily directly useful to project managers, but the indirect soft-skills development is expected to be useful to them in their work practices. Action research seemed a natural choice of research methodology, because its purpose involves ‘improvement of practice[,] understanding of practice, [and] improvement of situation’ (Robson and McCartan, 2016, p199).

3.1. Research paradigm

The original premise of the study embedded a hope that coaching skills can be useful to project managers. Rorty (1999) reflects on pragmatism as a philosophy of social hope, expressing hope as luck because the future is unpredictable in social activity. Pragmatism aims to determine ‘what works’ (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p18), with truth reflected in what actually happens: ‘truth is embodied in a practical outcome’ (Baskerville and Myers, 2004, p331). This study aims to elucidate whether and how coaching practice works as a soft-skills development approach for project managers, by exploring what soft skills from coaching practice are useful in their project manager roles.

Despite a traditionally positivist ontological perspective, the prevalent view of projects is a ‘network of actors embedded in a social context and in constant transformation’ (Gauthier and Ika, 2012, p12), where project managers are urged to become reflexive agents. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) suggest a pragmatist approach for people-related research focused on practical outcomes with recognition of ‘the existence and importance of the natural or physical world as well as the emergent social and psychological world’ (p18). For project management research, Cicmil et al (2006, p677) advocate ‘project actuality research’, using pragmatist philosophy, due to projects’ ‘complex social processes’, where ‘actions, decisions and behaviours are embedded in and continuously

re-shaped by local patterns of power relations and communicative inter-subjective interaction in real time' (p678). The authors claim the importance of the wisdom of practice being captured, and that over time, theory can explain the dynamics of complex processes. It is encouraging too, that Bachkirova and Borrington (2018) advocate pragmatism as a philosophical framework for organisational coaching.

Pragmatism seeks to remove the traditional dualism in ontology, between the physical and social world. The early pragmatist John Dewey (1905, p326) comments that 'pragmatism has learned that the true meaning of subjectivism is just anti-dualism', also ontology and epistemology merge through empiricism focussing on findings from practical experience. Knowledge is conceived as action and its practical consequences. Dewey (1905, p325) says that 'getting knowledge rests on facts or things' but such 'things are not [necessarily] present' in knowledge. This is potentially helpful for a study about soft skills, as the main objects of study, because many are associated with roles, such as manager (Pichler and Beenen, 2014; Yeardley, 2017; Weber et al, 2010), emotion worker (Hurrell et al, 2013) or coach (Maltbia et al, 2014; Mukherjee, 2012). Also, such roles associate aims as a result of action: for example, presenting the right corporate image (Hurrell et al, 2013) or listening to understand how to support a coachee (Mukherjee, 2012; Rogers, 2008). Considering, too, the debates about the meaning of managerial coaching (Lawrence, 2017) and the use of hard/soft skill terminology (Claxton et al, 2016; Hurrell et al, 2013), pragmatism seems useful to put focus on soft skills in action.

Dewey's concept of pragmatic enquiry is a collaborative process, in search of positive outcomes (Morgan, 2014) which aligns with action research. While action research has broad origins and broad application (Reason and Bradbury, 2006), there is emphasis on collaboration where 'people try to work together to address key problems in their communities or organizations' (Reason and Bradbury, 2006, p1). Pasmore (2001, p38) suggests that Dewey must be given credit for his novel thinking 'in addressing practical social problems', but also recognises the originators as 'two men working independently, John Collier and Kurt Lewin'. Pasmore (2001) draws a parallel between both originators showing how participatory research with non-academic groups found acceptable solutions to problems. Dewey promotes collective agreement for social groups (Dewey, 1999), while also recognising the individual nature of experience of actions, feelings and beliefs. Morgan (2014) summarises Dewey's approach to enquiry. Firstly, there needs to be a problematic situation. The lack of knowledge about how project managers develop soft skills for effective use in work situations is a problem. Then consideration is needed of ways to define the problem and I have chosen to consider how coaching practice could address the problem. Then a possible line of action needs development, followed by

evaluation to see whether it will address the problematic situation. Thus, collaborative agreement that any changed behaviour at work be considered to be a result of the coaching practice action is ideal.

Based on my personal experience, I hoped project managers would learn new soft skills through coaching practice, which in turn may affect their work relationships and thus, project outcomes. If project managers applied soft skills at work after coaching practice, they would demonstrate practical knowing (Reason and Torbert, 2001). Action research supports the assumption that participants would be reflecting on their own actions, feelings and beliefs in making decisions appropriate for their own situations. Morgan (2014) refers to Dewey's model of enquiry as a 'process of self-conscious decision-making' (p1046) and 'a continuous process that may involve many cycles between beliefs and actions [before] resolution' (p1047), because old beliefs may be uncovered at any point. Project managers' knowledge would likely evolve throughout the coaching practice.

Soft skills are people-related and not well defined, so there may be many subjective explanations of thoughts and feelings from participants. Pragmatism supports the idea of sharing views to develop participants' understanding, as well as supporting subjective beliefs. A contemporary of Dewey, William James is reported as saying 'man is always cooperating with the world around him, both in shaping his own fate, and in making what we call truth' (Bjorkman, 1907, p1). James is considered as representing a more permissive view of pragmatism in that individuals can decide truth in the form of their beliefs, feelings and actions. Even in relation to belief in God, James considers 'probable truth is what works best in the way of leading us, what fits every part of life best and combines with the collectivity of experience's demands nothing being omitted' (James, 1907, p39). Kolb (2014) writes that James' ideas underpin the theory of experiential learning. The project managers' coaching practice would be experiential learning of the soft skills used, creating their own knowledge of them. Rodgers (2002) explains Dewey's similar views of reflection being needed to learn, and how any learning experience potentially impacts both the learner, and others, in the affected environment.

Lalonde, Bourgault, and Findeli (2010) give an epistemological rationale for pragmatism in the project management discipline, so that 'reflective practice becomes the main empirical ground on which to sketch theories' (p30) for the management of projects. Their desire is that research spans theory and practice, which equally applies to the coaching discipline; both demand reflection of practice. Theories must help project managers 'make better decisions, or at the very least to act while taking into account a broader range of dimensions' (p28). Lalonde et al (2010) argue reflective practice is based on the work of

Schön (1987) who is considered to have 'proposed a new epistemology of professional practice' (p29). Interviews would tap into and support project managers' reflections on what soft skills they were learning and then applying.

Finding ways for participants to share experiences seemed ideal, because Hammond (2013) refers to Dewey's belief that we can 'share an inter-subjective world' (p610). An inter-subjective agreement of how coach skills are relevant to project managers is sought, for a practical reality of how coaching practice develops soft skills; though this potentially prioritises contribution to the project management discipline over the coaching discipline. As researcher I would aim to take a broader viewpoint, to notice any opportunity to contribute to the coaching discipline or the understanding of soft skills. Hammond (2013, p605) refers to Charles Peirce to argue that action can be a 'deductive testing of ideas', as well as 'an inductive drawing out of what can be learned'. This aptly summarises the original aims of the study of coaching practice as a development approach and qualitative analysis of project managers' learning. Dewey (1916, pp714-715) acknowledges Peirce and aligns with his need for 'trustworthiness of procedures in inquiry' and 'social agreement'.

The answer to the research question was sought from analysis of interview data representing participants' experience and reflections. The initial aim was to take an interpretivist approach to data analysis, to clearly focus on the perceptions and understandings of participants (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003), thus limit the researcher's influence. Other researchers had combined pragmatist and interpretivist approaches (Goldkuhl, 2012), so this aim was followed. However, interpretivist thematic analysis did not result in stable themes, even after protracted attempts. Instead deduction and abduction enabled data analysis to reach an outcome, forcing deeper reflection of pragmatism and its meaning. Abduction is associated with pragmatism and Peirce. Peirce (1992) considers 'abductive suggestion comes to us like a flash [, an] act of insight' (p227), which is a fallible hypothesis. Insight is not a fully conscious process even though Peirce writes 'different elements of the hypothesis were in our minds before' (p227); rather a new combination of elements is sensed. In this study, induction elicits project managers' descriptions of soft skills, from their practical experience of learning and applying coaching skills. Deduction is used in framing the practical experience within recognised soft-skill groupings from the literature review. Abduction is used to align the inductive findings and deductive groupings, and also to give a rationale for the applied use of soft skills, based on the learning of coaching principles. Primarily, data analysis seeks to elicit project managers' descriptions of coaching skills and their applied use at work. This aligns with

pragmatist aims to evolve 'descriptions of the world and of ourselves' Rorty (1999, p27) into more useful ones.

In summary, this study uses a framework of pragmatism with abduction to focus on outcomes of practical value, particularly descriptions of useful soft skills, in response to the lack of direction on how to develop soft skills for project managers. If considered useful, the findings could potentially apply beyond project managers, due to the literature gaps, such as soft-skills needs being poorly defined (Matteson et al, 2016) and rarely developed in organisations (Bailly and Léné, 2012), whereas coaching has defined skills (Rogers, 2008) and is becoming prevalent in organisations (Garvey et al, 2014). In response to the specific literature gap about the benefits of coaching to the coach, a contribution can be made regarding the skills useful outside of coaching.

3.2. Research strategy – participatory action research

Reason and Torbert (2001) argue that the combination of action research and pragmatism supports research into the real world to understand how to act. Action research has been used extensively in educational research and Zeichner (2001, p276) relates that teachers use action research 'to understand better and improve their practice', which aligns with improving project managers' practice. Action research thus supports evolutionary learning through action. The action aimed to evolve project managers' descriptions of soft skills used during coaching practice and applied at work. Its inherent flexibility, which Herr and Anderson (2005) call 'designing the plane while flying it' (p69) supports the unknown outcomes of coaching practice. I had only my own experience and the enthusiasm of the participants to predict whether the project managers would manage to complete the action and benefit from soft skills learning.

Action research is a family of approaches that typically start with 'everyday experiences' for the development of 'living knowledge' (Reason and Bradbury, 2001, p2). Kemmis (2007) suggests that all action research in education is participatory because participants all undergo self-reflective enquiry. Reason and Torbert (2001) advise that the participatory form is intended to 'forge a more direct link between intellectual knowledge and moment-to-moment personal and social action, so that enquiry contributes *directly* to the flourishing of human persons' (p6). The so-called 'action turn in the social sciences' is designed for 'integrating inquiry and practice' (p7). Thus, both participatory action research and pragmatism align to encourage the sharing of practice, as well as self-reflection. Kemmis (2007) acknowledges a range of stakeholder involvement in creating resultant knowledge. I have emphasised the participatory action research to put focus on

the participants' contribution through participation, their ideas about what works, and shared practice so that ideas evolve into agreed knowledge.

I have positioned myself as an 'outsider' (McNiff and Whitehead, 2011, p8) in this action research, because I am not currently working as a professional project manager, and outside the immediate context of the participants. In addition, participants would not be available for research activity such as data analysis. In the terminology used by Carr and Kemmis (2003, p202), I would be following 'practical action research' (p202) because the aspiration to explore coaching as an effective route to improving soft skills was my initiative, rather than being instigated by the participants as a way of supporting themselves to inquire into and improve their situation. I am the researcher, cooperating with participants who are performing the action and reflection. For project management research, Cicmil et al (2006, p677) advocate 'co-production of knowledge between researcher and researched'. In this case, the participants would be individually learning, practicing, reflecting and making their own judgements about soft-skill improvement, while I would separately analyse the data.

The coaching practice of six periodic coaching sessions over 6 months presented the possibility of a repeated experiential learning cycle (Kolb, 2014) to support change in the use and understanding of coach skills. The focus of analysis was changes in soft skills both in coaching practice and at work. Interviews would support reflection on both coaching activity and relevance of learned soft skills to project managers. Action research could support project managers' action and self-reflection for development.

The project manager participants would need to learn to coach in order to act as coach. If the focus had only been the benefits of the coaching to a coach, it might have been possible to interview student coaches about challenges taken to supervision to understand their skills learning, but supervision is rare for new student coaches and coaches need to learn to use supervision (Sheppard, 2017). Alternatively, student coaches could have been interviewed, based on their early learning from practice, but the participants would then have been focused on coaching as an outcome rather than soft-skills development. Therefore, coach training was provided.

Finding ways to share experiences could help the participatory nature of the study. The training was an opportunity for the participants to meet each other. Summaries of soft skills from the first three rounds of interviews were emailed to all participants, to share ideas about soft skills learning. The focus group provided another opportunity to share experiences. The stick figure drawings in chapter six were individually reviewed with each participant in July 2016. Similarly, the summary section of chapter six was shared with

participants in August 2018. Thomas (2017) indicates the process of member-checking is unlikely to improve research but is appropriate for participatory research.

3.2.1. Action research process

The planned participatory action research process is shown in figure 3.1 on page 61. The outline is an initial preparation period, then two action cycles – each of three months – with formal data analysis being done by the researcher after the action cycles. The aim of the preparation period was to ensure readiness of participants to engage in the required coaching practice. Dividing the action into two halves seemed the simplest solution to the unknowns surrounding the participants' learning and any difficulties they may face. The focus group marked the half-way point of the action and supported the participatory nature of the study. It was a checkpoint for participants' views of their motivation to continue, and an opportunity to share experiences. This outline provided a simple explanation to participants, yet, as researcher, I remained flexible about what might constitute an action cycle. For example, Herr and Anderson (2005, p71) suggest considering the early cycles as a 'pilot', because any action is naturally an experiment. In this study, real coaching practice could not be piloted in the traditional sense, because every coaching session is unique. However, the early sessions were experiments in the sense that the coaching relationships were new and the newly learned skills were being used for the first time.

There were five data collection points: three interviews in action cycle one, a focus group and final interview. Action cycle 1 accommodated my concern to have regular contact with the coach participants to ensure they were still happy to commit to the research, or to address any issues arising. It included three interviews with each coach participant, each to follow soon after the corresponding coaching practice session. The focus group marked the end of action cycle one and was another possible review point of any changes being necessary. In reality, all participants appeared to be confident with coaching practice by the end of action cycle 1. Action cycle 2 continued as the planned three months of further coaching practice with the final interviews occurring at the end of coaching practice. The process followed the figure; at the focus group, participants indicated they were happy to continue with coaching practice, and some had already applied skills at work.

As facilitator, I adopted the philosophy that 'a participative collaborative style is more important than sorting the complexities of various feedback loops in the cycle' (Robson and McCartan, 2016, p202), even though iterations of diagnosis, planning, action and evaluation (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009) may be more common. Herr and Anderson (2005, p69) propose a philosophy of 'designing the plane while flying it', and this resonated with the flexibility I felt was needed to support the unknowns: the

participants' current soft skills, whether coaching practice was achievable and whether any skills would be learned and applied. Although I imposed two action cycles to encourage both learning and application of skills, the participants' awareness, assimilation and application of soft skills was evolving through individual experiential learning. The rationale for a monthly frequency for coaching sessions was to spread the participants' investment of time, allow them time to reflect and to consider applying learned skills at work. The coach training established the soft skills to be learned, but each participant's starting knowledge of soft skills and context would be different, so their learning potentially different. During the first action cycle, a summary of the soft skills mentioned by all coach participants was shared in an email after each of round of interviews, to promote the idea of shared understanding in the results of the research.

The emailed skill summaries provided a regular opportunity for participants to view the other participants' experiences and to encourage reconsideration of their own learning in comparison. The focus group created a list of learned soft skills, which was sent to each coach participant, with an invitation request to score themselves out of ten then, ideally at the start of the research, and score again at the final interview. This aimed to embed the intent to develop soft skills. Reason and Bradbury (2006) advocate establishing an 'orientation of change with others' (p1) and giving the opportunity for reflection. The focus group marked the half-way point in the study and aimed to encourage consideration of the application of skills at work. The participants would not be interviewed again for three months, giving a period of self-learning without prompting.

3.3. Research methods

The process steps within figure 3.1 are now discussed under four sub-headings.

Participants describes the participants, how they were invited, the initial training and introductions made for each pairing of coach participant and coachee participant.

Interviews describes the main data collection through interview during both action cycles.

Focus group describes the online conference meeting to encourage the sharing of experiences and focus on the learned soft skills. *Data analysis* explains the process from which findings emerged.

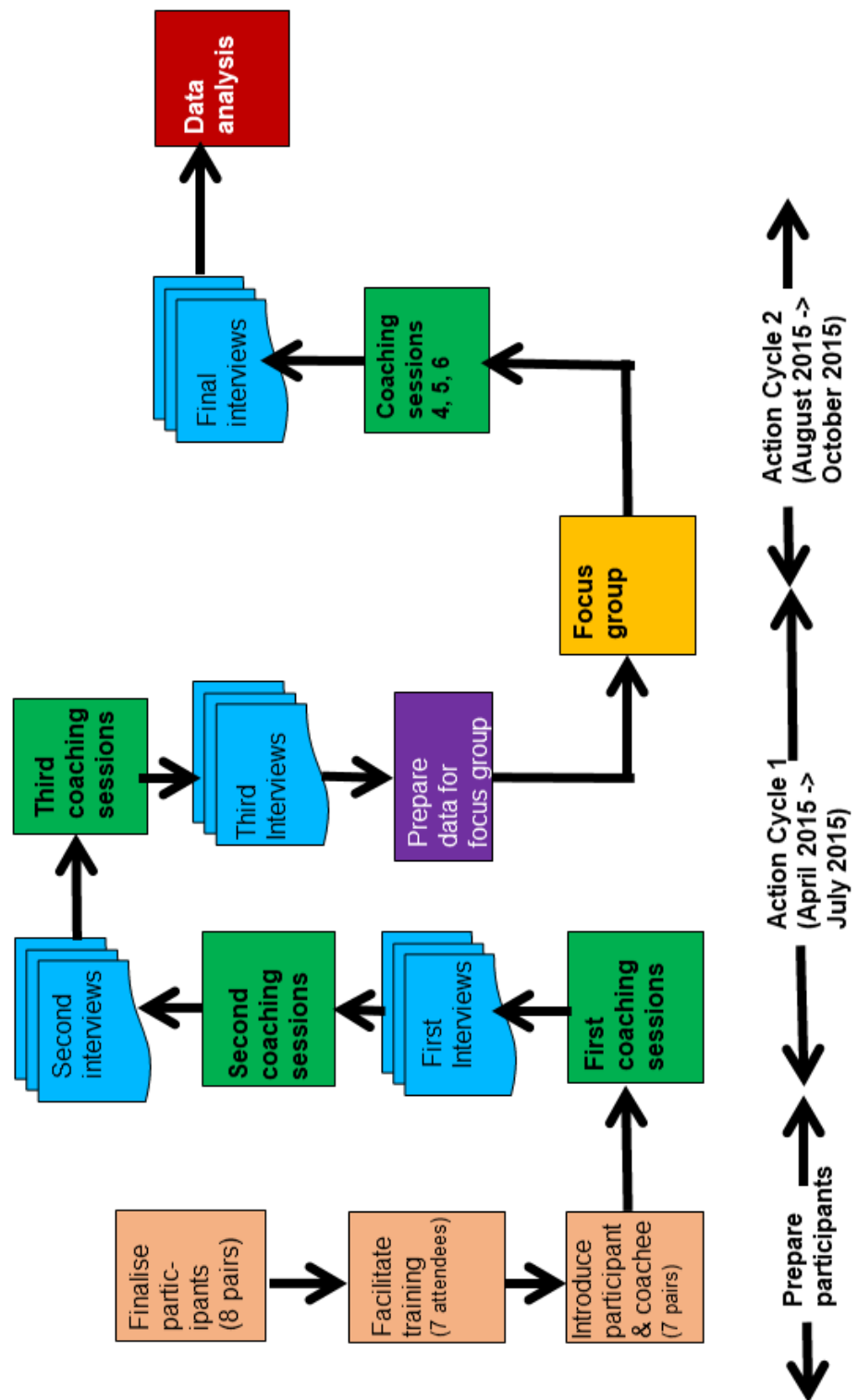


Figure 3.1. The action research process.

3.3.1. Participants

Action research tends to take place with a small group of dedicated people open to new ideas (Dawson, 2002). In order to understand how project managers can develop soft skills through acting as a novice coaches, I needed to find project managers who were interested in exploring the potential of developing such skills. I felt that project managers who considered they did not already have coach skills were the most likely to be motivated by additional, recognised learning, and therefore prepared to invest the time for learning and practice, whether or not it immediately altered their behaviour at work. This would also give a clearer view of soft skills to be learned rather than having the complication of different experiences of coach skills. Additionally, I felt it would be challenging to attract project managers who had undergone formal coach training partly due to the motivation to participate but also because project managers rarely have formal coach skills (Thompson and Cox, 2017). Rather, project managers who did not already have coach skills, could generate a clearer picture of the value of coach skills to established project managers and other novice coaches. Training would be needed, but this offered an initial view whether coaching practice was going feasible. Although there was an implied benefit to learners, because of the training, there was no guaranteed practical benefit at work.

Participants prepared to invest the time to learn to act as coaches and motivated to complete the coaching practice were therefore needed. For their coaching practice, an equivalent number of coachees were required. Coachees who were experienced project managers would be ideal, to give an initial basis for rapport between coach and coachee. However, they also needed experience of coaching to know if the coach participants were indeed acting as coaches. I would not be observing these coaching sessions; experienced coachees could possibly give some feedback on the coaching practice and an early warning of any issues. An advertisement for coach participants (appendix 3.1a) was made available in a newsletter issued by Project Management Institute UK Chapter (www.pmi.org.uk), and online in two LinkedIn groups related to project managers (www.linkedin.com), as well as through emails from myself to personal contacts. For coach participants, the aim was to find project managers who had not undergone coach training and who were not currently coaching, so that they would not already be using coaching skills at work. Learning skills could then be a motivator to participate. An advertisement to invite coachee participants (appendix 3.1b) was similarly communicated. For coachee participants, the aim was to find project managers who had experience of coaching, ideally in being coached formally, and would be prepared to be coached on a work-related topic, by a novice coach. Many coachee participants had experience of

acting as a coach, either as manager, or peer, but their willingness to use the coaching session for real issues was the prime requirement.

20 respondents to the advertisements were provided with at least one participant information sheet, which stated the involvement required as well as experience expected (see appendix 3.2 for the coach participant sheet). Most knew which type of participant they wanted to be; some were initially less sure. For each interested respondent, there was a short telephone interview of 15-30 minutes to cover any questions and compare experiences with requirements. With coach participants, I confirmed their interest in the coach training, commitment to the study requirements over six months and that coach-like skills were not currently being used. With coachee participants, we discussed our understanding of coaching and their expected commitment to the study. I made clear to both coach and coachee participants that pairing would not involve any consideration of matching criteria. The important criteria were that the participants were practising project managers and not using coaching skills. I was open to coach participants having a range of project manager experience but wanted to establish they were project managers in the sense of having led or managed projects.

Respondents who showed interest in continuing, and who met the criteria, were invited to give their formal consent by signing a coach or coachee participant form (appendix 3.3). When each form was returned, the participant was added to either the list of planned coach participants or the list of coachee participants. This allowed pairing on a first-come-first-served basis: Coach1 was paired with Coachee1, Coach2 with Coachee2 etc. Table 3.1 overleaf shows the backgrounds of the coach participants and their assigned coachee participants; with the anonymised names of coach participants used hereafter. An eighth pair of participants was recruited, but Coach8 had to drop out for personal reasons on the training day. Because Coachee1 also dropped out within two months, Coachee8 was later paired with Coach1 as a substitute coachee.

The coach participants were being asked to invest one day for training, at least six hours in their practice as a coach, and up to four hours in interviews. The coachee participants were being asked to invest six hours in being coached by novice coaches and up to one hour in interviews. Data would only be collected from the coach participants, because the research focus was *their* learning. Although the coachee participants may each have an opinion about a coach participant's coaching, an evaluation of the coaching was not sought, in recognition that the participants would be novice coaches. Also, any assessment by coachees of soft-skill improvement would be impossible since each coach was unknown to the coachee prior to the study.

<u>Pairing</u>	<u>Coach years as PM</u>	<u>Coach's current role</u>	<u>Coach - no formal coaching activity, but....</u>	<u>Coachee's current role</u>	<u>Coachee years as PM</u>
Coach1 (Mark) Coachee1	>15	Project management trainer and consultant	Gave business advice many years ago.		12
Coach2 (Peter) Coachee2	12	Programme manager (Telecommunications)	Trained as a trainer and had been a mentor.	Project manager	9
Coach3 (Susan) Coachee3	7	Project Management office manager (IT)	Some experience of being a manager.	Manager of project managers	Many
Coach4 (Adèle) Coachee4	4	Project manager (Refrigeration)	Some awareness at university, connected with helping others.	Information manager	2
Coach5 (Jill) Coachee5	14	Project manager (Investment banking)	Been mentored.	Leader of project managers	>20
Coach6 (Bill) Coachee6	8	Senior project manager (IT/technology)	Mentored years ago, but not felt successful. Had recently received mentoring from senior project manager.	Project manager	6
Coach7 (Andrew) Coachee7	>15	Project/programme manager, responsible for 7 project managers. (Logistics)	Some mentoring of high school students.	Leading a large project in academic environment	1
(Coach1-Mark) Coachee8	>15	Project management trainer and consultant	Gave business advice many years ago.	Project manager	5 (A manager prior)

Table 3.1. Coach participant and Coachee participant pairings

3.3.2. One day training

A single full day of coach training was arranged for the coach participants only, in a face-to-face learning workshop, led by an experienced trainer in organisational coach training (content is covered in Chapter 4). This aimed to model typical organisational coach training, including the coaching model 'GROW' (Whitmore, 2009). The course was held on 11th April 2015; at that time the trainer had 12 years of experience in developing leaders through accredited and non-accredited coaching training to professional audiences all

over the UK. I was present throughout and took the opportunity of presenting an overview of the research project. This overview established the overall goal, timeframe, and that I was the contact for any issues arising. I explained I had received coach supervision training, so would be able to work with participants on any coaching issues and offer appropriate professional guidance.

After the training, I facilitated a short introductory meeting for each coach-coachee pairing, using virtual conferencing application (www.zoom.us) that supported video or audio facilities. These allowed some sharing of information between us, to initiate a sense of cooperation with research, and also a good beginning to the relationship between us, in the spirit of human flourishing (Reason and Torbert, 2001). Participants related their interest in the study and also their project management experience. I hoped these points would lay the foundations of trust, which is 'based on the expectation [another] will behave positively' under a condition of risk (Gubbins and MacCurtain, 2008). Sharing common interests increases trust because one is more likely to 'be able to put oneself in the shoes of another' (Weber and Carter, 2003) increasing understanding. I explained how I knew each of them and answered any questions they had. This call marked handover to the coach participant for responsibility of the coaching relationship; and contact information was shared.

3.3.3. Interviews

Four semi-structured individual interviews with each participant were planned: three in action cycle 1 and a final interview at the end of action cycle 2. The first three interviews were planned for 30 minutes each. In practice, the first ones tended to be longer, the second ones tended to be shorter, and the third around 30 minutes, with some discussion about the value of the upcoming focus group. The final interviews were 45-60 minutes long and took place after the sixth coaching sessions, approximately six months after the training.

Bryman (2016, p468) advocates semi-structured interviews being flexible with an emphasis on "how the interviewee frames and understands issues and events". For all interviews with coach participants, my stance was to be curious about their personal experiences of any learning or application of soft skills, and open to the interviewee's topics of relevance. The interview questions for action cycle 1 (appendix 3.4) aimed to focus data collection on the learning experiences in coaching practice, asking particularly about new skills, and later what behavioural differences they had noticed at work, if any. The semi-structured style supported participants to air any concerns with coaching practice too. The same questions were used for each of the interviews in action cycle 1,

moving the emphasis from coaching practice to the work environment according to a participant's situation. The one final interview in action cycle 2 mostly used open questioning about skills learning and application in order that the participants had the opportunity to drive the conversation. (Appendix 3.5 shows the questions.)

The final interviews did refer to the skills-list from the focus group, whether or not the participants had scored the list (only three participants had). Also, in the first final interview, I experimented with an imaginary drawing question inspired by the description of presentational knowing by Heron and Reason (1997). This seemed to go well so I continued to ask each coach participant to draw and/or describe an imaginary stick figure of themselves at the end of the study compared to the beginning. Only Andrew found the request too challenging. Heron and Reason (2008) advise an open stance on how experience is represented: examples include 'visual arts, music, poetry, drama', where 'images articulate experiential knowing, shaping what is inchoate into a communicable form' (p370-371). Although some of these ideas sounded far removed from practical-minded project managers, drawing a stick figure implied that drawing expertise was not necessary. The imaginary pictures seemed to help participants give information about how they felt about themselves.

Rowan (2001) explains the need to listen actively to subjective views of participants; my role as data collector would be to probe for as rich a description as possible, without judgement. The aim was that conversations were natural, following each participant's experiences. This allowed interviewees to introduce their ideas about soft skills. I wished to explore these as deeply as possible, while participants were interested in doing so, but I found the participants often repeated their experiences using similar language. Although we were generally relaxed about time, most interviews kept to less than 45 minutes and final interviews less than 60 minutes. I also ensured that I did no coaching myself; there was no sense that I needed to improve the coaching skills I was hearing about.

All interviews used Skype or Zoom initially so that video was possible. However, it became obvious that some participants were quite happy with audio only and a phone call was often then used. I was keen that participants had the choice, for participatory action research. Each call seemed to improve the individual relationship between myself and a participant such that audio only felt acceptable and practical. Bryman (2016, p458) indicates telephone interviewing can elicit similar responses to the situation where participants answer questions in person. He gives examples in his own research of getting 'expansive' replies while using the telephone. The biggest concern for me as researcher was the quality of the audio and I discouraged the use of mobile phones generally, after

one poor experience, by explaining the issue and asking for a landline number, if necessary. I personally did not feel confident in interpreting or commenting on body language in a research setting and listening only helped to focus on the participants' own words.

3.3.4. Focus group

The focus group meeting was an opportunity for participants to share experiences, which I deemed important because action research depends on cycles of reflection (Reason and Bradbury, 2006). A focus group could provide the 'intersubjective, second-person voices' (Reason and Bradbury, 2006, p6) of interpersonal dialogue. The participants had not communicated since the training, so it was an opportunity to hear different views and reconsider their own learning. Focus groups normally emphasise a specific theme or topic (Bryman, 2016) and participants bring issues in relation to a topic that they think is important. For this study, I shared an initial list of soft skills from earlier emails as part of the agenda shown in appendix 3.6. I aimed for some agreement on the list of learned soft skills, to use it as a potential tool to relate soft-skills growth

For ease of getting coach participants together, I used a participant's conferencing system (www.gotomeeting.com) which allowed screens to be shared; encouragingly Bryman (2016, p515) indicates 'growth in the use of online' focus groups, because they can save time and cost and yet still be effective. Most participants did join the webinar planned for 90-120 minutes, though one participant was late arriving and another using a phone was very hard to hear. The focus group happened on 11th July 2015, after the second or third coaching session, and its timing helped to prompt scheduling of further sessions around summer holidays, for target completion of the six coaching sessions during October.

As a re-introduction to each other, participants were initially encouraged to each share their experiences so far. Heron and Reason (2006, p149) advise that group work in participatory action research gives an opportunity for participants to 'look at themselves'. It took a while for the conversation to flow; one or two people sharing their stories prompted some interaction. Nervousness and challenges were spoken about, but overall there were no major concerns in proceeding with the coaching practice. At my turn, I shared some feedback from the coachees, to give an upbeat message that coachees were positive, and to encourage participants to request personal feedback from coachees. To promote participation, I allowed the participants to ask any questions of each other. This became rather dominated by one person and generally consisted of individual issues such as session-to-session handling and was fortunately curtailed by the late arrival, so we could

review the compiled soft-skills list generated so far, which was the data-collection purpose of the meeting.

Each soft skill was explained and discussed, but this felt difficult due to lack of familiarity with the language of soft skills. Potentially the main benefit of the focus group was the sharing of experiences. Propositional knowing is the ability to make statements about concepts, and outcomes from experience (Reason and Torbert, 2001) as propositions. Heron and Reason (2008, p374) suggest 'research recycling so that propositions are continually tested in practice and rooted back in experiential knowing'.

However, the participants gave feedback on the skills that they thought were especially useful or what might be missing. The group review recording was transcribed and anonymised for data analysis later. The list of soft skills was slightly modified in response to the comments and emailed to the participants with the request to give themselves a score out of 10 on each soft skill before the research study started, then at this mid-way point of the study and again for the final interviews (appendix 3.7). The aim of the scoring was to help the participants to reflect on soft-skills change, rather than be a meaningful quantification.

3.3.5 Data analysis

According to Grbich (2012), a pragmatic approach can support hybrid and creative methods, if they are 'simply the best tools for providing the most comprehensive answer to the question' (p28). I started with an inductive view of interview data and then combined the deductive view that coaching skills are recognised soft skills. An inductive approach aims to generate a fresh view of data through breaking it down and rebuilding using different concepts and connections (Dey, 1993). It lends itself to thick description which could elicit the project managers' descriptions of learned soft skills. At the outset I chose to use thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) established approach, because of its detailed guidance in a six-step process. Thematic analysis is a traditional inductive approach that puts focus on the participants' data to avoid bias from the researcher. Several steps were completed, but not all because the grouping of codes proved impossible. Choosing to follow a more pragmatist and abductive process, I took inspiration from thematic network analysis described by Attride-Stirling (2001). It allowed me to use ideas from existing soft-skills taxonomies such as Pichler and Beenen (2014) and Klein et al (2006), to make sense of the data. Using this method, I chose two global themes that represented learned skills during coaching practice and skills applied at work, with lower-level organising themes of soft-skill groupings relating to the taxonomies. The lowest level, basic themes are the bottom-up, participant-led code groupings generated

from the Braun and Clarke (2006) method. The process is depicted in figure 3.2 that shows all five sets of interview transcripts, I-1, I-2, I-3 I-G, I-F and three coding steps N-1, N-3, N-F for first, third and final interviews, followed by a writing stage to make sense of themes and eventual transition to the Attride-Stirling method.

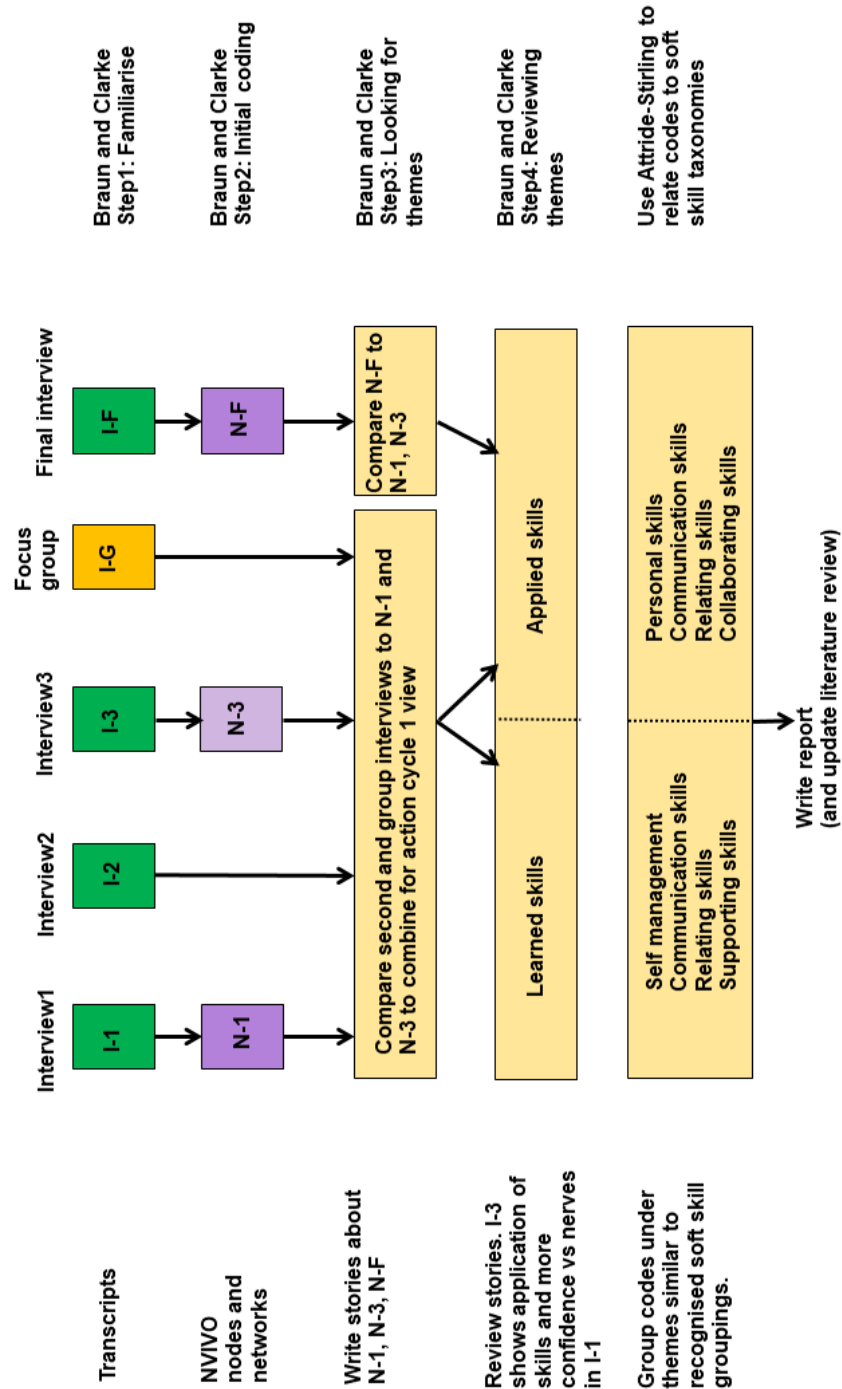


Figure 3.2. Data analysis process.

In Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step process, step one is about getting familiar with the data. With five data-collection points, there was a concern about data management. I used NVIVO software to store the data and experiment with coding. Coding seemed relatively straightforward in initial experiments with the first interview transcripts; I coded anything that the participants mentioned in relation to behavioural change. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest codes and themes are inductive, prioritising the meanings provided in the data. This aligns with the traditional qualitative approach for rigour by suspending existing knowledge and generating theory purely from the data. Yet, Braun and Clarke recognise researchers' responsibility for 'theoretical commitments' and data are 'not coded in an epistemological vacuum'. (p84). Pragmatism places 'theory in the service of practice' (Ormerod, 2006, p906) which gives it a more problem-solving orientation needing awareness of context. Knowing that the language of soft skills was potentially not familiar to participants, behavioural change would encompass anything related to soft skills.

Step two was initial coding. I began this stage with final interview transcripts, I-F, to establish the important practical outcomes for the project managers at work, which could help to focus the analysis of data from action cycle one. Encouraged that there were behavioural changes at work, I energetically decided to do initial coding separately for the first, second and third interviews to see if there was any relevant data about the learning process. The first interviews showed learned skills only, the second primarily showed nerves being overcome, and the third interview already showed application of the skills at work. In NVIVO I maintained separate node structures, codes and code groupings, for first, third and final interviews.

Finding the right focus for analysis became important; an early node list for analysis of the first interviews showed that I could look too broadly: outcomes (how participants had changed), value of coaching skills (what participants thought was valuable), why skills changed, and coaching definitions (how participants described coaching). I was interested in all these aspects, but they were not necessarily all critical to learned and applied skills.

Step three was searching for themes. I experimented in NVIVO with network diagrams for each of the analyses. Examples for the final interview and initial interviews are shown in appendices 3.8 and 3.9. During this time, I reviewed the second interviews and group review transcripts, while also reviewing and comparing the three network diagrams, and experimented with the code groupings. I wrote outlines of everyone's learning and application of skills to see similarities and differences between participants. These were like historical summaries, which could easily be compared. There were several iterations of the written outlines, which evolved to participants' stories about what was happening in

relation to participants' learned skills and why they were being used at work. Although the writing now seems inefficient, I was becoming closer to the data. For example, I got a clear sense of the initial nerves lessening and the participants evolving their understanding of coaching. By the third interviews they were recognising the benefits of coaching, both for the coachee and coach, and were starting to apply the acquired skills.

Step four was reviewing the themes and code groupings, but I could not progress beyond this step. There were challenges in the interconnection of soft skills, complicated by associated perceived outcomes, benefits, and feelings. Code groups would not stabilise using an inductive approach. Some codes seemed to fit in multiple groups and moving a code often suggested different groupings. NVIVO was no longer adding value, though it remained as a useful data repository. At this stage I decided to follow the Attride-Stirling (2001) method to stabilise groupings, by using organising themes that aligned with the soft-skills model in figure 2.3, under two global themes of learned skills and applied skills. The basic themes at the lowest level were more inductively established as groupings of initial codes.

While struggling to find stable themes, I had been looking at several soft-skill taxonomies and comparing them with the data. Klein et al (2006) show interpersonal skills depend on personal skills and characteristics. Pichler and Beenen (2014) reduce their interpersonal leader skill model to three skills by arguing that communication is pervasive to all three, and all depend on the personal skill of self-management. It occurred to me that some skills are combinations of other skills. Using recognised skill groupings gave the data a stable framework that helped to identify complex skills as combinations of skills. I seemed to have stumbled into 'uncovering and relying on the best of a set of explanations for understanding one's results' (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). More importantly, I had consolidated the data into more settled themes. Only then did the data reveal apparent linkages between skill groupings, which helped to explain the initial difficulty. The combination of induction and deduction suggests abduction and provided some creativity to gain clarity in the findings. Timmermans and Tavory (2012) quote Peirce in asserting that induction only relates the usefulness, while abduction provides a 'plausible causal chain' which can be further tested. In addition, the recognised skill groupings provided a practical and useful way to compare learned and applied skills. Yet induction, traditionally associated with qualitative research (Bryman, 2016), identified valued skills to project managers, using their descriptions.

During data analysis I came to a better understanding of soft-skill taxonomies and a general soft-skills framework that aligns with coaching principles. Bryman (2016) warns

that research which does not have an emphasis on theory can be criticised as 'naïve empiricism' (p20), but the practical understanding of soft skills from the data analysis is potentially valuable across disciplines and could support a new model for soft skills. De Waal (2001) explains abduction finds 'what may be' true, so the resultant soft-skills framework is a proposal that needs further verification.

3.4. Validity

The main challenges to the results described by Herr and Anderson (2005, p50) are 'trustworthiness of inferences drawn from the data' and 'how well inferences generalize', representing internal and external validity. Regarding generalisation, positivists may argue that data from seven participants is never sufficient. However, though learning experiences are individual, it is clear all participants learned something useful, and the experiences are like those of any novice coaches (De Haan, 2008). In addition, the resultant soft-skills framework is based on real practice rather than expert opinion. Other similarly experienced project managers may not find coaching practice useful because the self-selection of the participants may have identified those motivated by personal learning. I have run a similar programme for a small number of project managers as part of the PMI UK mentoring programme, for mentor-training. Feedback has been positive, but again participants were motivated to learn.

A mixed-methods study is common for pragmatist studies and could have supported better triangulation of results (Bryman, 2016). Robson and McCartan (2016) assert as an important benefit that inappropriate certainty is reduced. Originally, I considered a coaching case study with project managers, but project managers do not seem to have the motivation to coach (Thompson and Cox, 2017).

Having a focus on soft skills makes quantitative study difficult due to the challenges of soft-skill assessment. The self-scoring of soft skills by the participants was initially considered a potential basis of a quantitative survey but, the list of changed and applied soft skills from data analysis is different to the focus group output and not all participants scored themselves on that. I have since experimented with a short survey with some project managers and also challenged others about their soft skills. In both cases, identifying good questions proved difficult because the understanding of soft skills is insufficiently deep such that my questions seem to be leading ones. Project managers' understanding of coach skills is also thin, so discussing the results of the study can be challenging. Encouraged by Mason (2006, p10) that 'mixing methods can be a very good thing indeed, but is not inevitably or by definition so', I concluded that I needed to concentrate on what this study had achieved, before using the results to extend the

research. When completed, the best target audience for further study would be clearer. This was frustrating but important given the potential applicability to any facilitator of tasks within any group of people in any organisation. Managers or team leaders familiar with coaching could be a better target audience.

Herr and Anderson (2005, p55) offer four quality criteria for internal validity, which I as researcher can control: outcome, process, democratic and catalytic validity. Outcome validity relates to outcomes being successful. Some participants adopted coaching skills more fully than others, but all have changed their soft skills at work. There are dependencies on existing knowledge and on personal characteristics, as there are with any learning. Project outcomes were not directly researched, though literature shows the importance of interpersonal skills to project managers' effectiveness (Brill et al, 2006; Van Rooij, 2011). Member checking reinforced the value of the skills to project managers who again talked about their confidence in handling situations more positively. Having communicated with all but one of the participants on the summary of findings, I feel that the findings are a shared understanding of the soft skills being developed through coaching practice. The study has thus demonstrated one practical development approach for soft skills, which has also uncovered better understanding of soft skills and learned what is relevant to project managers.

Process validity is the 'extent problems are solved in a manner that permits ongoing learning of the individual or system' (Herr and Anderson, 2005, p69). Participants have reflected throughout the study and this is part of the learning. Having project managers who had not coached before simplified the training and learning has been evident. However, the study has not checked that participants continued to use the skills at work or considered their further needs to develop and support their coaching skills. Conversations with participants have indicated that the coaching practice made a permanent impression for change, but pragmatism shows beliefs change constantly with experience. Democratic validity relates to the extent the study is done collaboratively so that all participants' views are represented. The group review aimed to support this, though participants primarily underwent an individual experience. Yet, the data shows their common experiences. Catalytic validity relates to whether study deepened understanding of social reality and encouraged change. Every participant made a change to their soft skills and has increased reflection, for ongoing learning and change.

There are positive aspects for project managers against all four internal validity criteria from Herr and Anderson (2005). Beyond project managers' needs, the results contribute to a soft-skills framework. For the coaching discipline, the results present potential

benefits for anyone learning to coach. Rorty (1999) suggests (p72) that an outcome may be assessed by the question 'are our ways of describing things, of relating them to other things [to] make them fulfil our needs more adequately, as good as possible?' Certainly, there is a known problem in the way soft skills are described because many disciplines are aiming to understand the skills and the existing frameworks do not align for general understanding. The results give detailed descriptions of useful soft skills for project managers, which are extended to a potentially general framework useful for all.

Saunders et al (2009) highlight that although action research is about research through action, there is a concern for theory; they suggest that 'the research should have implications beyond the immediate project [and] inform other contexts (p147)'. I personally wanted to focus on what is relevant to the coaching field, but recognised participants were not directly interested in this. I struggled with the idea of potential bias from my own interpretation of the data. I consider knowledge-generation important and the data analysis decision to use recognised soft-skill groupings was a conscious one. However, there also seemed some risk with the decision because soft skills do not have established definitions. At the same time, the data has generated a description of the coach skills relevant to project managers, who will not necessarily use the term *coaching*. Some re-descriptions in the data, particularly related to personal growth might always be considered a subjective interpretation. Heron and Reason (1997) state that subjective feelings and thoughts can never become reality because they are interpreted by the inner self. They emphasise four ways of knowing (p279): experiential ('feeling and imagining the presence of some energy'), presentational (the 'intuitive grasp' coming from the experiential knowledge), propositional ('knowing in conceptual terms that something is the case') and practical ('knowing how do to something'). For personal growth, it was likely that feelings and intuition predominated.

In summary of trustworthiness, I considered my potential bias and have worked hard on data analysis to ensure the data drives findings. I also recognised potential inappropriate certainty when using a single research method. I have used pragmatism and abduction to argue that re-description of coaching skills is a useful outcome to educate all project managers about soft skills and these may help other managers understand their motivation for developmental rather than performance coaching. It is clear that seven project managers feel the personal benefits have practical value to them for all their future projects, this suggests benefits of coaching to the coach is potentially useful to a wider community, not just project managers.

3.5. Reflexivity

The research was prompted by my own subjective experience suggesting a potential bias. Reflexivity is a qualitative research strategy to address a researcher's subjectivity (Primeau, 2003). My coaching experience has made me conscious of subjectivity, that soft skills being people-related is unlikely to have black-and-white theory, enforcing the need to avoid assumptions. I have aimed to be as probing as possible about the subjective experience of each participant and trusted that participants would give all relevant information. I have sought to be the conduit of others' experiences. When writing the monthly summaries of soft skills from interviews, I was aware that unconscious bias was likely, based on what I selected, and how I might subconsciously group them or omit some, so these were used only in support of data collection, rather than analysis. The emails supported participatory action and the participants were free to interpret as they wished. I received one or two comments that it was interesting and valuable to see what others had said in interviews. The evidence of some participants not scoring the list of skills from the group review, shows their autonomy which was intended.

During the interviews, I wanted to ensure I was not acting as coach, in order to directly study the benefits of coaching practice. The primary role was interviewer, yet participants were likely to experience challenges in a learning environment, and I had an ethical responsibility for their well-being. I was occasionally carer or teacher. I wanted participants to be open about their issues yet understood they may not have wanted to admit problems. I made it clear to participants that their honest views were desired, and that I was interested in their learning experiences, however challenging. I did make a judgement call and asked a direct question on two occasions: one where the nerves expressed might be too overwhelming and one regarding apparent lack of interest from a coachee in the coaching. A monitoring stance on the first showed the nerves were later overcome, and the second led to action resulting in a coachee swap. Sometimes, too, the interviewee had questions about coaching and I answered those as directly as I would have had they cropped up in the training.

Herr and Anderson (2005) recommend 'not leaving oneself off the page' (p69). With a dynamic methodology to lead, challenges and worries are inevitable. I felt excited that my work might 'contribute to my sense of being-in-the-world, to my praxis and to the larger conversation regarding the topic' (p70). I felt optimistic about the potential for the results to be applicable to my own coaching practice, which has been changing throughout the study to put more emphasis on soft-skill learning through coach-like activity. Overall, I was enthused about action research being a flexible approach but learning to be a researcher

was challenging while juggling all roles. Hall (2001, p173) writes that one of the early principles of participatory action research is that the 'researcher is a committed participant and learner in the process of research'. My roles included project manager to drive the study, data analyst, ethics monitor, coaching and research expert for participants and research student. Being such a learner felt stretching when maintaining a positive stance to participants that I knew what I was doing and believed value would emerge from data analysis.

My primary academic concerns related to the choice of participatory action research because action research can be regarded as practice-focussed and not suitable for the generation of new knowledge (Herr and Anderson, 2005). Its expected iterative nature has caused much reflection, too. My understanding was that action research needs a spiral of action, review and change (Altrichter, Kemmis, McTaggart, and Zuber-Skerritt, 2002). The participants and I, in our respective activities and reflections that evolved our understanding of soft skills, represented the spiral. We each brought an initial knowledge and capability of soft skills and experienced different learning. The ICF competencies were only a reference point for the training. The emailed soft-skill lists were a better representation of the participants' learning. I was a typical action researcher, who according to Dick (2002) is 'initially asking fuzzy questions' (p161) to establish the participants' descriptions of learned soft skills, and to suspend my assumptions of soft skills or that ICF competencies are an appropriate list of soft skills for project managers.

The participatory nature of the study felt difficult to maintain. The training day created an initial sense of working together, which was recovered to some extent by the group review. However, the participants were a disparate group and their coaching practice individual. I have adhered to the ideal in sharing ideas but choosing a group of project managers who regularly met for other reasons may have made it easier. However, the study may then have been affected by an established group culture. The results are more encouraging because the project managers are individuals and at different stages of their career. Also, I recognise that I had to trust project managers would tell me the truth about whether they initially knew about coaching, but most found coaching practice challenging, which suggests they had not been practising coaching skills prior to the training.

Data analysis was my main concern for bias, hence the initial inductive approach. I have learned that my reflective process is a naturally open one, rather than keeping focus on the academic goal of answering the research question. I was personally interested in many aspects of the research and I took digressive paths at times away from my soft-skills objective, rather than focus. For example, the viability and effectiveness of the

learning framework I had provided for the participants was interesting, but not when analysing the data or writing the thesis. Herr and Anderson assert a 'process of reflection that loops back to re-examine the underlying assumptions behind the problem definition' (p69). Now, I better recognise in myself a bias towards task rather than relationship, which I had assumed true for project managers. Even the small number of participants in this study show individuals' differences in personal characteristics and experience suggesting a better understanding of soft skills and knowledge gap is ideal to appreciate training needs. I now also recognise as a personal bias that it is required to understand coaching before being a successful coachee. Although that bias partially prompted the research and my own belief is somewhat reinforced, I am now more curious about exactly what soft skills understanding would be useful for a coachee before being coached.

3.6. Ethics

It was important to ensure that all participants felt supported, valued, and always free to withdraw. One coach withdrew from some coaching practice due to ill-health but returned for final interview. One coachee withdrew from the coaching after two sessions. Since project managers lead teams, the action of learning coach skills seemed a reasonable activity. Also, project managers are expected to become reflective practitioners (Crawford, et al, 2006). Yet the expected contribution from participants felt significant, because project managers can be very pressured in their work roles (Jugdev et al, 2018).

The rigorous ethics review process at Oxford Brookes includes a review of all contact information and planned interview content, as well as the storage of all confidential data. The approval letter for this study is included in appendix 3.10. Essentially participants need to be fully informed of expectations, to freely consent to participate and not experience any negative impact to their person, whether physical or emotional. Encouragement was given to all participants to discuss any issues arising and communicate them to the researcher, but also with the knowledge that the content of conversations was kept confidential between coach-coachee participant pairings. Thus, sharing of experiences needed to relate to the participants' use of soft skills rather than coachee data.

Specific concerns in this study related to the time and effort to be contributed by the prime participants, and that the coachee participants would be coached by novice coaches. I felt aware of a duty of care to all participants, while needing to establish a collaborative relationship for the research. I felt responsible for the developmental environment I had created for the participants. Rowan (2001) recommends taking a humanistic approach that requires the researcher to become close to the participants, to consider interpersonal

ethics (how one treats others) and social ethics (concern for consequences from participation). I had concern for both coach and coachee participants. For problems arising, their options were to talk to me or withdraw from the process. I aimed for trusted relationships with everyone so that they would talk to me. I believe I maintained a positive relationship, despite two changes to participants' pairings.

Because participants were experienced project managers, typically taking responsibility for team- and stakeholder-relationships in projects, sufficient assertiveness was likely. Also, the excuse of becoming too busy would be a straightforward one for opting out. There was a risk to losing participants. For an exit decision during the first two months the aim would be to find a replacement, but later, the researcher would substitute for a participant exiting. If more than one or two substitutions were necessary, this would question the practicality of the development method. Fortunately, this did not happen.

Separate to data collection, I arranged to speak to the coachee participants twice; each call took 15-30 minutes. After the first interviews, I wanted to ensure they were happy to continue with the study. After the final interviews I sought to understand their feelings about involvement. Maintaining contact could help me to deal with any issues; there was no need to monitor the quality of the coaching for data collection for the research question. Yet I was prepared to consider any feedback about the coaching and whether to pass it on to the coach participants. The coachees were supporters of my study and would likely let me know if there were problems. The only coaching issue raised was that of not generally being asked for feedback at the end of a coaching session. I expressed my appreciation for their participation and ensured they understood I could be contacted at any time if problems arose. In fact, I only had additional contact with Coachee1 – who exited the study, and Coachee2 – whose coach temporarily exited the study. (Coachee2 received his remaining coaching sessions from myself as coach, because the content of sessions with Coach2 were included in the data.) Some coachees thought the coaching extremely positive for them, particularly in support through challenging situations. Most were pleased to support academic study; the coaching activity was considered a bonus.

This concludes the methodology explanation. Chapter four explains the training that primed the action cycles. Data are summarised in chapters five and six, which separate the learned soft skills during coaching practice and the applied soft skills at work. The four main themes in each of these chapters relate to one group of personal skills and three groups of interpersonal skills, which allows a comparison to be made between learning and applied skills. Chapter seven compares learned and applied skills and explores the value of the findings.

Chapter 4: Preparing for coaching practice

The aim of this chapter is to explain how participants were prepared for their coaching practice. Primarily the participants underwent a day's coach training. This chapter has three sections that examine the training content, discuss training transfer and summarise the soft-skill learning. The training incorporated practice sessions and facilitated discussion with presentation of knowledge about coaching; and focused on a practical understanding.

4.1. The training

The literature suggests that many managers do not receive coach training and/or training of less than a day is typical: for example, McCarthy and Milner (2013). Yet, Grant (2007) highlights that training, even a short course, does improve coaching skills. Because all participants came from different areas of the UK, and would have to travel, training for anything less than one day seemed too short. One day could cover introductory knowledge and allow time for participants to practice coaching, as preparation for coaching practice their assigned coachee. In addition, the practical experience of being coached could provide awareness, or a reminder, of what being a coachee feels like, which may support empathy for the coachee.

So that training would reflect a real-world organisational perspective of coach training. I approached a trainer with over ten years' experience in delivering management and leadership topics, including coaching, in a variety of organisations. While I wanted to allow the trainer to adopt what he would naturally do for managers and leaders, I gave the trainer three specific requirements which are summarised in table 4.1 and now discussed.

<u>Outcome requirement</u>	<u>Rationale</u>
1. Knowledge of coaching typically used in organisations	Closest alignment to coaching skills relevant to project managers
2. Able to coach from a practical perspective	Participants will have confidence to coach another project manager straight after the course
3. Awareness of the ICF Competencies (appendix 4.1)	Skills baseline

Table 4.1 Desired outcomes from training.

The first requirement, knowledge of coaching typically used in organisations, reflects the aim that participants would find that at least some learned skills were relevant to them. Project managers may work as contractors or employees, but typically at the same level in the organisational hierarchy as managers. Garvey et al (2014, p64) suggest that, in a coaching culture, managers must 'liaise and cooperate with others who may have differing views' of the organisation and coaching. Since project managers liaise and cooperate with others to produce project outcomes that may be contentious, I felt participants would cope with negotiating coaching activity at work, if appropriate. If the trainer followed the outline of his typical of introductory coach training for managers, this requirement would be met.

The second requirement, to be able to coach from a practice perspective, arises because the research design expected participants to complete the required coaching practice after the training. Conway (2013, p10) suggests that managers need 'courage, motivation, commitment and confidence' to coach and that practice helps to overcome challenges. This emphasised the need for practice sessions within the training. The participants had already shown some courage and motivation to commit to several hours of volunteer activity over six months.

The third requirement, to give participants an awareness of ICF competencies, was included primarily to use coach skills (Maltbia et al, 2014) as a soft-skills baseline. In addition, it demanded the inclusion of contracting a coaching relationship. The literature review revealed a distinction between formal coaching and everyday conversations managers have with staff (Lawrence, 2017). For this research, participants would need to contract a coaching relationship with the unknown coachee participant. As a coach supervisor and as a coach, I am aware of the importance of contracting to professional coaches, even if it is debatable for managers. For example, Bennett (2008) says poor contracting can lead to 'unfilled expectations' (p9) and suggests contracting enables trust in the relationship. Project managers are used to contracting (Westerveld, 2003) and understanding stakeholder needs (Bourne and Walker, 2008) so understanding typical contracting topics for coaching seemed relevant and attainable.

I explained to the trainer the required outcome that the participants would have sufficient knowledge and practice to be able to set up a coaching relationship with one coachee, and then complete six coaching sessions. Our negotiation centred on what was possible to cover in one day, and it was relatively straightforward to reach an agreement. He confirmed that one day would be sufficient to cover his introductory coaching course which included practice, and to reference the ICF competencies, with contracting explained. However, just one coaching model could be included.

We agreed on the GROW coaching model (Whitmore, 2009). I felt project managers would find it naturally aligns with their work role. Projects typically establish clarity and detail of outcomes, can look at current reality (of the marketplace or situation) and can look at several plan options before finalisation of a project plan. Grant (2007) suggests 'goal-focused coaching skills' (p258) and McCarthy and Milner (2013) suggest novice coaching managers may find a framework helpful, but coaching skills are possibly more important.

As researcher, I presented myself as observer at the training and, as well as taking the opportunity at the end of the day, to summarise the research project overall and next steps. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) highlight that in observation, as a research method, it is possible to 'understand the context of programmes' (p305). I adopted an 'unstructured' (p305) stance and was able to get a sense of the participants' involvement, learning and enjoyment, as well as recording the training content. Knowing the training content would I felt support me to assess whether training requirements were covered, and to identify any future training needs, if issues occurred after the training. I allowed myself to participate in the discussions occasionally, especially where there were debates and I could offer a relevant coaching example to highlight an issue and that *right* answers can be elusive in coaching. I also participated in the practice sessions, as I thought that would help the participatory nature of the action research study, though this did mean that I could not observe all practice sessions.

Figure 4.1 overleaf represents the knowledge and practice elements discussed in more detail in the following sections. I have shown circles since the knowledge elements were completed with the whole group, whereas participants were in sub-groups for the practice sessions. There were several coaching practice periods with interspersed group debrief sessions that allowed reflection and discussion of the learning from practice. The revisiting of ideas and skills including contracting also consolidated understanding from practice. The knowledge sections established an understanding of coaching, GROW as the coaching process and aired challenges managers might face when coaching.

4.1.1. Knowledge

Training on the three knowledge topics all involved interactive discussion. To understand coaching, definitions were initially explored that included phrases such as "measurable results", "skilled conversation", "enabling a coachee" and "nice chat". Participants quite naturally volunteered their thoughts about the important elements of coaching, such as "clearing fog", "removing blockages" and that "relationship is important". Having created interaction, reflection was encouraged through questions. For example, the trainer asked

how challenging coaching should be and how personal the topics. Similarly, there was discussion of “what coaching is not” by comparing with similar processes. Contributed opinions of mentoring, supervision, consulting, training, and therapy were initially quite narrow: mentoring is for “channelling career development”, supervision about “watching over someone”, consulting is “where you have the answers or know best practice”, training is “imparting knowledge”, therapy “looks at the past”. Discussion flowed among the attendees, with lots of ideas offered that tried to get to a consensus of what coaching is. The result was a practical rather than academic understanding.

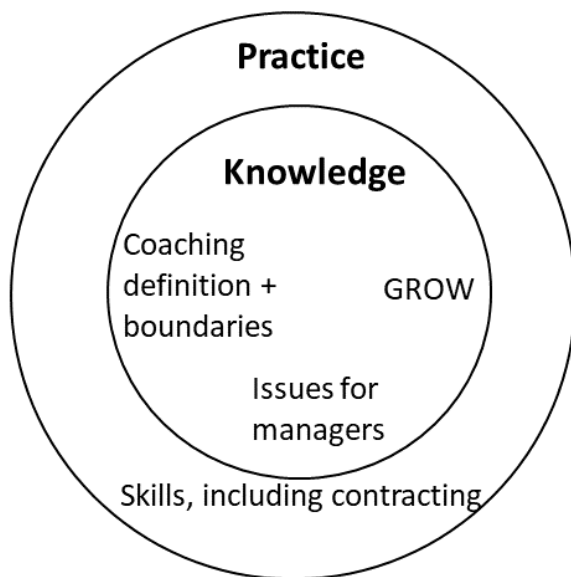


Figure 4.1. Training content.

There was an emphasis on the difference between coaching and mentoring. The question “how much of an expert does the coach need to be?” enabled discussion about when the coach might impart knowledge or opinion and about the amount of respect a coachee might want to have for the coach. The asserted philosophy for the coaching practice was not to give advice and trust the coachee has sufficient resources; as suggested by Whitmore (2009) to help others to learn. There was advice to not use leading questions, though it is good if coach and coachee understand the context of any discussion. More general questions such as “what is relevant?” or “are we on track?” are preferred, to help keep the coachee driving the discussion. Regarding giving advice and leading conversations. Rogers (2008, p60) explains the ‘trap [of] advice in disguise’ questions,

such as 'would you agree that...', a leading question a lawyer might ask of a witness. Hereby the approach allowed a formulation of the desired coaching philosophy that the coach does not direct the coachee. Rather, the coach needs to be an expert in coaching, not in the topic of discussion, which puts emphasis on awareness of the coaching process.

Maltbia et al (2014) use a tree metaphor to explain that the roots of coaching are embedded in many different disciplines, including overlaps with therapy, adult learning, adult development, neurosciences, management education, sports psychology, organisational behaviour and behavioural sciences, and psychotherapy/counselling/psychology. Non-directive coaching aligns with adult learning (Holton et al, 2001) where the learner drives the learning process through their own desire for knowledge, and self-motivation and self-understanding. Ives (2008) explains the many different approaches to coaching and that goal-focused, performance-based coaching aims to be non-directive. A non-directive approach aligns with my own understanding of a professional coaching relationship, where the ICF competencies encourage the coach to invite the coachee to be an equal partner and to set the agenda for the desired outcome. While I have heard many debates among coaches about the value of the coach's content knowledge in the collaborative coaching space, advising novice coaches to be non-directive supported their learning of professional coaching philosophy.

Two challenges that managers may have regarding coaching were discussed. Firstly, the question "how to motivate learning in others?" prompted consideration of confidence-building, role-modelling, and reflection on what motivates people. The trainer explained that people are different, and situations are context dependent. Situational Leadership, (Blanchard, Zigarmi and Zigarmi, 1985; Blanchard, Zigarmi and Nelson, 1993) was referenced, particularly to highlight the skill and will of individuals. It was related that coaching by managers may involve management to key performance indicators or be more developmental of a coachee by encouraging their personal growth, ideally according to the coachee's agenda. Encouraging high performance was emphasised and presented as a combination of capability, behaviour and coaching. Secondly, there was discussion around whether it is possible to coach as a manager. The ensuing answers began with "you can't", "it's hard not to manage", "it's more coaching style". The advice imparted was to operate a "pull" rather than "push" strategy, to empower staff so they felt responsible for their outcomes. There was reinforcement of the lack of leadership when coaching because the coach operates from the coachee's map of the world, to see their unique vision and intentions.

The final core knowledge item, the coaching model GROW, was introduced in a visual way starting with a blank sheet of paper. The acronym GROW stands for four stages of coaching advocated by Whitmore (2009): **G**oal, **R**eality, **O**ptions, **W**ill. The trainer recommended that the **G**oal for the session is written down, and relevant short and long-term *SMART* goals (Conzemius and O'Neill, 2009) may also be needed. The desired goal was represented on the right of the blank sheet and **R**eality representing the current situation for the coachee on the left of the sheet. Reality can include whatever is relevant for the coachee: for example, resources, constraints, confidence, motivation, or knowledge. **O**ptions represents the alternative actions and strategies that could be adopted and was presented by a set of stepping-stones. **W**ill represents what action or strategy the coachee will take. The trainer recommended identifying what the coachee felt motivated to action immediately, to encourage forward movement onto the first stepping-stone. This endorses the coaching philosophy used by Whitmore (2009), which gives Timothy Gallwey credit for introducing the essence of coaching that Whitmore describes as 'unlocking people's potential to maximize their own performance' (p12), in recognition that internal barriers more often prevent progress than external ones.

Lennard (2013) explains that a coaching model 'simplifies and clarifies the complexities of coaching' (p1). Several practitioner texts suggest the GROW coaching model is well established. Wilson (2014) states it is one of two to become familiar with at the outset of a coach's learning.

4.1.2. Practice of skills including contracting

For the first practice, there was encouragement to use the visual representation of GROW and to create a gap between current reality and the future goal to create motivation. This would help to uncover the real desire for the goal. The trainer pointed out that the brainstorming of options should promote awareness of broader possibilities and to include ideas without judgement, leaving the coachee to choose the primary option to pursue. It was mentioned that the coachee may need to go and search for answers, rather than have the answers there and then, and to let them do that if necessary. A *do-it-now* mantra was advocated so that the coachee has a clear idea of a definite and easy first step that gets them started. A set of sample questions for each stage of GROW was provided by the trainer (appendix 4.2). The practice sessions were run in triads: coach, coachee and observer, where the observer feeds back observations to the coach after the session.

During the debriefs the trainer used the opportunity to add information as appropriate: SWOT analysis (Mindtools, 2015) and the Johari window (Businessballs, 2015) were tools discussed in response to participants' questions. Contracting was revisited and

developed, as well as supporting participants to have other questions answered, typically relating to coaching philosophy, competencies and ethics.

The trainer modelled contracting at the start of the session; for example, in relation to confidentiality, focussed time and outcome expectations. Thereby, real situations in coaching practice would be discussed, because *pretend* scenarios would not work; therefore, what is aired needs to “stay in the room”. Likewise, it was highlighted that coaching in one day was challenging, so full attention was needed in the session with phones and computers switched off. As the training session proceeded, possible contracting topics were added to a flipchart that was regularly updated. “What coaching is not” discussions supported clear communication that contracting is the opportunity to discuss and set expectations with a coachee. It was recommended that coaches explain coaching as working together to find solutions and ideally the coachee finds their own solution.

Later, during practice sessions, the importance of an agreement that either party can withdraw at any time was explained. For example, if the coach has a high level of anxiety about a situation, or if the coachee is not emotionally able to design their own solutions, then coaching is not likely to work. In situations where the coaches did not feel comfortable, or in the extreme is feeling anxious or manipulated, a referral is ideal. In this study, participants just needed to contact the researcher for help. There was clear advice to trust one’s senses and to be aware of them. The final checklist of suggested matters to discuss with coachees is in appendix 4.3.

My own experience of supervising coaches has demonstrated to me how commonly boundaries can be crossed where issues have not previously been aired. Fillery-Travis (2015) says there is ‘a paradox of needing to be transparent about issues that are implicit’ (p7); her recommendation that ‘transparency, openness and exposure all foster trust’ (p7). Although Fillery-Travis (2015, p5) uses Eric Berne’s Administrative, Professional, Psychological types to simplify contracting, Fillery-Travis and Cavicchia (2013) highlight the challenges and breadth of coaching contracts and that ‘one size does not fit all’. It seemed effective that the trainer reiterated contracting several times during debriefs, using different topics throughout the day, from the participant’s practice experiences.

4.1.3. Overview of the research study

I took the opportunity, at the end of the training, to summarise the intentions and plan to the participatory action research study with the participants, since it was likely to be my first and only opportunity of a face-to-face meeting with them. I adopted a project manager style, using the principle of a project’s ‘internal kick-off meeting’ (Savolainen, Ahonen and

Richardson, 2015, p36), where participants would get an appreciation of the overall project, who was involved and expectations of activities throughout. I used a simplified version of the action research process diagram (figure 3.1). The participants and I would be working together on the research study; they would be having the experience of coaching practice and my role would be to collect their experiences as part of a participatory action research study. They had already had an outline from the participant information sheets, but this was a reminder of the six-month timetable of the study, and expectations of their involvement, especially to encourage the sharing of their experiences, whatever they turned out to be.

My presentation was short and simple because I wanted the trainer in charge of the training day and the training to be the priority for the day. A succinct summary of the next six months would, however, allow for questions to be asked. I wished to show I had confidence in them to complete their part of the study. The summary allowed me to reposition myself as the participants' primary contact for any kind of support they needed, including if they didn't want to continue.

Overall, I observed the trainer using a questioning and discussion style so that the participants' opinions were drawn out, to promote reflection and adjustment of understanding as the explanation progressed. This seemed to be role-modelling of the coaching process. There were some references to emotional intelligence, such as observing rapport but no direct training.

4.2. Transfer of training

In designing this research, no assumptions were made about the participants' soft skills prior to the training. Rather the aim had been to expose them to the typical training for managers, having selected participants who believed they did not currently have coach skills. Similarly, there would be no formal assessment of learned skills. Nevertheless, self-assessment of coach skills was encouraged. During the training feedback from peers and the trainer was available. There was an assumption that if participants applied skills at work, that would evidence learning of the coach skills. Cox (2013) relates that application of skill in a context that is different to the learned context signifies learning. Cox also explains that the word transfer is not ideal because it implies reproduction of skill is used rather than transformation of knowledge. Acknowledging this research is interested in understanding soft skills used at work, some transformation of coaching skills is expected.

Burke and Hutchins (2007) in their literature review relate the 'transfer challenge' (p263) citing a 10%-50% chance of creating behavioural change. They provide a table of 14

learner characteristics needed for transfer of training. Because the participants had volunteered and were aware of the process they would undergo, their initial motivation was assumed, and it was also evidenced by their efforts to attend the training and their overall commitment to the study. MacKie (2014, p121) talks about 'developmental readiness' being a 'combination of motivation and ability to change [and a] potential prerequisite for effective engagement'. The participants in this study were interested in personal development. Their ability to change, and what needed to change, was still to be discovered.

Burke and Hutchins (2007) also relate a range of skills and activities relevant to 'intervention design and delivery' (p272) of training, which suggested I should invest in an experienced trainer. In addition, Grant (2007) suggests the training needs to be 'enjoyable' (p264) and an experienced trainer would be more likely to achieve that goal. It was clear that the participants enjoyed the training.

The participants appeared to increase their confidence to coach during the interspersed practice and review sessions. Wood and Bandura (1989) assert that self-efficacy 'mobilises motivation, cognitive resources and courses of action' (p364). The practice sessions raised awareness of the challenges of acting as coach and participation as observers at times seemed to support reflection and awareness of challenges such as giving suggestions. Awareness was encouraged: for example, noticing when a leading question was asked or a personal story or idea offered. The review sessions reinforced reflection and appeared help participants to renew intentions for acting as coach. For example, it was suggested that when the coach is confident about coaching, this supports the coachee with confidence in coaching and supports the coach's intention to ask the coachee the way forward.

Similarly, the participants learned to cope with GROW. Whitmore (2002, p32) encourages that 'it is possible to coach another person to solve a problem or learn a new skill by diligently applying the coaching method [...] The coaching may be competent and may achieve limited success, but it will fall far short of what is possible'. For this research, coachees outcomes were not relevant, though the researcher would ask the coachees whether they felt they were coached.

The workshop seemed to support the participants, with the requirements met and the participants happy to have attended the training. After the training, an online repository for training flipcharts and handouts from the training was made available using Dropbox. I shared what I used as a contracting agreement in my coaching practice as an example. The participants could upload tools too, though only one person did so. Optional reading

had been suggested prior to the training: Coutu and Kauffman (2009) and Whitmore (2009). These and others were available during on the training day.

4.3. Soft-skills content

The trainer supplied a checklist for the participants to reflect on their own skills as they were practising (appendix 4.4). These skills are now related to the ICF competencies in table 4.2 and discussed, using the skills equivalent of the competencies presented in Maltbia et al (2014).

<u>ICF competence</u>	<u>Trainer's reflection sheet</u>
1: Ethics	Boundaries
2: Establishing the coaching agreement	Boundaries (and agreement)
3,4: Establishing trust and intimacy Coaching presence	Rapport Empathy Respect
5,6: Active listening Powerful questioning	Listening Questioning
7,8: Direct feedback Creating awareness	Summarising Techniques
9,10,11: Designing actions Planning and goal setting	Goals Solution (whose?) Actions

Table 4.2. Coaching practice skills from training

Maltbia et al (2014) use the term *mindset* for a coach's adherence to ethical and professional guidelines, which was incorporated into the agreement of boundaries within the coach practice. The trainer used mindset simply to represent the coaching philosophy which included that the coachee decides the agenda, the solutions and actions from coaching, such that coaching supports a coachee's forward path, the path the coachee personally intends to follow. There was an emphasis on maintaining an open stance and questioning rather than giving answers. The trainer also expressed that it can be good to observe, ideally to ask whether a coachee needs guidance, and possibly to suggest a

different type of discussion or offering, such as training, mentoring, therapy or even coaching by another coach. There were some detailed questions from participants about the ethics of prying into someone's personal life. The advice imparted was to invite the coachee to contribute information to the collaboration: for example, keep questions simple, such as "is there anything else I need to know?" or "how this will affect the rest of your life?". This was also an opportunity for the trainer to mention coach supervision as something important for professional coaches on an ongoing basis, so refer to the researcher if concerns arose.

In relation to competencies 2,9,10 and 11, which include contracting, Maltbia et al (2014) argue that these structural competencies relate to the coaching process rather than to soft skills, though also say 'there is support for their inclusion in training' (p175). Perhaps because project managers' work often involves contracts and there is a need to establish project agreements with team members who may not previously have been known to them, they seemed to be comfortable with contracting. For managers Hunt and Weintraub (2010, p37) talk about 'coaching moments' and encourage a 'coaching dialogue' and create a 'coaching friendly' context, rather than the more formal contracting. Dixey (2015) too, asserts that a manager's coaching may only happen during everyday conversations with team members.

The rest of the competencies Maltbia et al (2014) summarise as 'social competence, emotional competence, listening, questioning, framing/reframing, [and] contributing' (p177). The trainer made clear that establishing rapport was important in building understanding of the coachee; he noted that coachees are people, the whole human-being comes to coaching, so sometimes the coaching may not be purely work-related. Advice given was to monitor and recognise emotions, possibly through physical changes, to give feedback on them and help the coachee formulate the desired action plan. Whitmore (2009) highlights 'building awareness and responsibility is the essence of good coaching' (p32), and that effective questions need to create spontaneous thought and activity in the coachee; the example of an ineffective sports command 'keep your eye on the ball' (p45) is countered by several better suggestions.

The training advocated summarising to check coach and coachee had the same understanding. Reframing and contributing to expand the coachee's worldview were mentioned; noticing generalisations or assumptions in the coachee's language was one suggested opportunity for reframing where the coach would need to decide how supportive or challenging the questioning should be. This amplified awareness-building

but perhaps gave lower emphasis on direct feedback. One example of feedback was to notice incongruences between language and behaviour.

This chapter has described the training for the participant coaches and summarised the soft skills that the participants were intended to assimilate. An experienced trainer was used. Training requirements were negotiated and led to a practical one day based on the trainer's typical introductory training on coaching for managers. Hunt and Weintraub (2010) suggest how managers learn to coach is a 'two-step process [:] first identify the need to learn about coaching and then internalize a model of coaching that helps guide their actions' (p86). One day allowed for an interactive training workshop covering the coaching process, boundaries, contracting, soft skills and coaching model, GROW, an established model for novice coaches. The participants were positive after the training, willing and prepared to coach their coachee.

Chapter 5: Soft skill development through coaching practice

This chapter relates the learned soft skills through coaching practice. The next chapter will show how learning is applied at work. Together they meet the study objectives to understand the soft skills developed through coaching practice. The learned soft skills are presented under four organising themes (Attride-Stirling, 2001) that provide a practical way to later compare learned skills with those applied at work. These organising themes are shown in figure 5.1, which includes the lower-level, basic themes (Attride-Stirling, 2001) that reflect participants' soft-skill descriptions. Hereafter the term *theme* is used for a basic theme.

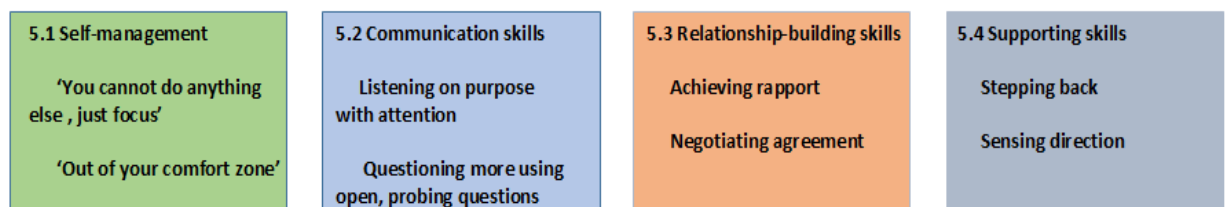


Figure 5.1. Themes for learned skills.

The first organising theme, *self-management*, highlights the participants' experiences of managing themselves through their personal skills. The second, *communication skills*, relates to changes to the interpersonal skills of listening and questioning. The third, *relationship-building skills*, reflects interpersonal skills noticed in initiating and maintaining the coaching relationship. The fourth, *supporting skills*, identifies the combination of both personal and interpersonal skills pertinent to the intention of helping the coachee.

Although data analysis focused on soft skills, either as new skills or new ways to use existing skills, participants also talk about their thoughts and feelings that describe intentions and challenges associated with the skills. Participants give a sense of adhering to requirements learned in the training and then experiencing barriers to those requirements in practice. Although most data relate to earlier interviews, relevant data from the final interviews have been included. Each data reference shows the participant's anonymised name and the interview number (1, 2 or 3) or letter marking final interview (F) or focus group (G).

5.1. Self-management

In the self-management organising theme, participants' views are presented that suggest acting as coach forces some control of personal skills. This is highlighted by Mark who suggests acting as a coach is a choice that must be made: *"I think I'm reasonably good at finding the right questions. [...] The challenge is more in doing that, making the choice to do that"* [Mark-3]. There are two themes: *"You cannot do anything else just focus"* and *"[Coping] out of your comfort zone"*, which represent participants' learning of the new mindset and personal skills of a coach, while coping with its challenges.

5.1.1. "You cannot do anything else just focus"

In the *"You cannot do anything else just focus"* theme, participants indicate the importance of giving their full attention during coaching practice. There are different ways the participants perceive the achievement of the focus needed.

Jill is immediately struck by the different behaviour required: *"It's a totally different type of meeting [,] it's like a factory reset [,] a complete stop"* [Jill-1]. Jill amplifies the very different expectations compared to the project manager's normal role: *"My job is about how much I can cram into one day and how many things I can do at the same time"* [Jill-1]. Peter also indicates time pressure as a project manager: *"Many times over I've been told to not put a half an hour call in when a 15-minute update would do"* [Peter-2].

Jill explains the skill of being present, so she can focus, is already known to her, but not recently used: *"The most obvious thing for me was [to] down baggage, be present; you cannot do anything else, just focus [,] Obviously, I've had it at some point"* [Jill-1]. In comparison, Jill recognises a lack of efficiency at work: *"You're not running at hundred percent efficient if you're thinking about everything all the time in a jumble"* [Jill-1].

Susan perceives her focus as allowing space: *"There's lots of different ways [to] interact highly involved almost dragging out the answer, questioning, reframing. The other way is allowing space"* [Susan-3]. She recognises value in people *"being heard"* [Susan-3] and a different mindset to allow space:

"It's just my mindset because I'm expecting that she's going to have something that she is going to be stuck on [,] She just needs a space and that's perfectly all right" [Susan-2].

Peter too recognises the power of attention and giving space *"The point is to give space, and the attention, it's pretty powerful"* [Peter-1].

Mark perceives he has learned to act patiently, similarly suggesting time or space for the coachee: *"I've learned to be more patient in conversations"* [Mark-3].

Whether being present, allowing space or being patient, concentration is clear, as Jill suggests: *“It’s pretty hard not to learn how to concentrate when you’re one-on-one with somebody”* [Jill-F]. Participants are prepared to focus; apparently, not being present, being impatient or not allowing space can hamper coaching.

Participants notice thinking activity. Susan highlights the decision-making required: *“I found quite hard [deciding] whether to be directional or non-directional, and involved or not, or empathising or relating to my scenario, or shutting up or just listening”* [Susan-F]. Peter perceives the need to allow thinking time for the coachee and himself: *“I need to allow time for silence to let him think and process [and] that would give me chance to think”* [Peter-1]. Bill suggests reflection on what happened in sessions happens naturally: *“You’re reflecting with the coachee, then you go away and think whether the sessions went well”* [Bill-F]. He also directly suggests the coaching is the cause of increased self-reflection: *“I was always trying to reflect on myself, but I do it more since the coaching”* [Bill-3].

There is a sense of self-control while thinking. Jill expresses the need to avoid sympathy and to maintain the objective stance: *“I do have a tendency when people are having hard times to sympathise [saying] oh isn’t this awful, I understand [; I] force myself to remain objective”* [Jill-3]. Jill is using the term *objective* as a way of distancing herself from the emotions, which is an expectation of the coach role. Cox and Bachkirova (2007) highlight the coach can feel emotion when coaching; control of emotions is stated as ‘good and necessary’ (p184) but that empathy is needed for the coachee’s emotion, rather than identification with the emotion.

Like Jill, other participants notice when their usual behaviour needs managing. Peter relates his natural leadership: *“I kept on wanting to complete the conversation and characteristically [I] like to turn things into a leadership role.”* [Peter-1]. Mark, too, admits a natural tendency to find solutions: *“[I need to act] as a coach, which is what I’m supposed to do, rather than coming up with solutions.”* [Mark-3]. Thus, coaching practice gives the opportunity to learn not to lead.

Mark recognises impatience is a natural trait, though conscious effort may lessen its affect:

“inwardly I’m still impatient, so the listening skills are improved but only through the conscious effort of listening and trying to understand [and] also, in becoming less impatient” [Mark-F].

Adèle’s simple statement *“I’m becoming more curious”* [Adèle-3] suggests coaching practice can modify perceived traits.

In this theme, focused attention and increased personal reflection have been encouraged through coaching practice. Being present is different behaviour to a project manager's role; this level of focus aligns with the ideal of presence in coaching. Cox (2013) relates this ideal awareness state, drawing on the work of Tolle (2008, p77) that suggests presence requires an 'inner stillness' rather than action. The participants imply more stillness when coaching compared to their normal role. Silsbee (2008, p20) describes presence as 'devilishly slippery to define', but similarly suggests it is a state of awareness without action. Participants are apparently willing to allow more time and space for the benefit of the coachee, to loosen their natural control and eagerness for action, and to attend to listening.

Time to think appears important; thinking is associated with decision-making when acting as coach and with self-reflection that may be helping to reinforce learning through considering the requirements for coaching. The coaching mindset also demands objective, non-leading and possibly more patience and curiosity, which are being practiced despite natural behaviours. Focused attention, allowing space and adopting a coaching mindset appear to be understood requirements.

5.1.2. “[Coping] out of your comfort zone”

In the “[Coping] out of your comfort zone” theme participants draw attention to challenges during coaching practice and the self-management skills needed to cope when experiencing some discomfort. Completion of the coaching practice may imply some resilience while learning. According to Mezirow (1994), disorientation is good for learning a new perspective. However, learning depends on many factors including the context and participants readiness to change (Taylor 1997).

Nervousness is expressed at the outset. Andrew is one of several participants who admit nerves, though he appears to overcome them quickly: “*Initially, I felt a little bit nervous because I hadn't previously gone through the whole process [...] after about 10-15 minutes I got into it*” [Andrew-1]. Susan is aware of feeling tense: “*Before the sessions I would feel a little bit tense [and when] the scenario started to unveil*” [Susan-F].

Susan expresses the most discomfort in coaching of all the participants, yet also expresses awareness of discomfort in the coachee: “*Sometimes you can dig into something and feel a little out of your comfort zone and get the other person out of their comfort zone*” [Susan-G]. In comparison; Bill's recommendation is to avoid emotion: “*not going too far on the emotional side*” [Bill-G]. Duffell and Lawton-Smith (2015) suggest that

organisational coaching has traditionally tended to ignore emotion, considering it was better dealt with by counselling, but that more recent understanding is that emotions can be used in coaching.

Susan feels uncomfortable while listening to her coachee talk about staff issues. Susan later rationalises this to personally being cautious:

"I did try to move away from the subject I wasn't too keen on talking about, but she did want to cover it [.] After hearing the update I felt more comfortable; probably it wasn't a huge [issue], just me being a bit overly cautious." [Susan].

She rationalises further that the coachee will make decisions around the staff issue: *"[I'm] making sure the coachee is coming up with the answers rather than me giving any kind of direction because of the nature of what we're discussing"* [Susan-G]. Since coaching philosophy encourages the coachee's own resolution, Susan's caution may have helped her adopt an objective stance.

When the coaching conversation includes lots of potentially complex information participants react differently. Mark shows mild surprise and recognises he can assist with analysis: *"Coachee8 basically dumped a whole load of stuff and I had to help her to realise what the actual issues were"* [Mark-F]. Susan notes the jack-in-the-box appearance of complexity: *"It lifts the lid off a box, lots of information comes out all at once; [the] whole scenario, lots of personalities [, a] big subject comes at you"* [Susan-F]. Susan feels pressure to assimilate, to react and feels personally exposed: *"a lot of information that you take on-board[,] then knowing which way to go with it and trying to keep it all in mind and not look silly"* [Susan-1].

In comparison, both Bill and Adèle seem confident in the face of many or large topics:

"[Coachee6] had a lot of things he wanted to discuss and areas they wanted to look at so I linked them together and kept a running theme through the session or sessions and said, 'well we discussed this in the last session'." [Bill-F]

Adèle seems able to break down a large topic: *"the subject [is] really wide, so I tried to start making smaller things from the bigger ones"* [Adèle-2].

Some resilience and confidence may be needed to overcome concerns. Having expected nerves, Bill relaxes: *"You get nervous about how it's going to go, [so] I just relaxed into it"* [Bill-G]. Bill recognises his coachee is nervous too: *"I think he was nervous just like I was nervous"* [Bill-1], and this understanding may have helped Bill relax. Susan similarly relates some intention towards trusting the process and herself: *"For me not trying to be the perfect coach [and] and just letting it flow more"* [Susan-G]. She also aims to expect, and to be open to complexity: *"There are so many different pieces of information floating*

around [...] it's the confidence of staying open to that, so that you can deal with it" [Susan-2]. Susan recognises her increasing confidence: "*I am listening more and questioning more and I'm more confident in that*" [Susan-G].

Positive feelings may help to counteract concerns. Mark reports experiencing a "*nice warm fuzzy feeling*" and Adèle feels "*very good [in helping] somebody with something*". Similarly, Jill enjoys the process: "*It was really good to be able to engage in just the one thing – it does sound weird – but I really quite enjoyed that*" [Jill-1]. Andrew sees personal benefit in working with someone new: "*It's been an eye-opener for me [talking to] someone from a completely different background and role*" [Andrew-G].

In this theme, participants have suggested that the coaching practice can generate both negative and positive feelings. Participants are out of their comfort zone as they are new to coaching, and possibly to dealing with human-related issues and complexity, without knowing the background information. It is known that novice coaches face doubt, and doubt provides potential learning (De Haan, 2008). However, anxiety can affect transfer of learning (Burke and Hutchins, 2007).

5.2. Communication skills

In the communication skills organising theme, participants perceive self-improvement in verbal communication. There are two themes: *Listening on purpose with attention* and *Questioning more using probing open questions*, representing what participants are changing about these interpersonal skills. The themes associate intention with these skills to focus attention and to probe.

5.2.1. Listening on purpose with attention

All participants notice their listening skill has improved. Some improvement comes from self-management skills, as Bill reports: "*I'm getting things out [of] how to listen, how to calm down, not get overexcited and how to not give my opinion*" [Bill-2]. In addition, specifically uses pauses, to encourage the coachee to talk: "*I'm finding that beneficial, when in coaching you want them to talk, you pause*" [Bill-2].

Adèle echoes the idea of speaking less so that the coachee speaks more: "*I was a little bit quieter.*" [Adèle-2]. She shares her belief of improvement to listening: "*I'm definitely better at listening*" [Adèle-G].

Mark notes the significance of listening development: "*listening was fundamental, the most important*" [Mark-F]. He suggests he understands more from what he calls pro-active

listening: “[with] pro-active listening I don’t mean just as in hearing but comprehending and understanding [.] Without listening you cannot be a coach” [Mark-F].

Andrew gives a rationale for better listening; he cannot anticipate the answer: “When you don’t know what’s going to come out, you really have to listen; that’s the whole purpose really” [Andrew-3]. Thus, coaching practice has provided a situation where Andrew must attend to his listening. At the same time, Andrew wants to show the coachee he is listening: “I needed to make sure that she feels she is being listened to.” [Andrew-1], suggesting he feels this is a necessary part of being a coach or that he has some concern for the coachee’s feelings.

Similar to Andrew, Jill notices her focus while listening, which supports her to hear more details: “You don’t realise how much people give away if you are listening. It’s that focus, the nuances you pick up” [Jill-3]. Jill seems to have increased awareness resulting from attentive, focused listening.

Emphasising some awareness of the coachee’s feelings while listening, Susan and Peter use the term *empathy*. Susan mentions empathy directly in conjunction with listening and other skills: “Using the listening, the empathy, and the rapport [it] came to a better, more positive outcome.” [Susan-3]. Peter notes his use of empathy to enable the conversation with his assigned coachee: “I was able to empathise with him because I do quite a similar role to him that enabled the conversation to flow better without knowing him” [Peter-1]. Both uses of empathy suggest a linkage of listening with relating skills.

In this theme, participants experience that listening is different when coaching. Apart from self-management, such as staying calm and attentive, there is apparent intention for the coachee to speak. Both aspects may result in more information being detected or the sense of listening more. There is some awareness of the coaching relationship through empathy and wanting the coachee to feel listened to.

Awareness under self-management related to presence. Here, awareness extends to social awareness that includes empathy. According to Goleman (2007) social awareness is the ability to understand another’s feelings and thoughts and the ability to do so relates to social intelligence. Singer and Lamm (2009) describe empathy as ‘the ability to share the affective experiences of others’ (p81) and this sharing is ‘crucially distinct from sympathy, empathic concern, and compassion’ (p84). Whereas Goleman (2007) uses attunement to define ‘ability to listen with full receptivity’ (p84), Stober and Grant (2006, p30) suggest a linkage between empathy and listening that offers more practical advice

for coaches: '[to develop] accurate empathy they must spend the time and energy listening [,] asking for clarification [,] summarising [,] checking understanding'. Thus, information is accessed as a result of a combination of empathy, listening and questioning.

5.2.2. Questioning more, using probing open questions

In the questioning theme, participants notice marked differences when coaching, compared to their normal questioning. Susan reflects three ways her questioning has changed. Firstly, she is asking more questions than usual: "*I don't tend to ask as many questions as this normally*" [Susan-1]. Secondly, she is consciously putting effort into open questions: "*I need to get into my head a few things like making sure I'm using 'how' and 'what' questions rather than more closed questions*" [Susan-1]. Thirdly, she digs deeper: "*I'm now seeing the power of asking more questions, allowing it to be okay to [be] digging a bit deeper with people*" [Susan-3]. The use of the term *allow* suggests that digging questions would not normally be acceptable; having the coach role gives the permission.

Mark and Jill echo the need for open questions. Mark reflects on the amount of questions: "*I did ask loads of open questions*" [Mark-1]. Jill highlights that personal effort is required: "*trying desperately to do open-ended questions*" [Jill-1]. It seems that participants have understood the intent of open questions, even though they may find it challenging. Cox (2013) suggests open questions 'elicit a longer, fuller answer' (p112).

Peter and Mark notice a tendency to lead which may give insight to the effort required. Peter wants to avoid leading questions: "*ensuring that I'm not overly using leading questions*" [Peter-1]. Mark speaks of his learning challenges:

"I've still got a long way to go. I still have to bite my tongue and put the 'why don't you' into 'have a think about how you might approach that situation', 'let's discuss some of the ways you think you can handle that'." [Mark-3]

Whitmore (2009, p47) emphasises effective questions are those that raise awareness and responsibility, particularly 'what, when, who, how much' style open questions.

Andrew suggests that questioning is tightly coupled with the information gathered through listening: "*Definitely new is listening and questioning on the back of what you've heard*" [Andrew-1]. This reflects desired learning; Whitmore (2009, p49) asserts coaching needs attentive listening and spontaneous questioning to support 'flow [and to follow] the interest of the coachee'. The close connection between listening and questioning may have led Andrew and Susan to refer to the notion of a *right* question. They both highlight its importance, though Andrew finds it hard to explain the selection of questions: "... *asking the right questions to bring them back to the situation, it's quite hard to describe it*"

[Andrew-2]. Susan, too, senses she is to find the right question, and sees this as a challenge when there can be so much information to assimilate: “*There are so many different pieces of information floating around and trying to make sure you’re asking the right question*” [Susan-2].

In this theme, the need to ask open questions is recognised and participants are asking more questions, as well as thinking about what question to ask. Subirana (2016) suggests that analysis by the coach may not work, rather the right question appears if the coach stays calm and curious about the coachee’s answers.

All the participants are experienced project managers and constantly use communication as part of their management roles. Yet, the participants consider coaching practice has exercised new ways of listening and questioning. Participants may only consider these ways when they are coaching, because, for instance, the coach role gives permission for deeper questioning. Hearing and understanding more seem particularly valuable, considering the importance of communication to project managers (Azim et al, 2010). The combination of listening with questioning or pause has shown the opportunity to access more information. There also seems to be an understanding of the importance of the coaching relationship because participants are sensing the coachee’s feelings, want the coachee to recognise they are listening and want the coachee to lead.

5.3. Relationship-building skills

In the relationship-building skills theme, the participants’ experiences of initiating and maintaining the coaching relationship are presented. There are two themes that reflect intentions set in the training: *Achieving rapport* and *Agreeing the relationship*. Although rapport was an observed outcome in the training practice sessions, there was no specific training on relationship-building skills, other than contracting.

5.3.1. Achieving rapport

In the achieving rapport theme, participants relate their experiences in creating a coaching relationship with someone they had not met before, and in maintaining that relationship. Mark suggests using skills to achieve rapport is a prerequisite to agreeing the coaching relationship: “*You need to have some rapport initially before moving on to coaching*” [Mark-F]. In social conversation about their backgrounds, Mark and his coachee apparently found “*similarities and parallels*” [Mark-1]. Mark has been a project management consultant and trainer for over 10 years and his coachee has had a long and

varied career as a project manager, including being a consultant. Looking for common ground may help since Mark creates a good relationship with his coachee: *“we got on extremely well”* [Mark-1].

Adèle, who is a project manager in the engineering sector with less than five years' experience highlights the importance of knowing about the coachee: *“Everyone is different [, I] think it is important to know the background of the person, the age of the person”* [Adèle-G]. Her coachee is older and working in the public sector, with some project management experience, though not currently a project manager. Jill, with a fifteen-year career in various types of businesses, is currently working in IT. Her coachee, has over 25 years' experience of leading and managing projects in a different industry. They share backgrounds, as well as personal goals and thoughts about the coaching research: *“We said a little about our history, what we thought of coaching what we want to get out of it”* [Jill-1]. The decision to participate in the research, as well as project management, is common ground for all participants and coachees.

There are some initial difficulties. Adèle is concerned to fit her conversational style to the coachee: *“I think it's difficult to fit your style to who the person is”* [Adèle-G]. Mark notices interruptions in the conversation initially:

“Occasionally there were interruptions. She would finish saying something, look down, so I spoke, and she would come up with something else. We might then both stop and start talking at the same time.” [Mark-1]

Andrew notices the newness of the relationship: *“I think it went really well, given that we didn't know each other that well”* [Andrew-1].

Participants did manage to build rapport with their coachee and give the sense that rapport means ease in a conversation. Adèle comments: *“It was quite easy to work with my coachee”* [Adèle-1]. Susan suggests that maintaining rapport is part of working with the coachee: *“Using the questioning, using the listening, the empathy and the rapport [it] came to a better, more positive outcome.”* [Susan-3].

Apparent barriers to ease amplify the importance of maintaining rapport. Adèle notices using the coaching model can hamper conversations: *“When I was using the GROW model, maybe I started with goals then I went to the reality, so I tried to be organised, but it can stop the conversations”* [Adèle-1]. Andrew has some concerns about not being able to communicate face-to-face: *“Skype [can freeze and is] not ideal but it does the job I suppose”* [Andrew-1]. Susan expresses concern about her own ability to maintain rapport needed to support the coachee: *“I was more concerned about how much in rapport I was and how I was going to be able to help her”* [Susan-1]. This suggests keeping one's own

feelings under control. Susan also shows awareness of the two-way nature of rapport in concern for getting “*the other person out of their comfort zone*” [Susan-1]. Andrew, too, has concern for the feelings of the coachee in suggesting there are boundaries to communication topics. He specifically worries about getting too personal: “*You feel sometimes that if you go off track, the coachee may feel you’re being a bit too personal*” [Andrew-1].

This theme has shown that participants recognise social skills are useful to build and maintain rapport, and that rapport includes some level of emotional connection with the coachee. Participants are aware of ‘getting on with’ their coachees, possibly too, the relevance of another’s feelings and mutuality of rapport for ease in the conversation.

5.3.2. Negotiating agreement

In the negotiating agreement theme, participants relate their experiences of getting agreement to the coaching relationship. Like rapport, agreement depends on both coach and coachee. The aim of the facilitated introduction was to enable agreement without difficulty. Most participants get agreement easily; Bill suggests a rationale for contracting ease: “*[Coachee6] being a project manager did help because we understood what contracts were about, both formal and informal*” [Bill-F]. However, Peter fails to reach agreement; the comparison seems important.

Most participants comment that the negotiation uses informal conversation. Bill relates his contracting process as a chat, yet also communicates an understanding of coaching:

“We were having a chat at the beginning and I was saying ‘what I’m not going to do is give you advice. What I will try to do is find our way forward, yet it is not for me to give advice’. It was fine.” [Bill-1]

Jill, too, relates a natural conversation with several points of agreement: “*We didn’t think there was any conflict of interest, we decided not to call anyone by name but just say XYZ and see how that goes [.] It was quite a natural flow*” [Jill-1]. Jill even mentions the time taken to establish agreement: “*We spent a good 10 minutes making sure we are okay [to proceed]*” [Jill-1]. Mark similarly relates informal discussion: “*It was an exploratory session to set the ground rules*” [Mark-1]. Agreeing with some flexibility might be useful, as Susan discovered after the first session: “*[it would be useful] knowing in advance if either of us are writing notes up*” [Susan-1]. The skill to create an easy relationship, where both sides can raise issues seems important.

Peter has a different experience and highlights a more formal conversation. Despite his perception *“I’m getting on fine with [Coachee2]”* [Peter-1], the coaching relationship is not established. He wanted an agreed understanding of coaching: *“A lot of our first conversation was around what he thinks coaching is; for example, what’s the difference between that and mentoring or consultancy.”* [Peter-1]. This formality is different to the way Peter describes an open conversation to get agreement to coaching a colleague: *“It was more of an open conversation as friends and colleagues [...] I did share with him the main points on the contract”* [Peter-2]. (Peter approached this colleague to be a guinea-pig coachee instead of Coachee2.) This open, informal conversational style seems more aligned with the other participants’ negotiation style.

Peter suggests that trust is an additional prerequisite for agreement. His coachee seems to have been keen to participate, but had thoughts about trust when exploring the topics of coaching:

“He was very much in the space of going for it and see what happens [,] but the conversation started around putting this trust in someone he doesn’t know because he [would be talking about] what he sees as his weaknesses” [Peter-2].

Peter feels the coachee also needs faith in the coach: *“He made it very clear, for him it was quite a big thing to make that leap of faith [...] [Coachee2] doesn’t have a clue who I am”* [Peter-1]. Peter feels he needs to explain to the assigned coachee something about himself to engender trust: *“I told him [about my volunteering work that] hopefully I might be trustworthy”* [Peter-1]. Both coachee and coach appear to be asking detailed questions of each other: *“It was important I understood his context and my values kept on coming up in the conversation”* [Peter-1]. Thus trust, like rapport, underpins a coaching relationship.

Trust is a complex construct, but in a one-to-one interpersonal relationship can be described as an orientation to another person (Weber and Carter, 2003), which is emergent and reflects a state of a relationship. Participants seem aware of trust: *“I think I have gained her trust”* [Mark-1] and *“you’re trying to build a relationship based on mutual trust and understanding”* [Jill-2]. Jill detects a difference in the coaching relationship compared to her work relationships, though recognises a struggle to explain the difference: *“It is the same as work but it’s not, there’s a difference. Why is it [laugh] I’m struggling with this?”* [Jill-2]. After some reflection, she recognises she holds power in many of her work relationships and the priority of getting work done could ultimately overpower the need to maintain a working relationship:

“You don’t hold the power in the relationship the way you do in a direct project management role. [At work] you have to build the relationship but [you] can burn a relationship if you really have to. [You] could always just go to their manager and say X should be ...” [Jill-2]

Bill is keen to show he will treat the coachee with respect: “*He realised that I was taking it seriously and I was going to treat him with respect*” [Bill-F]. This implies a desire for the coachee to at least trust Bill to be respectful. Bill overtly mentions trust in relation to the coachee feeling trusted to make their own choices, through which the coachee can build self-belief: “*Because you’re showing that you trust their [own] judgement, by putting faith in it, even in a little way [...] they get that faith [and] you get a little more done*” [Bill-G]. Bill seems to be personally putting faith in coaching philosophy that the coachee can provide answers, and this underpins their coaching relationship.

The main findings in this theme are that participants are using rapport to underpin informal negotiation of the coaching relationship and trust between both parties must be sufficient to sustain the relationship. Contracting may be considered a process management skill (Maltbia et al, 2014), but rapport, respect and trust are needed. For the relationship-building skills theme, contracting the coaching relationship is new, but there are no other obviously new soft skills. However, participants notice social skills for building and maintaining rapport. They also seem aware of building rapport through respect and trust and of negotiating agreement. Rapport and trust are possibly evidenced by informality when contracting.

5.4. Supporting skills

In the supporting skills organising theme, participants show that coaching is referred to in a variety of ways. Susan uses the term *facilitating*: “*just facilitating her and her identification of what her options could be*” [Susan-3]. Peter uses the term *unlocking*: “*[it’s] about unlocking the coachee; it’s not about imparting things from the coach*” [Peter-1]. The phrase “*coaching techniques*” is often used as shorthand for all their learning: “*I’ll apply more open questions and coaching techniques*” [Mark-1]. There are two themes: *Stepping back* and *Sensing direction*, each reflecting a combination of previously mentioned personal and interpersonal skills. Together, these themes represent participants’ understanding of coaching skills.

5.4.1. Stepping back

The stepping back theme amplifies the idea of allowing metaphorical space between participant and coachee, and assumes adoption of the coach mindset that emphasises the coachee’s agenda. Peter implies he can observe more by stepping back: “*If I take that*

step back, if I watch and ask the right questions, I can get a lot more from it [Peter-2]. He also gets more time to think:

"[I need to] let him think and process more because that might let him drive the conversation a bit more". That would give me chance to think about the coaching techniques a little more [Peter-1].

Jill also implies space, yet not being too distant with her coachee: *"remain objective [,] not distant [,] without being cold and not feeling like I'm engaged"* [Jill-3]. Jill has already shown she considers being objective important, from an emotional perspective. Yet, the distance must not be too great; human connection matters.

There are examples of remembering the difference in coach and coachee perspectives. Jill remembers a phrase from the training: *"You have to get off your mountain and go to their mountain and I thought right, I've got to remember"* [Jill-1]. Mark thinks about not mentoring to avoid his natural leadership style: *"I'm trying to think about following the rules of coaching, and not to mentor"* [Mark-1].

Goals are used to focus on the coachee's agenda. Mark relates a coaching session goal and overall aims for the coachee: *"I asked her what she would like as a goal for the end of this initial session, not just the overall goals and objectives for improvement"* [Mark-1]. Participants are used to talking about project goals but may not be used to talking about personal goals. Mark for instance seems surprised at helping with a small goal: *"I was expecting something a bit meatier."* [Mark-1].

Coachee progress can bring pleasure to the participants. For instance, Adèle is pleased she can see session-to-session progress: *"[Coachee4] usually achieves the goals that we talk [about] in the previous session."* [Adèle-3]. Susan is pleased when the coachee takes action from the coaching conversation: *"I was pleased with the conclusion we came to today that she was going to take away the action to go through those four questions."* [Susan-3].

Tools seem to enable the coachee's forward progress. Jill mentions that tools give a smoother approach: *"[I] used more of the questions and tools [...] just to make things a bit smoother"* [Jill-3]. GROW is commonly used, as Jill mentions: *"I've used [GROW] every time"* [Jill-3]. Several tools came from the participants' own experience, showing a desire to help the coachee:

"Write down all the pros and cons" [Mark-3]

"I mentioned a set of programs and this thing called the blueprint [to help her plan her future]" [Mark-3]

"I said try and define your top five situational constraints" [Jill-3]

"[orthogonal questioning] looking at [the question] in the four different ways." [Susan-3]

This theme has shown that participants aim to support the coachee. Stepping back is a new skill that shows a willingness to take a broader viewpoint to support the coachee to benefit from the coaching process. Participants are pleased when they sense progress.

5.4.2. Sensing direction

In the sensing direction theme, participants suggest how they make choices in the coaching conversation, such as deciding when to pause or to choose and pose the next question. For Bill, there is an intent to follow the coachee's lead: *"My role is to get him to talk through what we are doing or whatever he wants to do" [Bill-2]*. Bill makes notes and checks against the goal: *"I was looking for the key words from him, so I try to write some notes [and] I go back to [what] we wanted to get out of the session."* [Bill-1].

Susan highlights direction can alter: *"Although we set off with an initial goal it meandered" [Susan-1]*. Andrew also suggests a reactive journey, using a chess metaphor: *"[It's] like a game of chess; you go through a little journey in a conversation [and] you want to get [somewhere] and work your way through it" [Andrew-2]*. Participants are having to cope with a changing direction, even if there is an overall objective.

Getting clarity gives a sense of direction. Susan wants her coachee to have clarity: *"... make sure that she was clear in her own mind what she wanted to do" [Susan-2]*. Mark similarly values the coachee being clear: *"I'm pleased for her that she's so clear" [Mark-3]*. Mark uses closed questions for his clarity: *"I did sometimes ask closed questions; they were more for clarification on what she'd just said" [Mark-1]*. Working towards clarity may be a known skill. Mark even suggests he has a strength for clarifying things: *"I tend to be a dot I's and cross T's man [and] I need to make sure I clarify things" [Mark-1]*.

When a coachee is perceived to have an issue, there is a sense of wanting to find a solution. Bill conveys obligation for a solution: *"You've got to tease the solution from them" [Bill-G]*. Susan echoes this purpose: *"[I'm] helping someone come up with a solution" [Susan-2]*. The literature suggests project managers are problem-solvers. However, Andrew recognises value in taking time to look at things:

“We had a really good session because she realises [that] she’s in a different stage in her life [now]. The role she was doing was ideal at that time but maybe is not now, it’s good we have looked at certain stuff” [Andrew-2].

Jill, too, shows understanding that the coachee may need to explore, and uses the coachee’s emotions to help sense what feels right:

“It’s definitely involving a lot of emotions in him, [...] so I was trying to draw out of him what feels right to him for his direction, what he is in tune with, and that was really good.” [Jill-3]

In the final interview, Jill emphasises helping the coachee to help themselves, *“and you’re trying to help them guide themselves through issues”* [Jill-F].

Reinforcing the sense of being open to the coachee’s direction, Bill reports the coachee likes the coaching even when Bill does not understand the coachee’s outcome in detail: *“He seems to like what we’re doing, so he must be getting something out”* [Bill-2]. Jill also gives an example of coachee feedback that reflects her detailed behaviour following the coachee’s lead – in encouraging him to think, contributing to his forward movement, and working with his preferences:

“[He fed back] I made him think about the options; working the way forward, capturing the conversation, relaying it back, agreeing the actions, and getting through lists. He likes lists” [Jill-3].

Ultimately the coachee’s view of success is valued. Andrew feels pleasure in the coachee’s positive outcome: *“It’s nice to hear some good news as well that’s come out of it.”* [Andrew-3]. Susan echoes that both coachee and coach want to be happy: *“She was happy with the results; we got a result that’s good”* [Susan-1]. Mark also states this dual ideal: *“Although it’s all about the person you’re coaching, the coach needs to feel that they are doing some good”* [Mark-3].

Helping someone may be unusual for participants, as implied by Adèle: *“I’ve found the coaching very interesting because you are helping somebody”* [Adèle-G]. Adèle feels the coachee cares about the coaching, which may promote Adèle’s interest: *“I am still appreciated by [Coachee4] that she really cares what I’m doing. I think she shows that it is important for her.”* [Adèle-2]. While Jill manages a temptation of giving advice with her coachee, her desire to help is clear:

“There were a couple of times where I said to him ‘you know if I was to make a suggestion – it’s only if you want me to – ‘. I don’t think that’s coaching but I have been in a similar circumstance, it’s totally up to you if you want to take it.” [Jill-1]

Bill also gives moral support to the coachee at one point, regarding a challenging situation at work: *“Can I just say something from my own experience? I think you did everything right”* [Bill-1]. Bill highlights personal satisfaction from using his personal experiences: *“I’m*

getting a lot out of it because what I can see is some earlier traits in myself that I can help him with” [Bill-2]. The participants thus want to be supportive. Jill receives coachee feedback that directly communicates this: “He feels I’m very supportive and patient” [Jill-3].

The main finding for this theme is that participants intend to follow the coachee’s lead, so are being supportive in the desired way. There is recognition of the need to allow a meandering exploration, to reach the coachee’s desired goals. Egan and Hamlin (2014) suggest the coaching stance involves ‘a readiness to be an authentic helper and to engage as a dyadic partner’ (p249). Participants seem able to cope with this unusual relationship compared to at work: lack of direct involvement in the coachee’s outcome and lack of control of direction. The participants’ natural driving leadership is not sought; their opinions on what constitutes progress, such as clarity, understanding, and completion of actions may be assisting the coaching practice. However, it is clear they do not always understand the coachee’s progress and are willing to explore according to the coachee’s apparent needs.

5.5. Summary and discussion of learned skills

Thematic analysis has shown that the participants exercised soft skills differently during coaching practice and experienced some barriers to learning. These are summarised, followed by a discussion of coaching being an interconnected combination of self-management, communications and relationship-building skills.

5.5.1. Learned soft skills and barriers

While learned soft skills are the prime focus, it is apparent that coaching practice sets some philosophical expectations for behaviour which is part of the learning and can present barriers to learning. The soft skills, perceived requirements for behaviour and barriers to learning are summarised in table 5.1 overleaf and discussed.

Skill theme	Soft skills	Perceived requirements	Barriers
Self-management: "You cannot do anything else just focus", "[Coping] out of your comfort zone"	Be present; "a complete stop". Allow space; "a space is perfectly alright". Allow time: "Time to think" for coach and coachee. Be patient, curious. Personal reflection increased.	A complete stop" "A space is perfectly alright" Time to think for coach and coachee Adopting the right "mindset"	Leading, lack of attention vs. "adopting the right mindset".
	Rationalise discomfort. Relax: "relaxed into it", "let it flow".	Overcome nerves Open to learning and positive about helping coachee	"Nerves". Coachee's content e.g. emotions, complexity.
Communication: Listening on purpose with attention, Questioning more and probing open questions.	Proactive listening, staying calm, quiet. Use pause, silence. Empathise	Comprehending, understanding, pick up "nuances". Coachee feels listened to.	Self-control e.g. "not overexcited".
	Ask open, deep questions. Consider the right question.	"Ask how why". Keep the conversation on coachee's track.	Not ok to dig. Leading questions Complexity.
Relationship-building: Achieving rapport, Negotiating agreement.	Social skills e.g. respectful, exchange personal information.	Ease in relationship.	Newness of relationship. Lack of knowledge to match styles. New to coaching, "coachee out of comfort zone"
	Contracting coaching relationship with easy style. Establishing trust.	Agreement to coaching relationship	Used to power in relationship. Trust from coachee'.
Supporting: Stepping back, Sensing direction	" Watch and ask right question". "Remain objective.	"Need chance to think" "Go to coachee's mountain" Coachee takes action	Mentoring, seeing only personal perspective, appearing cold.
	Use coaching techniques, tools. Follow coachee's direction ("meandering", "like chess"). Get clarity. Explore solutions.	"Got to tease solution from them" "Coachee makes progress, is happy"	Not understanding. Closed questions, giving advice.

Table 5.1. Soft skills and barriers.

Regarding the *self-management* theme, participants exercise control over personal behaviour. Focused attention means that participants cannot think of anything else at the same time, which is unusual behaviour for project managers expected to multi-task and accept interruptions. The perceived mindset of a coach is also different to their usual leading role; participants have to allow time and space, and to be present, patient and curious. Allowing time supports both participant and coachee; participants indicate increased self-reflection which may support their self-awareness and learning. Nerves occur and for some, anxiety about helping the coachee when complexity or emotions arise. The participants respond by trying to relax, putting trust in the coaching process and being encouraged by positive improvement. There is a sense of participants slowing down. According to Kahneman (2011, p21), thinking is part of a human's 'system 2' that is associated with 'agency, choice and concentration', and slower than the generation of feelings and habitual behaviour.

For *communication skills*, coaching practice has apparently prompted significant change to listening and questioning skills. Participants' focus while listening may help to hear more, assuming the self-control to stay calm and concentrate. Open, probing questions are used more; there is some sensitivity to asking deep questions though coaching somehow legitimises such questioning. The tendency to ask leading questions is felt to be a barrier to learning. Questions and silence are used to encourage the coachee to have more of the conversation, which may contribute to the felt importance of listening. Empathy is mentioned, suggesting some sensitivity to the coachee's feelings. Singer and Lamm (2009) comment that empathy is 'a first necessary step in a chain that begins with affect sharing, [then] understanding the other person's feelings, which then motivates other-related concern [then] helping behaviour' (p84).

Social skills are noted as necessary *relationship-building skills*, with trust, respect and rapport considered as required characteristics of a coaching relationship. Participants each use social skills they already have, to get to know and to get on with their coachee. They use their existing negotiating skills to agree the coaching relationship, except one participant fails to get agreement, suggesting insufficient trust. Participants notice ease in the coaching conversations; it can be affected by their coaching, their own feelings, the communication style of the coachee, the content and the communication medium. The equal power relationship is potentially challenging; normally project managers would hold power over team members.

Supporting skills are two complex soft skills, stepping back and sensing direction. The stepping-back skill suggests the personal control to adopt the learned coaching

philosophy, with the implied agreement of a coaching relationship to hold a coaching space for the coachee. The sensing-direction skill suggests participants are wanting to follow the coachee's agenda and direction. Both skills represent the learned skills of coaching and each represent a combination of self-management, communications and relationship-building skills. Both skills require project managers to avoid their leadership tendencies, otherwise they could slip into mentoring, adopt a personal perspective or be distant. Participants focus on getting clarity and finding solutions but recognise they may not understand all that is said. Positive results appear pleasing to participants, which may help them to overcome learning challenges.

The barriers relate to the perceived requirements of coaching, particularly holding the objective stance of a coach, and helping the coachee. Participants have to establish sufficient rapport and trust to maintain an equal power relationship. They also have to manage themselves, to overcome any nerves and any natural tendencies towards mentoring, leading or being distant. In addition, they have to facilitate the coaching conversation that may include complexity or emotions. Sympathy, nerves and the urge to lead are being controlled. The training could possibly include more about building trust, matching styles, and possibly eliciting thoughts and feelings into the coaching conversation. However, the training was sufficient for all participants complete coaching practice with one person.

5.5.2. Skills interdependence

The learned skills are combinations of self-management, communications and relationship-building skills, driven by the coaching philosophy that puts requirements on the person who acts as coach, the relationship between coach and coachee, and the coaching conversation. Some interdependence between skill groupings has been suggested in the data and is summarised in figure 5.2.

Arrows represent the apparent linkage between organising themes. The one-directional arrows are used to represent that supporting skills are combinations of skills in other skill groups. Stepping back requires self-management, in adopting the coaching stance and maintaining the coaching relationship. Sensing direction represents the coaching conversation which is mainly communication skills, but also relies on relationship-building and self-management skills. The two-way arrows show linkage between skill groups. The linkages are not necessarily well-understood and represent human connection between participant and coachee. These bi-directional linkages are now itemised and discussed.

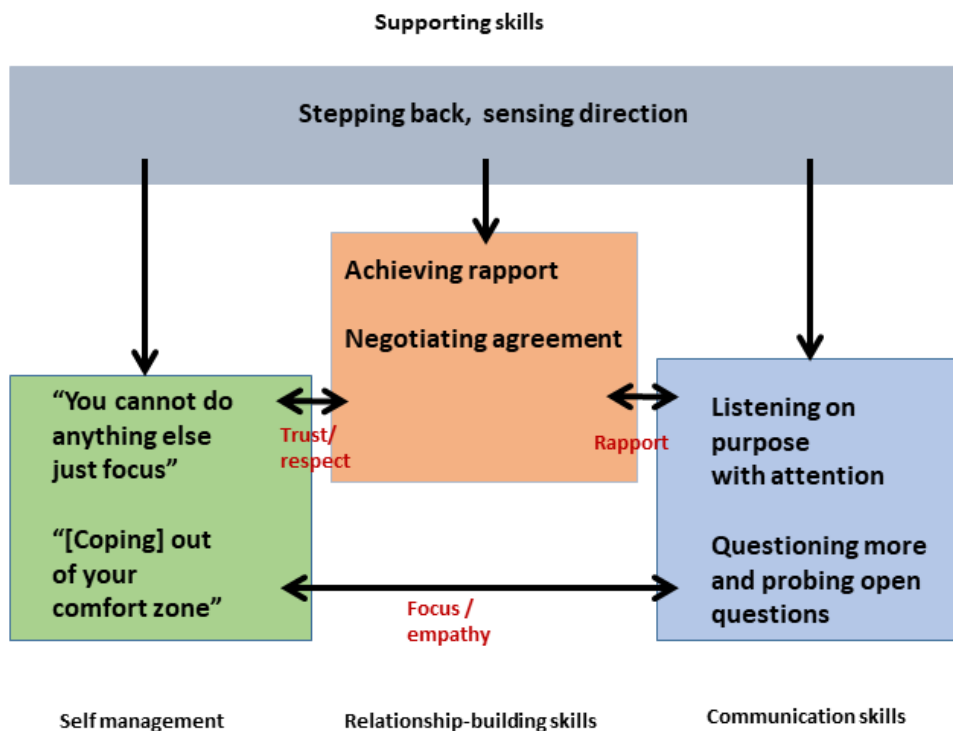


Figure 5.2. Skills interdependence.

Between self-management and communication skills, participants have noticed the required focus for them to listen well and to ask the right question. Also, the participants wanted to show the coachee that they were paying attention, and to show empathy.

Between communication and relationship-building skills, participants have noticed information transfer during communication depends on rapport. Rapport is built initially through social conversation and is seen as a transient phenomenon dependent on the coaching conversation.

Between self-management and relationship skills there is required trust for contracting the coaching relationship, and ongoing respect.

All three interdependencies are not new in relation to the literature. They also indicate some dependence on the coachee. Hunt and Weintraub (2010, p131) recommend ‘a few minutes of small talk’ for managers to re-establish rapport for a coaching conversation, to be respectful to ‘ask permission’ and to be mindful of the coachee’s feelings. Mutual trust and mutual respect are considered essential to the coaching relationship (Flaherty, 2010), the levels achievable are dependent on both parties. Participants are potentially unfamiliar with explaining these skills, and they are not easily explained; emotional connections and

quality of a relationship is often sensed, such as when probing into a personally sensitive area for the coachee. Yet coaching practice has at least created a learning environment for increased awareness of a new type of relationship that demands consideration of the maintenance of rapport, respect, trust, personal focus and empathy.

The coaching relationship is recognised as a mutual commitment (Flaherty, 2010) that reinforces that all interpersonal relationships are dependent on the both parties, not just one party's soft skills. Participants' relationship-building skills, supported by self-management and communication skills, are key to negotiating the relationship. Listening attentively, and showing interest in the coachee through questioning, may help to build trust and empathy, but these depend on the coachee, too.

The participants suggested total focus while listening improved awareness and asking the right question. Established literature about listening seems to put an emphasis on intrapersonal listening, but the data suggests that the awareness of another's feelings and thoughts is helpful. Coaching literature encourages use of empathy with the idea of stepping into the coachee's shoes. Hill (2016) recognises the impossibility of being able to do this in reality and suggests more interpretive listening. This means questioning interpretations within the conversation so that a better sense of the other person's situation can be gained. A natural conclusion, perhaps, is that there should be more emphasis in any training on eliciting feelings and thoughts into the coaching space, for the benefit of both participant and coachee in their collaboration, rather than relying on empathy.

This completes the findings on learned soft skills, which include perceived requirements and barriers as well as skills. Stepping back and sensing direction represent the participants' descriptions of coaching skills which are combinations of soft skills from categories of self-management, communication and relationship-building skills. There are linkages between soft skills that make consideration of the coaching relationship and the stance of a coach important in association with the skills.

Chapter 6 – Application of soft skills as a project manager

This chapter describes how participants applied their learned soft skills at work. Participants recognise coaching practice has made an impact to everyday skills; for example, Jill immediately answers “*all the time*” [Jill-F] to the interview question “when are learned skills being applied at work?” However, this does not necessarily mean that the skills are applied with all colleagues or at all times. Rather, participants may be finding suitable opportunities to use the skills. It is possible participants are just experimenting but skills application often associates intention with potential benefit.

Thematic data analysis has again been used with four organising themes, summarised in figure 6.1. Two are named slightly differently to those identified in Chapter 5, to reflect the data. The first, *personal skills*, reports how participants perceive their own growth in personal skills, from having new ways of thinking and acting, to feeling confident in using some learning. The second, *communication skills*, reports application of the learned style of listening and questioning skills. The third, *relationship-building skills* reports how participants combine learned skills in attempting to change their work relationships. The fourth, *collaborating skills*, reports how all learned skills are used to improve teamwork.



Figure 6.1. Themes for applied skills.

The findings are presented under section headings that match the organising themes, then the findings are discussed. Apparent intentions, as associated goals with soft skill use (Cohen and Levesque, 1990), are noted. Apparent barriers to application only appear in the last theme.

6.1. Personal skills

In the *personal skills* organising theme, participants’ perceptions of increased personal capabilities are presented. There are two themes: *increased capacity* relates the belief of personal growth, and *increased confidence* relates more confidence to deal with other people. Though these themes are strictly not skills, they represent the development of skills.

The explanations of stick figures from the final interviews show the belief of personal growth for every participant. The participants each described from their imagination a stick figure to represent themselves (except Andrew who did not feel able to describe one). Subsequently the stick figures were drawn by an artist, whose images are shown alongside the descriptions. Though these drawings are included under increased capacity; they also suggest increased self-confidence and interpersonal capability.

6.1.1. Increased capacity

In the increased capacity theme participants show their belief of value in having new skills at their disposal. Jill uses an armour metaphor: “[you’ve] got a bit more in your armour to try and do your job with” [Jill-F]. In describing her stick figure Jill wanted to include the GROW model as a valuable too, alongside more confidence and some personal development: “I’m better at what I do because [of] the GROW model. [Jill-F].

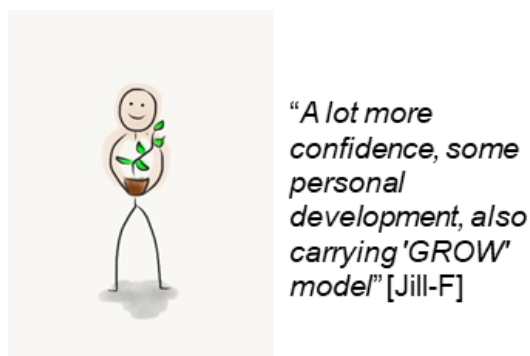


Figure 6.2. Jill’s stick figure.

Susan recognises her new capacity as an ability to help in more situations: “[I’ve] got more capacity rather than gone ‘OK I’ll leave that big issue with you” [Susan-F]. Susan shows belief in her coach skills now, even for big issues: “I can coach somebody through a big issue like that.” [Susan-1]. She also anticipates the value of her listening to colleagues: “... especially for project managers. They’re under a lot of stress, [who] else listens to all they’ve sweated over” [Susan-F]. Susan’s stick figure description, shown in figure 6.3, shows her capacity to cope and willingness to use a coaching-like space with others.



“Added confidence as able to cope with involved, people-related, team-related scenarios. Willing to give people more opportunity to have an informal discussion, and [hold] a space between us” [Susan-F]

Figure 6.3. Susan’s stick figure.

Adèle expresses a belief in more awareness and leader capability, as shown in figure 6.4. Like Susan, she emphasises her personal growth in working with others.



“ I see more leadership, more like a leader now, a little more confident, more aware” [Adèle-F]

Figure 6.4. Adèle’s stick figure.

A difficulty in ascribing personal skill growth directly to the coaching practice is that learning is part of ongoing, everyday experiences, as Bill suggests: *“It has cemented a lot of things that I was working on [;] I do try to be self-aware, to learn and to grow. I ask for feedback from people about how I’m doing.”* [Bill-F]. Bill uses the word expansive to describe himself as shown in figure 6.5. His stance is more open to embrace more situations in relation to others: *“Rather than having a closed frame it’s more expansive”* [Bill-F]. Bill explains his meaning by describing someone who is not expansive: *“he didn’t take everything in; he was too focused in the detail, so wasn’t expansive enough for me”* [Bill-F]. This suggests the objectivity of a coach-like stance, to absorb different viewpoints. Bachkirova and Cox (2008, p332) suggest that ‘the more individuals can take as object, the more complex their world view becomes, because they can examine and act upon more things’. Bill personally is now able to deal with more situations: *“[I’m] able to deal with more trying situations with the learned soft skills I’m building up”* [Bill-F].



“A smile and open arms (willingness to learn and embrace new things), a crowd, more expansive than before.” [Bill-F]

Figure 6.5. Bill's stick figure.

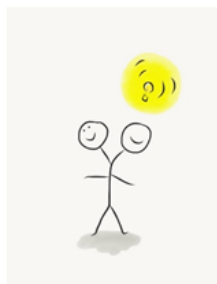
More thinking is apparent for participants. Bill has thought about his own contribution in team situations:

“I've been thinking [while] I've been doing the coaching [about] what I've been saying [in] situations at work where what's been said either to me, or I've said, has caused reactions.” [Bill-F]

Despite a concern about overthinking: “Sometimes you've got to be careful that you don't over reflect [because] with introspection, you think ‘oh I'm going all wrong’”, Bill is positive that reflection has helped him deal with work issues:

“I've definitely done more reflection. [In] a certain situation, you think ‘well what could I have said to make it go better or what did I do that made it go a bit pear-shaped?’ Sometimes [it] wasn't me, it was just the situation or the person.” [Bill-F]

Mark suggests new things naturally encourage his thinking: “I reflect not just coaching itself but in how I use the things that we discussed within coaching in whatever I do. I like to think about things and cross fertilise ideas.” [Mark-F]. His stick figure, shown in figure 6.6, seems to focus on the head, potentially amplifying his thinking. Mark's coaching practice has highlighted his short attention span: “I do have to a certain extent a short span of attention [...] enhanced performance needs attention to the individuals” [Mark-F], though his smile suggests positive learning and potentially his will to listen more attentively.



“A smiley face with a light bulb on top. I'm smiling because I'm happy I've gone through this experience. It's also been useful. It could be a bit of a Janus being two headed each with a smile. [Mark-F]

Figure 6.6. Mark's stick figure.

Andrew could not imagine a stick figure but describes more reflection as well as planning and being collaborative: *“More internal reflection/planning, more collaborative.”* [Andrew-F]. He also mentions increased reflection within conversations:

“While other individuals speak, I have a quick reflection of what I’m going to do or what I’m going to say next. That has improved.” [Andrew-F]

Peter directly attributes more thinking to coaching practice: *“All these conversations about goals and achievements have helped me think”* [Peter-F]. Peter is thinking about personal goals: *“What I do I want to achieve, and what do I actually want to be doing?”* [Peter-F]. He also attributes value in taking an objective stance: *“[Conversations about goals] have helped me take a step back and think”*. Self-coaching is potentially a new intrapersonal skill; Berg and Karlsen (2016) recognise managers do coach themselves. Peter’s stick figure, in figure 6.7 suggests that use of all learned skills has the aim of supporting him to be less burdened at work; as for most participants, he believes he is working with others differently.



“The stick man six months ago would have had the weight of the world on his shoulders. The stick man now doesn’t have the weight of the world on his shoulders he’s just helping everybody get from where they are to where they need to be on that world, so it’s very much a sign-posting and helping them rather than collapsing under the weight of everything” [Peter]

Figure 6.7. Peter’s stick figure.

The main findings for this theme are that participants have new skills at their disposal, feel different and reflect more. The participants are prepared to use their learned skills at work. The increase in reflection is encouraging because project managers are recommended to become reflective practitioners (Crawford et al, 2006).

6.1.2. Increased confidence

Increased confidence is implied by the stick figure descriptions, personally and when working with others. Now participants are back in their normal environment, they may be more in their comfort zone, with no pressure to formally act as coach. In this theme, participants express more confidence in using the learned interpersonal skills compared to the previous chapter. Susan attributes her confidence to handling her coachee’s

scenarios: *“Coaching has given me more confidence to deal with different scenarios and apply things I’ve learned or use some of that to try and help somebody else”* [Susan-F].

Adèle highlights confidence in questioning: *“It has given me confidence. Questioning is so important. You never have to assume things now, so I’m always questioning”* [Adèle-F].

She reinforces the change by a change in her emotions: *“Maybe if I don’t understand something I don’t feel really embarrassed to ask now.”* [Adèle-F]. This suggests self-efficacy, the ‘core belief that one has the power to produce desired results’ (Bandura, 2009, p179).

Jill explains her new confidence in communication skills with some frustration about explaining soft skills: *“I’ve got a lot more confidence [but] being a good communicator, it sounds so obvious [like] a good character reference, like writing a CV.”* [Jill-F].

Jill questions whether qualities of skills such as listening are valued sufficiently:

“[Communication skills] mean so very little because people don’t really value them, they don’t value them because they probably don’t do them well.” [Jill-F].

This potentially suggests a need to increase the general awareness of soft skills in organisations, particularly quality listening and questioning.

The increased confidence with interpersonal skills suggests more focus on people.

Andrew recognises directly he is now less focussed on tasks:

“In my daily work, maybe previously I would have been more task-based; [I’d say to the team] ‘we need to get this, this and this done and let’s just get on and do it’” [Andrew-F].

Being more people-focused rather than task-focused would be welcomed for project managers, to focus more on the human aspects of project management (Dalcher; 2016).

Mark explains how project managers can easily put tasks ahead of people:

“Project managers are simply focused on what needs to be done [and] when it needs to be done, dealing with the issues, dealing with the risks, and so they sometimes forget people are individuals” [Mark].

The confidence is associated with personal benefit, too. Andrew and Adèle express both feeling good and feeling confident about their new capabilities with others: *“I feel much better in general. I feel more confident”* [Adèle-F] and *“I feel good”* [Andrew-F]. Bill feels calmer as a result: *“I’m a bit calmer, I have a bit more time”* [Bill-F]. He works better in a team: *“I work better in teams; although I felt I was a good team player, [coaching] has*

helped and to my mind had tangible results.” [Bill-F]. Peter is so confident about the value of the coaching mindset to his leadership; he wants to pass on the benefits to other leaders:

“[For two project managers], rather than leading managing people in the old way of setting the task and [saying] just go do it, I’ve got them very much working with the mindset that their job is to enable and coach, not to lead and manage” [Peter-F].

The main finding for this theme is that participants are confident about applying learned soft skills. Lloyd-Walker, French and Crawford (2016, p907) assert project managers need ‘initiative, flexibility and self-confidence’ due to little career support. Participants are showing initiative and flexibility through making changes. The power of being able to take an objective stance to support flexibility is potentially supporting participants’ application of skills, and self-efficacy.

6.2. Communication skills

In the *communications skills* organising theme, I relate the learned aspects of listening and questioning that are applied at work. The two themes each relate to an intention: *listening to hear more* shows the learning in relation to the importance of awareness and *questioning to understand more* shows the application of coaching-style questions.

6.2.1. Listening to hear more

When listening, participants show they are more aware of available information from colleagues and are interested in the information. Susan is hearing what colleagues are, and are not, saying: *“I hear what they’re actually talking about [and] what they’re not saying as well”* [Susan-F]. Jill directly indicates she can be present while listening and believes information comes from resultant awareness: *“being present and focusing on the person, including their choice of words, tone of voice indicating both what they are telling you, and what they are omitting”* [Jill-F]. Mark, too, states he is more aware: *“Being more aware of the individual and listening to them”* [Mark-F]. These examples suggest attentive listening is a new capability.

The skill reflecting back is newly mentioned and amplifies listening. Although Bill considers he has the skill already, and used it in his coaching, he implies using it even more at work:

“Reflecting back is important [;] I do that a lot where I say [;], this is what I understand that you’ve said [;is] that your understanding? I’ve taken that and grown. I did use that a lot in my coaching.” [Bill-F]

Reflecting back gives the opportunity to correct meaning: *“By reflecting back, it allows them time to go over what they’ve said [and] correct any misunderstanding I might have.”* [Bill-F]. Bill reports that this correction of understanding can make the colleague feel part of the conversation topic and valued: *“they actually have said that they feel part of what we’re doing because I’m asking, I’m not just assuming, and I actually value their opinion”* [Bill-F]. This skill may show the other person that the speaker is listening, because Bill reports that the similar of referring back to an earlier part of the conversation can be appreciated by colleagues: *“They’ll say, ‘oh yes I remember that’. It has been remarked they believe I listen to them, which I do [and] it’s because I pay attention to them”* [Bill-F]. Bill suggests that his attention is rewarded by returned effort from colleagues: *“because you’re giving them that attention and you’re showing that level of attention they put more into it”* [Bill-F].

Jill uses this reflecting back skill to get alignment of understanding, especially with project sponsors: *“Being able to reflect, for example a project sponsor’s needs [leads to] realistic expectation”* [Jill-F]. In comparison, Susan uses a slightly different skill relating back, while listening to status from colleagues: *“You have got a goal, you’re relating back to that all the time but also you’re hearing what they’re saying”* [Susan-F]. Even though Susan is listening attentively: *“it’s important to hear other people”* [Susan-F], she may not be fully demonstrating her listening.

Andrew and Mark suggest they allow others to think and speak more. Andrew uses silence to give thinking time: *“On the conference calls now, I try to put in some silence, giving individuals time to think”* [Andrew-3]. Andrew also extends this time to think in staff one-to-ones: *“I’ve improved reflection time in my one-to-one sessions”* [Andrew-F]. Mark wants to be quieter: *“I was consulting with [name], and I remembered [to] shut up and give them their say”* [Mark-3]. He also avoids interrupting: *“I have stopped interrupting so much, so there is application there”* [Mark-3].

The main finding in this theme is that participants are listening with more attention, awareness and intention to absorb information. To help them gather better information and understand they may use silence or the reflecting-back skill; both imply time to think. The reflecting-back skill is encouraged for managers by Hunt and Weintraub (2010, p138), who call it reflective listening, which is ‘restating an individual’s comments so as to confirm an understanding’. Reflecting back was not reported in the last chapter; it may be a known

skill and natural in coaching but participants may be more conscious now at work to demonstrate they are listening. Since communication is an important project management process (PMI, 2017), any improvement in effectiveness is valuable for project performance, dependent on any increase in time taken. Participants may need to balance the time invested with value of resultant information.

Participants seem more open to colleagues' perspectives. While colleagues are volunteering more information, participants suggest colleagues can also feel more valued because they are being listened to. However, listening must be motivated (Brownell 1994), so the information received is important to participants. Yet, there is risk that information may be different to expectations and air differing opinions.

6.2.2. Questioning to understand

Participants show desire to understand when using coaching-style questions. When Peter uses open questions to gather project status information from team members, he is getting better information: *"when I ask the [open] question, I get a wider picture"* [Peter-2]. He explains the difference between asking open and closed questions: *"I actually get 'we're 90% there' rather than just 'yes, it's done'; and they're telling me what the issues are too"* [Peter-2]. Rather than hearing a simple yes, Peter learns more details. He comments he feels guilty about not having done this before: *On reflection, I beat myself up that I shouldn't have been asking closed questions"* [Peter-2]. This reinforces learning and value.

Participants show changes in personal attitude that reinforce the desire to understand.

Mark recognises questions can remove assumptions:

"I want to apply the techniques – not for full-on coaching, but if I'm speaking to colleagues, to establish what the need is, rather than making assumptions." [Mark-1].

Peter recognises a change in his intention:

"Before, I went into conversations with the attitude that I'll go in and get the answer I need, rather than I'll go in and ask deep questions, which is a step-change in my thinking" [Peter-G].

Peter relates the importance of the resultant information which benefits him personally:

"It's important I get a full update as I don't want to look stupid with my stakeholders" [Peter-2].

There is a sense of change in the amount and style of questioning. Susan uses more questions: *"[I'm] using questioning skills more extensively"* [Susan-F]. She also gives a

rationale for project managers to use deeper questioning: *“in a complex working environment where there’s lots of information and almost conflicting forces I’ve now learned to dig in a bit deeper with people”* [Susan-F]. Peter echoes the digging metaphor for better understanding: *“In work, [coaching has] definitely helped me understand more where people are coming from, having dug into the details of things a bit more”* [Peter-G].

Adèle recognises an intention to ask more challenging questions:

“In the coaching sessions, maybe I wasn’t challenging enough, so I think on that and start challenging her more [and] it has had an impact on my job” [Adèle-F].

She recognises questions aid learning: *“I use the tool of asking questions in many situations [to] learn more”* [Adèle-3]. Jill and Andrew reinforce the challenging style. Jill considers metaphoric drilling for information as an idea for improving a poor relationship with a work colleague to encourage his input more: *“instead of saying what I’m prepared to do, [and] being direct, I should drill for information”* [Jill-1]. Andrew uses the term *probing* with questions to draw ideas from the team:

“[Before] I’d say, ‘just do this and it’ll be fine’. What I tend to do now is ask questions like why did it happen and what can we do? Just a few probing coaching questions really” [Andrew-2].

The idea of a right question is present alongside good listening. Jill is clear this is helpful when working with sponsors: *“Knowing how to ask the right open questions and then to really listen can mine valuable information that will shape the project work”* [Jill-F]. Jill suggests a new soft skill from coaching practice is *“drawing out others’ thoughts”*, which reinforces the combination of listening and questioning to “mine” in the right place. Jill compares it with usual approaches: *“that wouldn’t come out in a group meeting, or a more standard ‘scoping/requirement’ discussion”* [Jill-F].

Susan reports holding a focus on a goal and using awareness: *“holding my focus on the goal at the same time [to get] the right piece of information or the sub-text of what’s going on”* [Susan-F]. She suggests an awareness of what colleagues brush aside is useful: *“There’s always something they bring up which they almost brush aside, and those things have a lot more fruition if I probe”* [Susan-F].

This theme highlights the learned aspects of questioning skills. Participants have given themselves permission to ask deep, open questions at work, and adopted the idea of the right question. At work leading questions are not noticed and drawing out another’s thoughts is emphasised. Leading questions and coaching can both be associated with Socratic dialogue, though Cox (2013) suggests its philosophy is not appropriate for a

coaching ethos and leading questions can 'induce an experience of emptiness or not knowing in the learner'. Garvey et al (2014) observe Socratic dialogue can help with consensus and understanding; they suggest 'it is the striving [for consensus] that is important, not necessarily the consensus' (p20). Thus, more probing questions at work may assist with mutual understanding.

6.3. Relationship-building skills

In the *relationship-building skills* organising theme, participants show an apparent desire for working relationships to be more collaborative. There are two themes *Inviting contribution* and *Inviting agreement* that suggest the desire for more contribution from colleagues and consensus.

6.3.1. Inviting contribution

Open questioning helps to elicit contribution that includes building the relationship. Andrew relates how he is thinking more about his relationship with a new team: "*When I would go to a new region, I would just get on with it and hope [...] Now I'm thinking a bit more about it*" [Andrew-F]. Andrew invites team members to help design the relationship: "*What sort of communication would you like from myself, how would you like to meet up, how would you like to be fed information?*" [Andrew-F]. Jill similarly invites contribution from a new colleague: "*What do you think? How do you think we can solve it together? I was definitely using open-ended questions and not what I would have done before*" [Jill-3].

Such questions may help to build rapport at work. Andrew is more conscious of rapport: "*I'm a bit warier of how I'm building rapport and gaining that initial relationship*" [Andrew-F]. He also recognises improvement in building rapport and trust with those spoken to irregularly:

"I have definitely improved my rapport and building trust with external customers and people that I don't tend to work with day in day out. [I] use rapport and listening and silence when I'm speaking to stakeholders" [Andrew-F].

Comparing this type of questioning with the more social 'getting-to-know' rapport-building skills for coaching practice, it seems task-oriented and work-related. Garvey et al (2014) show a 'seven layers of dialogue' (p117) model that starts with social connection. Participants at work seem to be using the second layer 'technical dialogue' (p118) that clarifies existing knowledge, or the third layer 'technical dialogue aimed at discovering practical ways to deal with issues'. Potentially the work environment has an established social connection.

There is ongoing encouragement for colleagues to contribute. Mark and Andrew let others finish explanations: "... *letting him finish what he was telling me*" [Mark-F] and "*With my team members, I'll let them finish*" [Andrew-2]. Andrew suggests he is now less personally frustrated with giving the team a chance to input to the conversation: "*I used to get frustrated because you just want to get it done and move onto the next bit but now I tend to leave a silence*" [Andrew-3]. His change of intention shows Andrew wants the team on-board with his plans, but he still wants to progress his plan: "*[I] think [of] where I need to get to and how I'm going to get [there] then try to take the team with me through that journey*" [Andrew-F].

There is apparent value in asking for contribution. Bill deliberating allows team opinions to be aired: "*I've learned to not be as eager to share my opinion and let them give me theirs*" [Bill-F]. He wants everyone to feel included: "*Inclusivity has changed. [I'm now] including everybody; making sure that team members don't feel excluded*" [Bill]. Susan recognises the value for colleagues to be heard to avoid frustration:

"He needed to be heard and his situation was that he just wasn't getting the respect he should have done" [Susan-3].

Potentially Susan and Bill are fostering better relationships which Jill relates is hugely important: "*building good relationships makes a huge difference in delivery*" [Jill-3]. Additionally, Taylor and Woelfer (2010) indicate relationship-building is important to a project managers' personal impact and influence.

In this theme, the coaching practice appears to have created awareness of opportunities to allow colleagues' contributions to relationships and work plans. Rapport applies to individuals and the team. Increased sensitivity to colleagues' feelings about plans is suggested; particularly how they might feel about being excluded, not being heard, or not given the chance to contribute. Trust and respect are relatively little-mentioned and may be merged with rapport and collaboration.

6.3.2. Inviting agreement

Participants suggest that while they are open to others' ideas, their intention is agreement. Bill uses the term *buy-in*: "*I've learned to [let] them give me their [ideas] because it's important that they buy into what we're doing*" [Bill-F]. Bill explains further how he invites the team to air more details of the project plan:

"Instead of saying do this [I say] come on you tell me what you would do because you're the guys doing it not me. I just need to know how long it's going to take, [not] how you do it" [Bill-2].

Susan, too, suggests that team agreement is important, using the phrase *on board*: *You have [to] make sure the team is on board and everyone is happy* [Susan-F]. Adèle believes she can get more agreement, suggesting she is seeking agreement more: *"I think I may be able to get more agreement"* [Adèle-F].

Peter is more specific about inviting agreement through visual sharing of information to engage others:

"Now I'm very much engaging with my audience; even [in] an online call I'm sharing the screen in front of people, so that they're visually seeing [the plan]" [Peter-1].

His term *engaging* suggests audience participation, and that visual presentation will assist with understanding. Peter considers this visual sharing is good for contracting with stakeholders: *"I was thinking of using it as an approach in review meetings where I have in essence created that contract with a group of stakeholders"* [Peter-1]. This seems a similar style of negotiation to Jill's open questioning of sponsors: *"[with sponsors, open questioning] results in better-defined understanding of requirements and scope* [Jill-F].

Contracting may be considered easy by project managers, as Bill claims: *"You work with people, you say I'll do this, you do that; [...] that's the contract, it's not rocket science, it's not complicated"* [Bill-F]. Bill shows flexibility too:

"It's about varying the contract with various audiences, because some people might think certain things are a bit patronising and you leave them out, or you leave them in for other groups because they need the detail" [Bill-F].

Possibly Bill has a less collaborative agreement with stakeholders compared to Peter, with no negotiation: *"When I work with stakeholders externally or internally, I will let them know what's going on"* [Bill-F]. The relationship participants want to have may or may not be open to negotiation, rather established by the work role and its expectations or the other people involved.

In this theme, there is a sense that coaching practice has influenced an ideal for work relationships where contribution and agreement are sought. The outcomes of buy-in and happiness align with the consideration of human participants that is being encouraged through the recognition of the importance of relationships (Dalcher, 2016) to project managers' effectiveness. Some participants seem willing to negotiate with different stakeholders. However, one's job role and its organisational context may imply certain responsibilities and expectations that impede negotiation.

6.4. Collaborating skills

In the Collaborating skills theme, participants use a combination of skills to work more cooperatively with colleagues. There are three themes *facilitating work goals*, *letting others drive* and *coaching* that reflect coaching techniques used to differing extents. Participants are using a combination of the already-mentioned coach-like skills from this chapter, with particular work-related intentions.

6.4.1. Facilitating work goals

The facilitating work goals theme shows participants using coach-like skills to encourage colleagues to contribute more to current work goals. This is not coaching to the colleague's agenda.

In her project status meetings, Susan is personally interested in financial objectives, but recognises her project manager colleagues are not: *"They're so in the middle of what they're trying to do: the clients ask for X and then there's a problem they're trying to fire-fight"* [Susan-F]. Susan questions them with apparent empathy: *"my questioning is to remind them"* [Susan-F]. Susan also applies the idea of sifting information against a goal – to bring the work in on budget :

"When I listen to the project managers with whom I discuss updates, I sift out what is irrelevant. We don't have a stated goal, but the goal is to bring a piece of work in on time and to budget" [Susan-F].

The goal is Susan's: *"I'm hearing a load of information. Now, how is this related to my goal, what question can I ask now that's going to take me closer to that goal?"* [Susan-F]. She uses the digging metaphor from coaching practice: *"To dig into how they're going about doing their role to achieve these objectives"* [Susan-F]. Susan similarly refers to the options aspect of the GROW model: *"[As] a PMO manager, [I] will try subtly and ask are there any other options you can consider?"* [Susan-2].

Like Susan, other participants are questioning more, particularly to help with problem-solving. Adèle gives an example situation where she uses many questions:

"It was really difficult to fit [the components on that specific] space, so I ask questions because I don't have a technical knowledge to help, but I start to ask these guys many questions about how we can solve it." [Adèle-3]

The use of 'we' suggests working together. Peter also relates getting his team together to solve a challenge and encouraging the team: *"Where somebody has identified a challenge they need to resolve and they don't how to do it, I've then got the team together and got them working through it"* [Peter-F]. Peter explains his stance to invite contribution:

“It’s not saying just get on and do this, it’s having more discussions around what approach they think is right, what they think the best solution is, getting them to do it rather than me.” [Peter-3]

Peter appears supportive, but apparently expects the team can find a solution. Berg and Karlsen (2007) highlight that use of coaching may help team members when ‘facing difficult decisions where there are no unequivocal answers’ (p10).

Jill finds stepping back is advantageous, for a conflict situation: *“Step back, try not to join into the heat of the argument but get a perspective” [Jill-3]*. Jill recognises her stance had changed: *“I reacted to it in the same way as I probably would have anyway, but I took a slightly different stance” [Jill-3]*. The objective nature of stepping back thus seems valuable at work.

Susan describes holding space with colleagues and being patient: *“I suppose patience is a strange word but sometimes, you just hold the space for another person a bit longer than maybe you would have done, because of this coaching” [Susan-F]*. She finds more opportunities to give support in this way: *“You’re holding that space [...] I’m giving them that opportunity more than I used to” [Susan-F]*.

The choice to step back may take more time, as Peter recognises: *“[more] time is taken to learn rather than just achieving the task” [Peter-F]*. He elaborates on his choice whether to invest time against the learning value to staff:

“ You could have pointed them there [...] a lot quicker than they got themselves there, but the difference in value [comes from] letting them get there themselves, so they’ve opened that thought process, they’ve learned in the process of getting there.” [Peter-F]

Andrew connects giving time to others with them feeling valued and increasing their efforts:

“The benefit from the calls being a lot longer is giving a bit more time to the team. They feel they’re being a bit more valued, but also, they have made the effort [to] come up with solutions” [Andrew-2].

Andrew also recognises a benefit for himself in stepping back that gives broader understanding:

“[I had] tunnel-vision before and now I can step back, see around the whole situation and engage on what’s important and what’s not, what needs to be done now, and who is more important than the other person.” [Andrew-F]

In this theme, participants have shown preparedness to give support to colleagues through coaching techniques that facilitates contribution and to start to shift some responsibility to the team to solve problems. The decision to use coaching techniques

may depend on the perceived value of others' learning or contribution. The adoption of a coach-like stance and stepping back allows colleagues to think for themselves and feel valued.

6.4.2. Letting others drive

In the letting others drive theme, participants expect colleagues to take more initiative. Bill now allows the team to drive to solve problems: “[I] let the team come up with the solutions and not just drive the solutions, which is what I normally did” [Bill-G]. Similarly, Andrew now encourages colleagues to reflect on plans: “[I] get their input [then] tell them ‘we need this done, go and have a think about it [and] let’s see what your views are’” [Andrew-F]. He now wants others to make decisions, too:

“[Before,] I’d say, ‘all you’ve got to do is XYZ and it’ll be fine’. Now I say, ‘you know what you feel, what do you think the best action would be for this situation?’”
[Andrew-2].

Adèle simply wants clarity around responsibilities: “make sure what their responsibilities are” [Adèle-F]. Peter asserts that the team owns the responsibility for addressing a challenge in their own work: “[for a team’s challenge I’m] very much utilising the coaching skills to enable them to do that; making it clear that the team owns this” [Peter-F]. Peter debates whether assertion of responsibility is delegating: “I could say [I’m] delegating more but that’s not exactly what I mean” [Peter-1]. Rather, Peter is encouraging others to initiate more: “I’m trying for all the people working on my project to let them do a little bit more [of] finding direction themselves” [Peter-1]. Yet Peter is still supportive: “If someone comes to me with a problem, because of the coaching, what I now do is I do help them solve it, not solve it for them” [Peter-F]. This may support gradual empowerment of colleagues such as that shown in the situational leadership model (Blanchard et al, 1993).

Being supportive in relation to ownership and responsibility is important because failure can bring a sense of fault, as Jill reflects on projects' high-pressure environment:

“By the very nature of projects, there’s always that moment when something goes wrong or there is a high pressure-point where people’s backs are against the wall, and [one questions] was it your fault or my fault, did we miss something there?” [Jill-3].

Jill describes the value of being supportive in such situations, to air sources of worry:

“In those moments [I need to] find out what it is that [people are] worried about, draw it out of them [and question] is it because they think they’ve done something wrong? And then work through it with them to see it out.” [Jill-3].

The objectivity of a coach-like stance thus appears useful in conflict situations. Jill also finds objectivity valuable for meetings with project sponsors: “Invariably the further up the

organisation, the more senior and the less time exposure you have, the more objectivity is pragmatic" [Jill-F]. In addition, she uses the GROW model to facilitate complex discussion, enabling calm and clarity:

"As a structured frame it's so simple. I can keep it in my mind how to do it, and then if I get a bit stuck in a meeting where I'm thinking all this information seems really unstructured ..." [Jill-F].

Jill offers a specific example of a project situation when this happens: *"At the end of the first third of projects [...] it just all unravels into the practicalities"* [Jill-F]. She relates how GROW cuts through the complexity:

"In [interactive group] conversations on lots of topics with people [,] you can say 'What are the things that are influencing the situation, who is in control and what is it that we need to think about in the future to make decisions on' [and] the GROW model conversation really lends itself to help wade through confusing circumstances" [Jill-F].

The coach-like stance can be personally useful at work, too, as Bill relates when frustrated by a colleague who is apparently not following the agreed approach. Without relating frustration, Bill invites contribution, albeit with closed questions:

"[I said] 'when we were talking about this earlier, we looked at doing it in a certain way. Do you think that way still holds, or have you had a think about it and do you think there's another way of doing it?'" [Bill-F].

In this theme, participants give more space to colleagues to take responsibility for the tasks they own. This is closer to coaching since problems potentially become a colleague's or a team's agenda. A coach-like stance is useful at work for supporting others to address their problems, even when conflict and complexity arise.

6.4.3. Coaching

In the coaching theme, participants show the small number of situations where they attempt to coach, and the apparent barriers to it. Just two participants use coaching to support another's learning.

Andrew supports staff to reflect on their decision-making: *"I'm using [the learning] every day; just trying to use it with staff to reflect on the decisions they make"* [Andrew-3]. He also directly uses the term *coaching* for individual staff issues: *"[Colleagues] know there's an issue, and they probably know what the answer is; they just need to be talked through"*

how to get there and coached in the right way” [Andrew-F]. Andrew gives an example of helping a deputy to improve a perceived weakness:

“One of my managers was covering me [while on leave] and he’d always struggled with stakeholder management. When I came back, we went through it to see how he felt and really went into detail” [Andrew-F].

As Andrew is also a manager, developing staff may be a priority. He admitted being currently motivated by end-of-year assessments:

“Maybe just because I’ve gone through the end-of-year markings with my team [and] hopefully I will speak to a few of them in the one-to-ones, [after] trying to sort out a new plan to see where everyone will get settled” [Andrew-2].

Peter similarly focuses on the team’s decision-making, particularly about priorities:

“coaching conversations with [colleagues] to get them to work out the priority of what they need to do [and] how to do it” [Peter-F]. He aims to help people move forward: *“helping everybody get from where they are to where they need to be”* [Peter-F]. Peter now clearly recognises his ability to help others: *“[you can] unlock potential you weren’t aware of in others”* [Peter-F]. He explains the personal benefit of using coaching philosophy:

“Because innately in the process of coaching they own it not me, this puts up barriers to me doing what I normally do, which is take ownership of things that aren’t necessarily my problem” [Peter-F].

Peter is selective about who he speaks to about coaching, dependent on the benefit to himself and the coachee: *“Coaching conversations only come in because I see that I explicitly need help from that individual and it helps them to understand it more, so I base it on my observation of their need”* [Peter-F]. Help with his workload is sought: *“Having more discussions about what they think is right and getting them to do it [could] ease my workload”* [Peter-1].

Peter goes a step further, in aiming to persuade two project managers to act as coaches: *“Conversations [were] about them coaching the rest of the team – not leading the rest of the team”*. He wants them to understand coaching in the same way he does, as unlocking learning in others:

“[With coaching] you help them frame what they need to understand, helping unlock what that person that is closest to it knows anyway [yeah] and that is quite a powerful thing” [Peter-F].

Peter has some success with the adoption of the coaching approach in his project team and relates that the team is feeling supported, and empowered:

“Everybody across the project – we’ve done a couple of reviews and retrospectives that you do in Agile [;] apparently they’re feeling empowered, they’re feeling like they own it and like [the fact that] they’re supported, which is novel to them” [Peter-F].

Other participants use the term *coaching* for remedial intervention. Mark sees potential in a conflict situation: *“If you’ve got someone who you believe is being unreasonable in their actions, you need to try and coach them to be able to see it from the other person’s point of view” [Mark-F].* Jill more directly asserts coaching indicates low performance: *“I wouldn’t feel comfortable totally using the coaching word because around here that would be interpreted almost like you’re on special measures” [Jill-F].* Peter, too, uses the coaching openly with some but not others who react negatively: *“I am making people aware that the toolset is there; those that want to pick it up and use it do, other people look at it a bit funny” [Peter-F].*

There are other potential barriers. Jill expresses that coaching potentially implies emotional investment:

“For me coaching, although it’s not supposed to be from an emotional perspective, if you end up with one person that is telling you everything that they need to and you’re there to help them [then] you’re invested in the person” [Jill-F].

Susan wants more practice:

“I could do with practising questioning skills and my approach. As a novice coach, I haven’t really worked my style out [ok] of whether or not to provide questions or to provide solutions – what I feel comfortable with” [Susan-F].

Peter also wants to understand more:

“[The training] unlocked the fact that I’d like to do more of it just to understand more and to also put a better framework around who I do, and don’t, engage with on a proper coaching basis” [Peter-F].

Time is a potential issue. Jill had talked about working with a difficult colleague but the colleague became seen as wasting the participant’s and organisation’s time. Adèle explains a lack of time for coaching a colleague suggested previously: *“We haven’t got the time; she has been quite busy, and I have been too” [Adèle-2].*

In this theme some participants show interest in coaching approach but there can be barriers. Cox (2013) suggests that coachees generally initiate coaching: for example, they may have a ‘disorienting dilemma’ (p4). Peter’s demotivated colleague and Andrew’s staff member who wanted help with stakeholder management are possible disorienting dilemmas. Participants’ applied use of coaching techniques seems to align more with the

Hunt and Weintraub (2010, p7) view for managers that acting as coach 'is good for you on a personal level' and supports working through others.

6.5. Summary and discussion

The data has shown that project managers can learn and apply relevant soft skills from coaching practice. After briefly summarising the main findings from each organising theme in this chapter, a comparison of learned and applied soft skills is provided to highlight the skills project managers value from coaching practice. Apparent intentions associated with soft skills have been noted throughout the chapter and these are then discussed. Finally, a summary of both data chapters shows all learning.

In the *personal skills* organising theme, project managers reported personal growth from new soft-skills capabilities and confidence in applying them at work. They felt coaching techniques supported self-development and their work with others. In the *communication skills* theme, project managers related better conversations with colleagues such that more information was felt to be communicated and heard. Listening was more attentive, more probing questions were asked, in order to understand. In the *relationship-building skills* theme, project managers felt they were more sensitive to others needs and could create more team buy-in and team happiness. In the *collaborating skills* theme project managers applied all their learned skills to be more supportive, and to empower others more, which gives the potential for shared workload and more collaborative relationships.

6.5.1. Learned and applied soft skills

The research aim was to focus on useful soft skills learned from coaching practice. A discussion of applied skills compared to learned skills is supported by the rows of table 6.1 that relate the soft skills from this chapter and the learned soft skills from table 5.5.

<u>Organising theme</u>	<u>Learned soft skills from table 5.5</u>	<u>Applied soft skills from this chapter</u>
<u>Self-management/ Personal skills:</u> Just focus / Increased capacity Cope as coach / Confidence	Be present. Allow space. Personal reflection increased. Be patient, curious. Rationalise discomfort. "Relaxed into it", "letting it flow".	(Use of coach-like stance.) More thinking, expansive, self-reflection, self-coaching. Coaching techniques in armoury.
<u>Communications:</u> Listening on purpose with attention / Listening to hear more Questioning more using open probing questions / Questioning to understand	Proactive listening, staying calm, quiet. Use pause. Empathise. Ask open, deep questions. Consider the right question.	Listening with awareness (+ being present) Using silence + Reflecting back, referring back relating back Open questions (and attitude to get information) Deep, challenging questions Ask right question
<u>Relationship-building:</u> Achieving rapport / Inviting contribution Negotiating agreement / Inviting agreement	Social skills e.g. respectful, exchange personal information. Contracting coaching relationship with easy style. Establishing trust.	Asking open questions (work-related) Invite thoughts and feelings Engaging with others on plans Being more open to agreement e.g. plans, requirements and scope (engagement with stakeholders may be organisation dependent)
<u>Supporting skills/ Collaborative skills:</u> Stepping back / Facilitating work goals Sensing direction / Letting others drive Coaching	"Watch and ask right question". "Remain objective." Use coaching techniques, tools. Follow coachee's direction ("meandering", "like chess"). Get clarity. Explore solutions.	Objective stance Listening/Questioning like coach Using coaching tools Problem-solving together Assert ownership (like contracting for coaching)

Table 6.1 Soft skills learned and applied

Regarding self-management and personal skills, project managers learned to focus through coaching practice: making time for being present and allowing space. They felt more patient and curious, and made time for reflection. They associated these characteristics with adopting the stance of a coach. At work, project managers implied a coach-like stance when using coaching techniques. They were more expansive and continued their reflective practice, with some self-coaching. During coaching practice, participants experienced nerves though confidence grew over time. At work, their new skills were considered an additional and optional personal capability; no anxiety was expressed; rather they felt more self-confident in having the coaching techniques in their armoury.

Communication skills were similar while learning and at work. Coaching practice put emphasis on focussed, active listening while personally staying calm, empathising, and using pause. At work, project managers felt they heard more through better awareness, and self-management. Reflecting back helped to show listening and to achieve mutual understanding, suggesting both aspects now have higher importance. Coaching practice gave permission for open, deep questions and asking the right question. At work, project managers reported using deeper and more challenging questions of the team and stakeholders. They also recognised value in giving consideration to asking the right question because it could draw relevant information from others.

For relationship-building skills, project managers felt they used existing social skills to establish a coaching relationship during coaching practice. At work, when they initiated new relationships, they noticed work-related issues were discussed to build rapport, and sometimes how a new relationship should work was openly explored. In coaching practice trust and contracting were needed to establish agreement. At work, trust and contracting were rarely mentioned. However, project managers felt they were more open about plans, mentioned more agreement with colleagues and were increasingly looking to share responsibilities, which all imply a level of trust and collaborative activity. With influential project stakeholders, project managers may now be able to ask better questions about requirements and scope, but negotiation may not be attempted.

For supporting and collaborating skills, project managers felt they needed to step back and leave responsibility with the coachee to set the agenda and direction of the conversation. At work, facilitation of work goals was the primary aim, yet project managers felt they involved colleagues more in resolution of issues, plans and decision-making, and were prepared to give colleagues more space, focus and time to invite their thoughts. Project managers felt they could step back to use coaching techniques at work, including

GROW, while holding an objective stance. Whereas the coachees had responsibility for making their own progress, project managers encouraged colleagues towards problem-solving being a shared activity and responsibilities were aired in some situations. Although some coaching was reported with the aim of developing others, the activities were not necessarily called coaching. There was no clear application at work of sensing the coachee's direction, beyond inviting contribution from others and hearing what they have to say. This poses a question about the extent to which project managers focus when listening at work because the last chapter made clear that coaching practice enforces attention because the coachee's answers cannot be anticipated.

Although comparison between learned and applied skills is shown not to be simple the following soft skills and aims seem consistent: holding a coach-like stance, listening with awareness, probing questions and consideration of the right question, acting with a desire for mutual understanding and a desire to work collaboratively with mutual agreement. These skills suggest objectives are associated with soft skills. Hurrell et al (2013) certainly indicates that soft skills cannot be considered in isolation from the context of use. Another perspective is that desires are a latent result of adopting a coach-like philosophy.

6.5.2. Coach-like intention

Although skills are the focus of the study, the apparent intentions associated with them seem to be important and to reflect coaching philosophy. For example, the project managers expressed inviting contribution from colleagues, which they recognised was more possible if they listened with focused attention and showed they were listening. They expressed the view that colleagues would feel their opinion was valued which would lead to more communication. This discussion aims to summarise the apparent intentions from the data and uses abductive analysis to suggest that coach-like expectations give a practical rationale for the collaborating skills themes: facilitating work goals, letting others drive and coaching.

In the last chapter project managers showed their understanding of coaching philosophy through the perceived requirements of acting as a coach. At work, project managers appeared to set intention to use coaching techniques, albeit for work goals. They found that holding a coach-like stance at work enabled them to be more people-focused. The objective stance, the self-awareness and giving themselves time to think also led to feeling more capable in difficult situations.

When communicating at work, project managers set intention to be more open to the contribution of others. The changes to listening and questioning were apparently intended to draw thoughts and ideas from colleagues which may improve understanding and

teamwork. The project managers reported wanting to hear all a colleague communicated and what was not communicated. They wanted to make others feel part of a conversation by feeling listened to, apparently appreciating that colleagues need to know their views matter, to feel included, respected and heard.

While the intention to coach was automatically present in coaching practice, the participants were not coaching at work before, so there was no expectation of coaching relationships at work or to change work relationships. Whereas the coaching relationship for coaching practice was new, relationships at work were mostly established or framed by cultural expectations of the work environment. Yet project managers reported intentions that seem similar to coaching relationships. Figure 6.8 depicts three different relationships that project managers appear to now pursue at work; these are itemised and discussed.

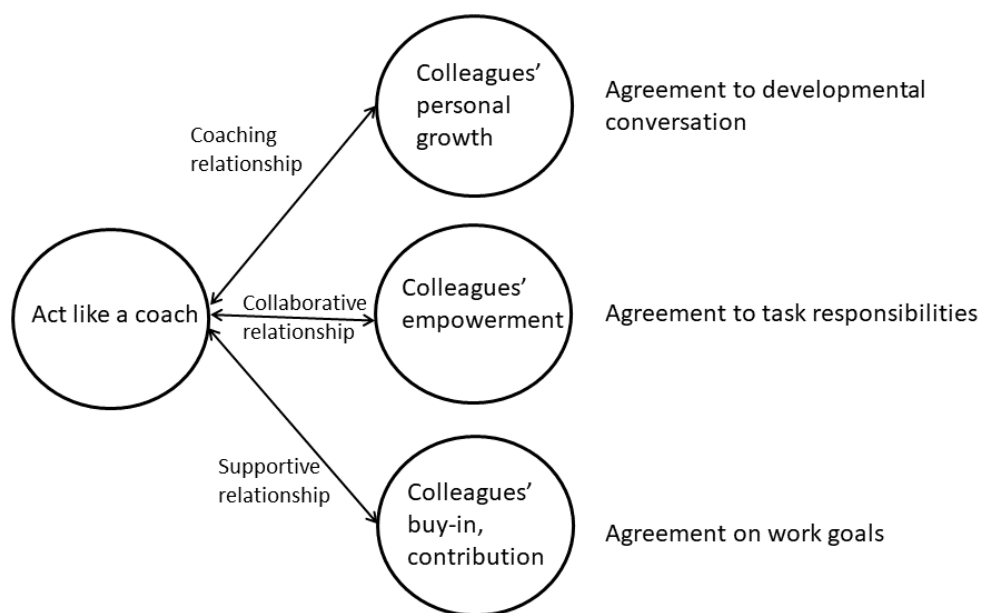


Figure 6.8. Soft-skill intentions for work relationships.

For most colleagues their contribution is being encouraged while facilitating work goals, for team buy-in and happiness. This relationship potentially relates to coaching philosophy as a supportive relationship with accepted goals, but the project manager owns responsibility for the work goals. To empower, project managers are encouraging others to take more responsibility through stepping back to let others drive, typically in problem-solving situations. This is more like coaching because a coachee normally takes

responsibility for decision-making, but colleagues do need to take responsibility. If encouraged or asserted responsibilities are agreed by both parties an overt agreement is established; and delegation becomes possible, for a more collaborative relationship. Such an agreement seems similar to contracting a coaching relationship and offers the basis for a more formal coaching conversation, for development of colleagues on the delegated activity.

The new relationships are inferred on the basis that the learned coaching philosophy has been adopted. It seems plausible that project managers act as if a desired agreement is in place, until proven otherwise, because a colleague may not be aware of coaching philosophy. For facilitating work goals, there is an implication that a project manager may stop being supportive if a colleague is uncommitted to the goals, as Jill reported with a time-wasting colleague. For letting others drive, responsibilities can be asserted, but if the team fails to solve a problem on their own, the desired collaborative relationship is likely to remain a supportive one with the project manager using coaching style questions. For coaching, two project managers reported having developmental conversations, but implied delegation of some responsibilities was part of the collaborative arrangement. Importantly, project managers may have intentions or desires for relationships, but agreement is needed from colleagues.

The desires associated with adopted skills for mutual understanding, contribution from colleagues and mutual agreement can thus be explained by coach-like philosophy. Project managers can adopt this philosophy at work, leading to more flexibility in using their soft skills.

6.5.3. Valued soft-skills development from coaching practice

Although self-coaching can be valued, coaching skills are not fully used in this study. The coaching practice is probably insufficient to be confident as a coach, unless bounded by project work content. Introductory training and practice thus give project managers enough understanding of coaching philosophy to change their soft skills at work. Some participants have pursued further coach training since the study; thus, coaching practice can spark their interest to further improve their capabilities.

All the learned and applied soft skill themes are summarised in figure 6.9, as the soft-skills descriptions from project managers. A discussion then follows of the adopted soft skills, in relation to soft skill requirements for project managers from literature, using appendices 6.1 and 6.2. The lower horizontal rows in the figure represent learned skills from coaching practice introduced in Chapter 5 and the upper rows the applied learning introduced in this chapter. The vertical columns represent the organising themes which are similar in

learning and application for communications and relationship-building but slightly different for the other two skill groupings. In applying learning, project managers used personal skills rather than self-management; this reflects increased confidence in skills compared to coaching practice. Similarly, there is a change of perspective between project managers collaborating at work rather than supporting the coachee, that potentially reflects well-understood work goals rather than the more unknown coachee goals.

Applied learning (mostly work goals)	Increased capacity	Listening to hear more	Inviting contribution	Facilitating work goals
	Increased confidence	Questioning to understand	Inviting agreement	Letting others drive Coaching
Learned skills and outcomes in coach practice (coachee goals)	You cannot do anything else but focus	Listening on purpose with attention	Achieving rapport	Stepping back
	[Cope as coach] out of comfort zone	Questioning more using open probing questions	Negotiating agreement	Sensing direction
	Self-management & personal skills	Communication skills	Relationship-building skills	Supporting & collaborating skills

Figure 6.9. Project managers' soft-skills learning.

Comparison to literature is not straightforward because the meaning of skills is unclear: for example, the required skill *understanding behaviour* (Fisher, 2011) is vague and may need extensive training. However, there is evidence that project managers can have more interest in others after coaching practice. Some skills from literature are not directly exercised during coaching practice, yet the adopted skills show an effect. An example is *stakeholder relationships*, highlighted as a key aspect of project management by Bourne and Walker (2008); the name is not a good explanation since stakeholder relationships may not be different to any other relationship in terms of skill. Yet, the context infers the potential power difference between some stakeholders and project managers, and this study concurs that some project managers may not be able to negotiate with some stakeholders, even though communication is likely to improve.

Reviewing the vertical columns, and comparing to the interpersonal skill literature in Appendix 6.1, the improved personal skills in being able to hold a coach-like stance is valuable because project managers felt more confident even in challenging situations. They appeared to feel calmer through being objective and expansive, which has the potential to help with leadership (Brill et al, 2006; Awan et al, 2015), such as when dealing with ambiguity and change (Stevenson and Starkweather, 2010; Ramazani and Jergeas, 2015), coping in crises and critical incidents (El-Sabaa, 2001; De Carvalho and Junior, 2015; Clarke, 2012), and team conflict (Pinkowska and Lent, 2011; Saunders et al, 2015; Fisher, 2011).

Communication skills are considered most important for project managers in the literature (Ingason and Jónasson, 2009) as well as those mentioned for leadership) and significant modifications are made to add value. Listening with purposeful attention and questioning more using open probing questions are applied to hear and understand more. The intention to probe deeply was noted during coaching practice; the participants felt coaching gave them permission to probe, and this permission has apparently been adopted at work, at least to probe more to draw others' thoughts for improved information and understanding.

Although the literature suggests communication highly important, this study poses the question whether the linkage with relationship-building skills is sufficiently understood. For example, more information may arise by project managers being more aware but also a colleague may be more open, due to feeling listened to and feeling part of a closer relationship. The literature shows requirements for better relationships, especially with the team (Fisher, 2011; Ingason and Jónasson, 2009; Awan et al, 2015) and this can involve negotiation and consensus (De Carvalho and Junior, 2015; Skulmoski & Hartman, 2010). Through coaching practice, project managers are reminded of achieving rapport and negotiating agreement which can be applied at work for improved team-working by engaging others to contribute, encouraging more team responsibility and aspiring to mutual understanding and agreement. These skills may imply more consideration of colleagues' needs (Fisher, 2011), especially because they are given more attention and time to think; and colleagues' contributions are valued. Equally potentially, the focus may be on work performance.

The final column for supportive and collaborative skills implies the adoption of the stance, skills and tools of a coach albeit for work goals. The literature states requirements of delegation (El-Sabaa, 2001; Awan et al, 2015), facilitation (Saunders et al, 2015; Ingason & Jónasson, 2009) and empowering others (Fisher, 2011). All three were shown as

changed intentions at work. Some literature mentions developing others (Geoghegan and Dulewicz, 2008) and there is some interest in the literature for project managers to coach, but the managerial coaching literature is possibly more relevant. In this study coaching was used where a colleague might learn but seemed suggested by the project manager who anticipated the potential value of learning for the coachee, so more part of everyday conversations (Hunt and Weintraub, 2010) rather than formal coaching sessions.

Regarding personal skills and comparing to Appendix 6.2, project managers are likely to be more people-focused after coaching practice. Also, they may be better at problem-solving because they will collaborate more with others to solve issues. Other required skills can only be marked as potential learning. Grant (2007) suggests coaching naturally increases emotional sensitivity to others. People's emotions were noted when learning and at work and awareness is increased. Attention had to be given to rapport, respect and trust, but these were less obvious at work. Emotional or social intelligence may not have changed, but colleagues may perceive a change of behaviour.

All the skills primarily relate to performance of work goals, which may explain why barriers are little mentioned by participants when applying skills. Colleagues and the work environment are more familiar. Participants are in control of how and when they use new skills, and work goals are readily understood. There is resistance to the word coaching because it associates remedial action; agreeing to some collaboration appears preferable, even for development of individuals. All applied skills potentially require an emotional investment, and an investment of time. These investments may be curtailed where coaching techniques do not bring short-term benefit.

This concludes the findings chapters and the research activities. It has been shown that project managers can gain personal growth through coach practice, stimulate more collaborative working and increase project team buy-in and happiness. This chapter has shown the adoption of a coach-like stance at work that promotes self-reflection and self-coaching, as well as changes to interpersonal skills for the benefit of project work. Chapter seven concludes the thesis with an analysis of the findings and their implications for stakeholders.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The conclusion summarises the study and findings, then discusses the contributions for coaching, soft skills and project management disciplines. It also gives some suggestions for further research, and a review of this pragmatist study. The prime focus for the study was the soft-skill experiences of seven project managers during a six-month period when they acted as a novice coach and applied soft-skills learning at work. The contribution aims were to add to the limited coaching literature on the benefits of coaching to the coach, to project management literature on the relevance of coaching practice to project managers' development and to the wider understanding of how soft skills can be developed through coaching practice. The original research question was: 'In what ways do project managers develop soft skills through coaching practice?', to focus on the soft skills useful to project managers. The project managers showed anxiety in acting as coach similarly to other novice coaches (De Haan, 2008). Yet, they applied learned skills at work in similar ways to other managers (Hunt and Weintraub, 2010) that could be useful to anyone needing to collaborate. Contributions to understanding novice coaches' learning and elements of managerial coaching are therefore included.

The literature review explored the definition of coaching and benefits of coaching to the coach, soft skills and their development, project manager development, and managerial coaching. The variability of definition and meaning of soft skills was highlighted as challenging, but a potential model of personal, interpersonal and role-related soft skills emerged where the role-related skills express aims for how soft skills are used. For project managers, soft skills are desirable, and can impact project success, particularly communication, relationship-building skills and critical thinking skills, yet are rarely developed intentionally. Coaches' soft skills are a combination of communication, relational and facilitation skills (Maltbia et al, 2014) and potentially useful to any manager in any conversation (Grant, 2017). Many different soft-skill development methods are available, especially in universities. Real practice, self-learning and receiving feedback to support learning are considered ideal. The review confirmed that using coaching practice as a soft-skills development method had potential because coaching practice provides real practice with the opportunity for some feedback from a coachee.

The updated conceptual framework in figure 2.4 emphasises that an organisational viewpoint pulls together the three disjoint disciplines of soft skills, project management and managerial coaching. An organisational coaching culture could link all three areas and provide theoretical underpinning for soft skills development for improved organisational performance. Hawkins (2012) asserts that coaching is a means to an end,

not an end in itself, which is similar to the view that soft skills are dependent on their context of use (Hurrell et al, 2013). A coaching culture can encourage coach training (Garvey et al, 2014) and motivate practice. This study questions whether training and practice would be helpful to more employees than managers.

The participative action research study provided initial coach training to seven project managers, then each one was introduced to their coachee, and left to organise six coaching sessions over six months. Interviews after each of the first three and the last coaching sessions gathered data relating to learned and applied soft skills. Using a pragmatist philosophy, thematic analysis and abduction, learned and applied soft skills have been identified from project managers' descriptions. Coach-like soft skills were learned, adapted and valued, resulting in personal growth for project managers who became more supportive or collaborative with work colleagues. Rather than becoming coaches, project managers use the soft skills learning to work more effectively. According to Bloom's taxonomy (Krathwohl, 2002), the *creative* stage is reached because learned skills are tuned to work needs. Even though adoption of a coach-like philosophy is apparent from the data, work goals set a boundary to applied skills. Yet the positive response from seven project managers suggests that using coaching practice for soft-skills development has potential for wider use, particularly improved collaboration.

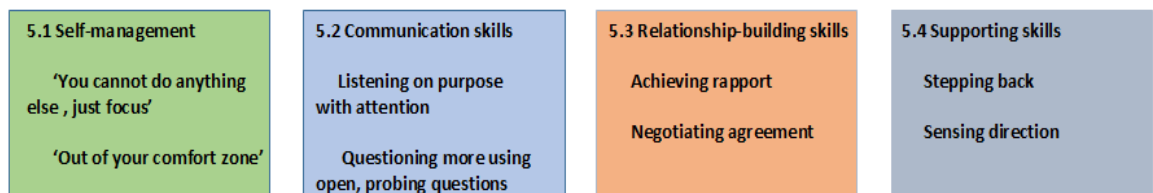
The literature review highlighted a gap in how the coach benefits from coaching. In the study, project managers did not find coaching practice easy, but expressed personal growth that made them feel better able to do their job. The review also highlighted gaps in the understanding of soft skills, the development of soft skills particularly for project managers and the activities of managerial coaching, along with a potential gap in understanding managers' motivation to coach. Three contributions follow. The first acknowledges the benefits to novice coaches from coaching practice by developing soft skills understanding and flexibility. This includes a methodological contribution of using stick figure drawings to highlight personal growth for project managers. The second presents the benefits of coaching practice to managers that may help to explain activities and motivation. The way project managers used the skills may help any manager to understand the benefits of having the option of adopting a coach-like, non-directive philosophy. The third proposes a general soft-skills framework based on the findings and literature, to improve soft-skills understanding.

7.1. Benefits to novice coaches

This section focuses on the project managers as novice coaches. It is acknowledged that successful project managers may have certain characteristics (Creasy and Anantatmula,

2013) that make the benefits of coaching unique. However, the project managers suggested that the learning which caused most anxiety related to the content of coaching practice conversations and to the need to overcome personal, possibly work or cultural habits, rather than the difficulty of different communications and relationship-building skills. Thus, learning may be applicable to anyone at work not familiar with coaching.

A copy of figure 5.1 is included here for easy reference to the learned soft skills from coaching practice. The most learning related to focusing attention, listening, questioning, stepping back on the personal need to find a solution and sensing the coachee's direction of thought. Embedded within this learning is the adopted coaching philosophy that establishes the coachee with responsibility for the agenda and making their own decisions. Using soft-skill groupings self-management, communication skills and relationship-building skills that aligned with the soft-skills model emerging from the literature review (figure 2.3) highlighted two particular coaching skills of stepping back and sensing direction which depended on learned skills from the other groupings. The intentions to step back and follow the coachee's thoughts and feelings are considered coaching techniques that demand the focus, the purposeful listening, probing questions and awareness of rapport and agreement.



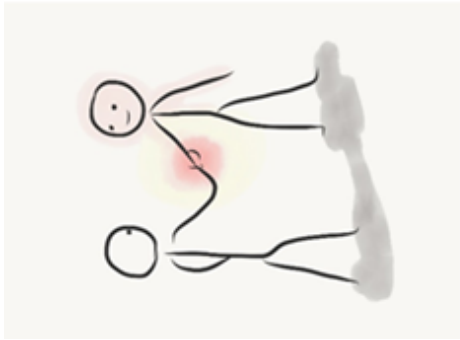
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The learned skills give more flexibility in the use of soft skills which can be used in roles outside of coaching. Project managers apparently recognised the value of paying more attention to others, to focus when listening to colleagues, and to use probing questions to encourage team members to think. These skills are potentially beneficial to anyone, because work is becoming increasingly complex where plans can have unpredictable outcomes (Bredillet, 2016) and self-organising teams are used for agile response to client demands (Parker, Holesgrove and Pathak, 2015). Coaching practice apparently gave project managers permission to change their approach, which suggests the coaching mindset is key, particularly the decision to stand back and follow another person's thought processes. Bachkirova and Smith (2015) suggest that novice coaches need rules to guide

their actions, even though they may later adopt a more flexible and intuitive approach according to need. In this study, the training took a clear stance at odds with traditional command and control style management, to aim to not give any direction at all.

Heightened awareness of relationship characteristics such as focused attention, rapport, trust, respect and empathy was apparent in project managers. These characteristics represent linkage between communication and relationship-building skills that are recognised in coaching. Rogers (2008) argues that coaching works because of the coaching relationship, a partnership for supporting change based on trust, rapport and empathy. She gives an example of a coach showing poor respect to the coachee, but that 'the intention to help [was] so strongly conveyed' that some positive outcomes resulted. The ICF competency list too demands an agreed and trusting relationship, use of listening, questioning and direct communication skills and having intentions that feedback occurs and the client takes positive action. This study suggests that novice coaches gain the ability for effective communication that is underpinned by a good relationship and is useful outside of coaching, to support another person to reflect and act.

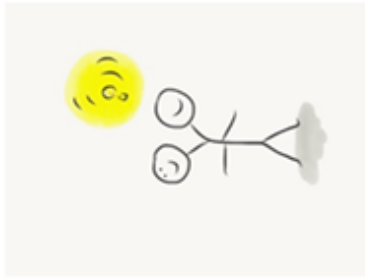
Regarding personal skills, this study corroborates the very little literature suggesting benefit from learning to act as coach. Reflection and self-coaching results in improved leadership skills (Mukherjee, 2012) and self-efficacy (Van Nieuwerburg and Tong, 2013; Ammentorp and Kofoed, 2010). Project managers overcame their initial discomfort as a coach to focus their attention, then apply personal and interpersonal skills to support another project manager. The Ammentorp and Kofoed (2010) study showed neo-natal nurses improved their relationships with parents, just as project managers sought to improve their working relationships in this study. The self-efficacy for nurse and project managers extends beyond coaching activities. Self-confidence is built alongside skill capacity and is expressed as personal growth. The set of stick figures is incorporated into figure 7.1 as a reminder of the expressed capabilities, such as feeling more like a leader, more able to deal with people and workload. Thus, acting as a coach, even over a short period, can be personally beneficial.



"Added confidence as able to cope with involved, people-related, team-related scenarios. Willing to give people more opportunity to have an informal discussion, and [hold] a space between us" [Susan]



"I see more leadership, more like a leader now, a little more confident, more aware" [Adèle]



"A smiley face with a light bulb on top. I'm smiling because I'm happy I've gone through this experience. It's also been useful. It could be a bit of a Janus being two headed each with a smile. [Mark]

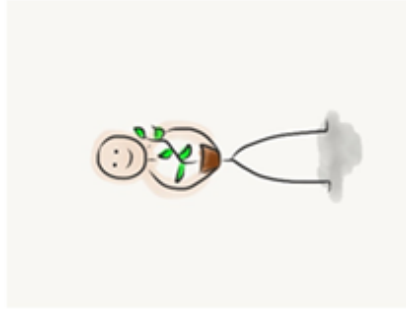


"The stick man six months ago would have had the weight of the world on his shoulders. The stick man now doesn't have the weight of the world on his shoulders he's just helping everybody get from where they are to where they need to be on that world, so it's very much a sign-posting and helping them rather than collapsing under the weight of everything" [Peter]

Andrew – no picture
 "More internal reflection/planning, more collaborative."



A smile and open arms (willingness to learn and embrace new things), a crowd, more expansive than before. [Bill]



"A lot more confidence, some personal development, also carrying 'GROW' model" [Jill]

Figure 7.1 All stick figures

A methodological contribution is claimed from the use of these stick figures, because the project managers did not actually draw them. Their imagined drawing apparently helped to elicit their knowing about their personal experience. In addition, having one artist draw the figures from the descriptive words means that they can be compared visually.

Presentational knowing has been claimed, but the words suggest a more definite propositional knowing (Heron and Reason, 1997) about leadership and acting differently with others. In contrast, the project manager who did not imagine a stick figure may have expressed thoughts that were not quite so well-formulated about his personal change. The images and words highlight a sense of growth for all project managers, and most reflect that interacting with other people is part of the growth.

In summary, novice coaches can use coaching skills in all their relationships, not just when coaching. This is an important advantage for building effective relationships through more flexible communication built on trust.

7.2. Benefits of coaching practice to managers

The findings concur with managerial coaching literature that the soft skills of coaching can provide a means to achieve work goals (Grant, 2017). They challenge though, current realities in respect of development of both coach and coachee. The personal benefits to managers are little recognised similarly to novice coaches. In addition, managers' coaching activities for developing staff are questioned; managers may only coach to work goals.

The project managers showed they applied their coaching techniques at work with different behaviour such as being more supportive to colleagues. Communications and relationship-building have the potential to improve project success (Hagen and Park, 2013) and project managers used their new skills to change work relationships. Project managers are similar to other managers in their role to encourage staff to achieve performance goals, so managers could use coaching skills in similar ways.

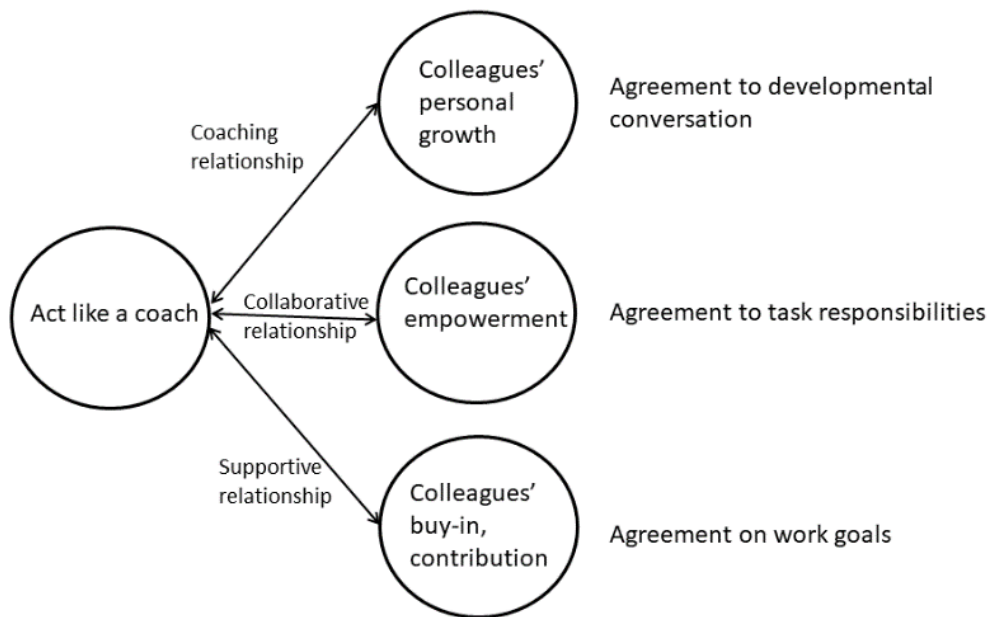
Counter-intuitively, project managers found value in investing time in supporting others more because better information can be shared. Plans and workload could be negotiated; team-buy-in and less stress for the manager could result. Coaching is limited, though; the valued learned skills may be restricted to those shown in figure 7.2. Compared to figure 6.9, project managers may not want to *cope as coach* or use *sensing direction* beyond letting others drive tasks. This figure relates the skill outcomes expected at work from understanding a non-directive coaching philosophy and just six sessions of coaching practice.

Any manager interested in performance may originally have a similar focus on task, but after coaching practice perceive the benefits of becoming more people focused. Though project managers considered their formal coaching practice was challenging, they found the application of skills at work straightforward, almost obvious and desirable, possibly because of established relationships. Communication became more effective, resulting in more sharing of project information. Communication became more assertive, with responsibilities discussed, which enabled empowerment and delegation.

<u>Personal skills</u>	<u>Communication skills</u>	<u>Relationship-building skills</u>	<u>Supporting & collaborating skills</u>
Increased capacity	Listening to hear more	Inviting contribution	Facilitating work goals
Increased confidence	Questioning to understand	Inviting agreement	Letting others drive
(Cope as coach?)			(Sensing direction?)

Figure 7.2. Adopted soft skills.

Figure 6.8 is included again here to highlight the changed work behaviours that reflect the learning potential for managers in adopting a coach-like stance even if not always agreeing a coaching relationship. Supportive or collaborative conversations were regarded by project managers to be more common than coaching ones and potentially provide a pathway to a coaching relationship. This is important because literature debates the meaning of managerial coaching whether coach-like conversations (Grant, 2017) or a formal role as in team-coaching (Lawrence, 2017). It also makes a distinction between such conversations and the developmental coaching that internal coaches might do (St.John-Brooks, 2018). Project managers felt the changed intention for work relationships to be supportive or collaborative was beneficial to them. Thus, coaching practice can help to motivate managers to use coach-like conversations with staff.



Copy of figure 6.8.

Figure 6.8 shows three relationship intentions. Subsequent to coaching practice, project managers aim to give more support to colleagues through improved listening, questioning and relating skills; more information can be conveyed to them as a result. They are now ready to give time and space for listening, so others have time to think and to share relevant information. Asking the right probing question helps to elicit valuable project data. These supportive relationships are underpinned by agreement to work goals. Project managers appear more open about plans, desire colleagues' buy-in and encourage input from colleagues. Beyond being supportive, they want others to contribute more, and to take more responsibility. In problem-solving situations, they are more assertive about who owns the problem. Ultimately delegation is desired because it provides the personal benefit of workload being shared and is a collaborative relationship. In the case where responsibilities are agreed, developmental coaching can be used on the topic. Thus, a delegated responsibility can provide the rationale for a coaching relationship of interest to both parties. This way of looking at relationships could apply to managers, and bring the team benefits that project managers reported. This study highlights that the intentions of both the manager and the employee in any situation is important to consider and affects the relationship that is established between them.

Despite some resistance to the word coaching, project managers have shown that a coach-like philosophy, not just skills, can be useful, because it identifies an effective stance for self-management, communication and relationship-building behaviour. This

coach stance can help managers to cope in difficult circumstances typical of their stressful role. Using GROW alongside can also be helpful, because the stance and tool allow managers to remain calm, to take a more objective and expansive viewpoint and to work with others to resolve issues. Encouraging others to take responsibility is part of the coaching stance, giving managers more flexibility to choose whether to give direction, to support, to empower, to delegate or to coach in any situation. The explanation that managerial coaching is supporting staff to contribute and to take responsibility, so to delegate effectively, may help to motivate managers to use coaching with a focus on work goals.

7.3. Proposed soft-skills framework

The literature review has shown shows many lists and taxonomies of soft skills and most focus on a particular context: examples are Matteson et al (2016) for librarians, Weber et al (2010) for managers, Maltbia et al (2014) for coaches. General taxonomies may thus be impossible. Yet, communications and relationship-building skills are applicable to all. A soft-skills framework is now proposed that builds on the findings and soft skills model in figure 2.3. A comparison is made here to the existing taxonomy, Klein et al (2006) to promote further effort towards a general taxonomy for communication and relationship-building skills.

In this study, the coaching skills of *stepping back* and *sensing direction* have been asserted as intentions that require a combination of personal, communication, and relationship-building skills. Pichler and Beenen (2014) suggest supporting, motivating and resolving conflict represent managers' soft skills and these also look like intentions requiring similar skills. Additionally, Pichler and Beenen originally included self-management and communications but considered them fundamental to the three skills. The proposed framework extends this *intention* viewpoint to all relationships, because recognised interpersonal skill groupings such as empowering others, creating team spirit, social skills, leadership or management all imply relationship intentions. These intentions are fulfilled, as they are in coaching, by personal, communication and relationship-building skills, which do not innately embed intentions for use of a relationship. Communication, for example, conjures the possibility of an associated knowledgebase of skills which may be tailorable for many different situations. For example, writing reports is knowledge that may not be used during coaching.

The proposed framework shown in figure 7.3 is similar the model from figure 2.3 with the concentric rings representing one individual's soft skills and slightly different ring boundaries. The outer layer represents the soft skills associated with a role that has some

intentions for a relationship with others and excludes communication and relationship-building. The middle effective communication layer represents combinations of self-management, communication, and relationship-building skills that are involved in effective communication. It aims to include interdependencies discussed in chapter five, including focused attention, trust and rapport. The central core represents personal characteristics and thinking skills but not self-management specific to communication with others.

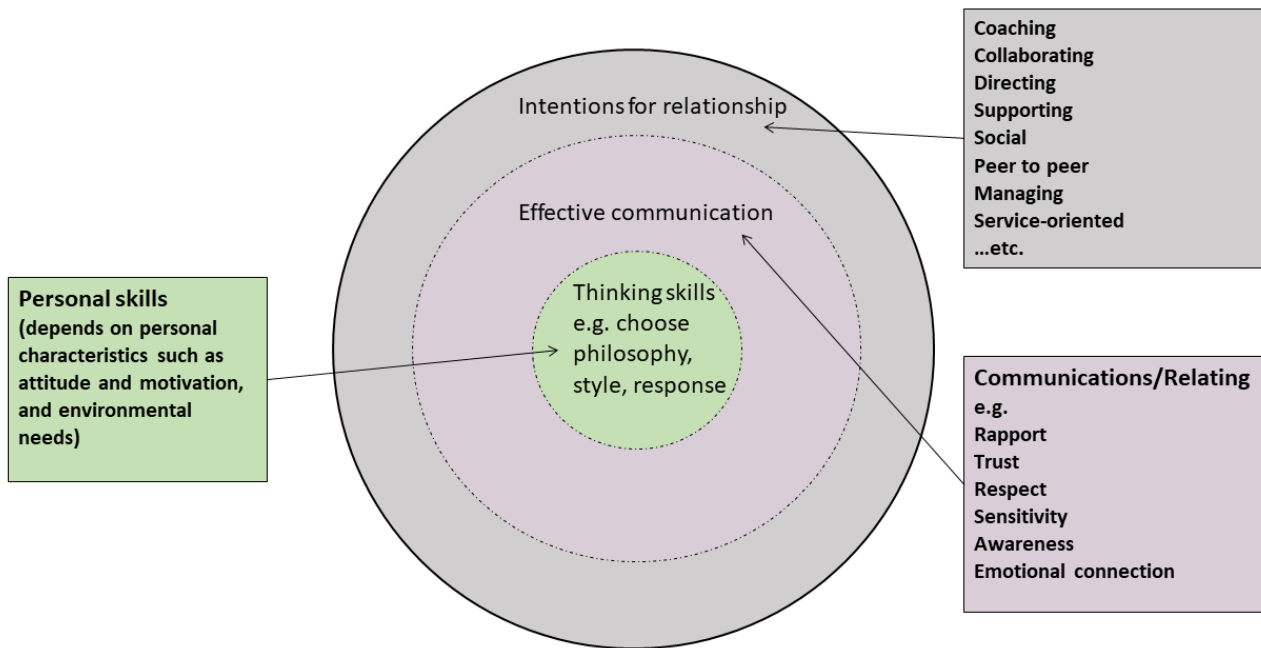


Figure 7.3. Proposed soft-skills framework for general use.

Comparing this proposal for effective communication with the Klein et al (2006) 'taxonomy of interpersonal performance', IPS, there are differences to be explored. However, effective communication could better support the idea of a skill set which Matteson et al (2016) align with knitting, where a knowledgebase can be referred to for the appropriate action. Matteson et al complain that the term *communication* is not clear and this study shows relationship-building and self-management skills must be included to fully understand communication. Traditionally communication models highlight the challenges of receivers not getting the actual communication intended from the sender (Fiske, 2010). This study finds that filters include respect, trust, empathy, rapport and attention; these may block the intended communication. Thus, communication is affected by the relationship between those communicating. This relates to verbal presentations where

there are many ways to engage the audience's attention (Kermode, 2013) that may help rapport, but do not guarantee that the audience will listen or agree.

Klein et al (2006) explain interpersonal interaction episodes which depend on environmental setting, goals and motivation, roles and social rules and norms. They express dependency, too, on individual differences such as intelligences, traits and team/collective orientation. The new framework also embraces the idea of interpersonal interaction and individual differences and incorporates the contextual use of a role, style or philosophy. Still, the lists of communication and relationship-building skills are different between IPS and the proposed framework. The IPS communication skills include active listening, oral communications, written communications, assertive communications and non-verbal communication. The IPS relationship-building skills are cooperation and coordination, trust, intercultural sensitivity, service orientation, self-presentation, social influence and conflict resolution or negotiation.

From this study, I argue IPS neither includes enough information about presence when listening nor effective questioning, nor all linkages between communicating and relating. I suggest active listening could be improved to explain the dependence on attention, possibly adding interpretive listening (Hill, 2016). From the IPS list of relationship-building skills, I propose only those that contribute to effective communication are included in this layer: trust and intercultural sensitivity. The building and maintenance of rapport needs to be added to them to cover any kind of interpersonal sensitivity.

The intentions-for-relationship skill grouping is new in comparison to IPS. The other relationship-building skills in IPS are proposed to be included here: cooperation and coordination, service orientation, self-presentation, social influence, conflict resolution or negotiation. I propose these skills are better considered as intentions that use effective communication and thinking skills because they rely on the intentions of others. Bratman (2009) indicates intention is part of personal planning that must be 'consistent with our beliefs' (p153), but for social situations shared intention is challenging because it depends on the intention of each person involved. Thus, an individual can have intention but agreement is required for shared intention. In coaching, coach and coachee(s) agree to an equal power relationship and contract relevant details of the relationship. At work, it is expected that work colleagues share an intention to work together, which may be enabled by the organisational culture or set by job roles. However, this proposed framework highlights that personal, relationship-building and communication skills are necessary to support the negotiation and agreement of activities involved in shared intention.

Coaching implies adoption of a philosophy that guides intentions. A role might include a philosophy or mindset but must clarify intentions for relationships. Effective communication represents a potential skill database that includes more skills than necessarily needed with a particular relationship role. Personal thinking skills are represented by the inner layer and assume impact from emotions, attitudes, traits and motivation. The benefit of this framework is the clarity that soft skills represent flexibility in human interactions, with decision-making needed about what to use when, and that another person's intentions can limit desired intentions for a relationship.

7.4. Limitations and further research

This has been a small study yet has contributed soft-skill descriptions for those skills project managers learn through coach practice, given details of the resultant benefits of coaching to the coach and presented ideas for a general soft-skills framework. These findings raise questions about how much training and coach practice are actually needed to effect the same changes, who could benefit from similar collaborative skills and the usefulness of the soft-skills framework. Further research is required to answer such questions. This section also takes a closer look at the way this research was approached and separates the discussion for coaching, project management, and soft-skills disciplines

7.4.1. Opportunities for the coaching discipline

This study has shown potential benefits of learning a coach-like stance for more people than coaches or managers. Ladyshevsky (2014) presents the idea of peer coaching, which could be considered to embrace this, but still the emphasis is on the coachee benefiting from coaching. This study poses a more general question whether coaching, particularly managerial coaching, should be considered a model for using soft skills that is not a mutually agreed coaching relationship. Ideas follow for describing managerial coaching and how coaching practice effected the change in project managers, to encourage more discussion and research into these aspects.

Managerial coaching could be described as a set of soft skills that managers use to support an employee with a *stepping-back* attitude which results in more questioning than telling. Coaching is then a way of managing (Garvey et al, 2014) and managers only have to think about one role. The project managers tended not to formally coach at work, mainly they had conversations about work goals. They learned that coaching is based on agreement to collaborate, and at work they only found agreement possible in relation to work goals and responsibilities. They became more open to collaboration, possibly having been given insight in how to agree to collaborate. They also became more confident about

asserting responsibilities and used agreement to underpin developmental conversations. Managers, too, possibly only have successful coaching conversations with those who accept responsibility and are looking to develop. This study did not investigate how often the project managers used their new skills, but further research could look at when a skill such as attentive listening is used and not used.

A current view is that managers have a coach role (Rock and Donde, 2008b). The project managers certainly showed they could be (novice) coaches in their coaching practice. However, more research about managers' coaching activities is ideal since managerial coaching is potentially a particular use of soft skills. Also, the lack of agreement potentially leads to coaching being perceived negatively, because it is imposed rather than an opportunity to negotiate the relationship and agenda. In essence, the issue is whether a manager has the power to decide when to coach an employee or whether the employee has more autonomy and responsibility to choose. This study highlights that a manager can encourage others to contribute or to become empowered, but unless there is agreement, coaching may be unsuccessful.

An underlying issue is that coaching may not be clear to employees, who need to take responsibility for a coaching conversation. Potentially self-responsibility is an unspoken concept. More research could be done regarding agreement, particular what coaching employees expect and the pros and cons of agreement. The subtle balance of stance between encouraging staff and staff seeking their own improvement could also be explored, though may be employee dependent.

Regarding why coaching practice caused project managers to change their behaviour, I suggest two potential contributing factors for self-efficacy, both relating to permission for different behaviour. Firstly, project managers related that they felt coaching allowed them time to focus, to think about the right question, and to ask probing questions respectfully. This permission appeared to carry over into work, presumably within their own span of control, despite time-pressures. Apparently, there were sufficient personal and project motivators to support this. Secondly, the project managers found that taking a coach-like stance in difficult situations gave them permission to stand back and encourage others to think and get involved. Calm facilitation, rather than being stressed to have the solution immediately is a potentially powerful emotional switch, supported by the philosophy to remain objective and expansive. It seems that coaching philosophy, processes, tools and skills have instilled permission for the change of work stance. It would be interesting to compare coaching practice with soft skills training that merely emphasised the required intention to support another person to think.

Permission to invest in time for learning seems important. As well as time for self-reflection, even self-coaching, project managers gave themselves permission to take more time to support and collaborate with others, even when knowing this could take longer than telling others what to do. My impression was that project managers saw benefits for the coachee in coaching practice, and for themselves in self-coaching, then experimented at work to see what would happen if they gave others more attention and thinking time. A belief in personal growth and the willingness and ability to support another person to think more could be useful for any collaborative workers. It would be interesting to invite collaborative workers to coach training and practice.

It is acknowledged that some managers have no training for coaching; the project managers in this study felt the training was important. Having to create a formal coaching relationship may be relevant learning too, because of the trust factor. Significantly, the project managers highlighted the results of acting as a coach were the change to their soft skills and intentions at work, which were felt to result from learning coaching skills and mindset. The introductory training used in this study could not cover the range of skills potentially useful: matching styles, eliciting thoughts and feelings into the coaching conversation and building trust. There is potential for investigating different training content and amounts of coaching practice to understand the influence on outcomes. It is acknowledged that project managers' motivation to coach can be questioned, as it is for managers (Hunt and Weintraub, 2010), but the amount of training and practice (and perhaps support) that is required to become confident to coach could be investigated.

In summary, having ensured that this study did not involve project managers being coached by an experienced coach, the findings question the difference between coaching and other uses of soft skills with particular intentions. Unless coaching philosophies are made clear, such as perhaps in a coaching culture, coaching may be a subjective use of soft skills. Cultural expectations of soft skills' use may be ideal because this study suggests use depends on perceived value related to personal or project benefit; there is always a risk of investing time with someone from whom the desired contribution is not achieved. Since project managers work with other people, it is perhaps surprising that they found the coach skills new, but the coaching philosophy potentially shows the opportunities to understand the perceived permission to invest time and to ask probing questions.

7.4.2 Opportunities for project management

An approach for developing project managers' soft skills has been introduced that results in personal growth and more collaborative work relationships. Figure 7.4 presents this Project Manager Soft-Skills Development model (PMSSD), showing the project manager who undergoes introductory coach training on the left, and other people needed to support development are shown on the right. The learned soft skills are a subset of the proposed soft skills framework represented by the concentric rings.

This model highlights the potential for personal and project benefits and is aimed at those who must consider the development of project managers. To use the model, appropriate training, support and provision of willing, ideally previously unknown project managers to act as coachees must be arranged. Some skill improvements give short-term gains such as team buy-in, more effective teamwork and project managers' personal growth that includes self-coaching. Some may bring longer-term benefits in developing others, through empowerment, delegation and coaching.

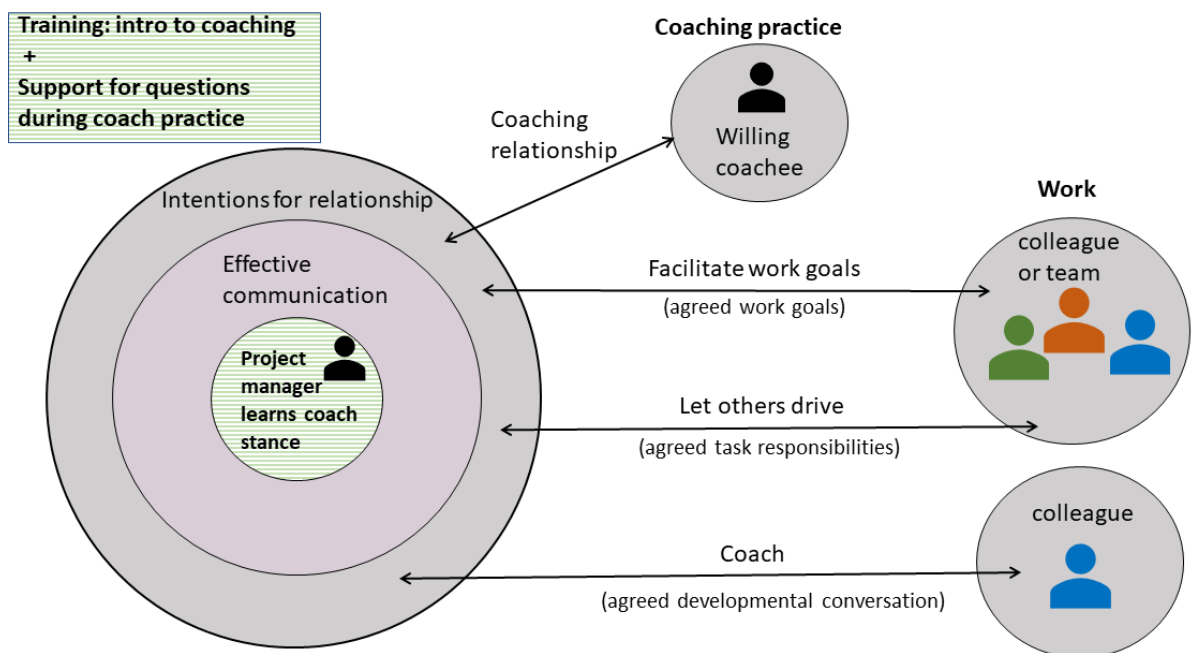


Figure 7.4. Project Manager Soft-Skills Development model.

The learned outcomes from coaching practice are shown by the arrows; and imply that learners must currently have work colleagues to apply the learning. The coachee and

colleagues are also shown in circles to represent that they too have associated soft skills and intentions. Facilitation of work goals by giving others more time, space and attention, allows others to contribute more. The learning to let an individual or team drive tasks uses the assertion of responsibilities where appropriate to empower others to take responsibility. Coaching-style conversations may switch back to facilitating work goals if colleagues do not take responsibility. Although self-coaching may be used more than developing others, coaching offers a framework for delegation with agreement. Developmental conversations are then enabled through that agreement by both parties; the agenda is most likely the shared workload of mutual interest.

Essentially, after training and coaching practice, project managers have new ways to relate to and communicate with others, to improve effectiveness. They learn the stance of a coach and show more sensitivity to colleagues. They can give time to listen because a colleague needs to be heard. They can encourage input from colleagues by being more open and showing that they value others' input. They can get more clarity during conversations with individuals, team and stakeholders. Fundamentally they learn to step back, to listen and question well while allowing the space for others to contribute and become empowered.

Future studies could focus much more on improved performance; this study suggests better team-working, but project outcomes matter. Comparing those project managers who have had coaching practice and those who have not would now be meaningful, assuming the possibility of evaluating performance. The colleagues of project managers with improved soft skills could also provide their views on effective communications, buy-in, team happiness and empowerment before and after the learning. Project managers could assess their own levels of self-reflection, awareness, expansiveness, self-confidence and self-coaching.

Comparing alternative soft-skill development methods is also possible with project performance data. Otherwise, self- or 360-assessment could be used. In this study, the simple 1-10 self-scoring on skills was not completely successful, but the finalised list of soft-skill descriptions is an improved list over the pre-data analysis version. Also, the understanding of different relationships could help in surveys or interviews.

The interviews did not ask directly about relationship intentions. The idea that coaching gives permission for certain behaviour challenges where the permission comes from. More research could identify the influence of coaching philosophy on this compared against organisational expectations, or an individual's own habitual expectations. Self-observation through journals might be necessary to capture intentions. Colleagues may

be able to give 360 feedback on their perception of relationship changes. Similarly, evaluation of skills' use, in the sense of how often or how well, was not a priority in this study. Yet, use of learned skills is potentially different at work compared with during coaching practice, and may change over time. Again, encouraging the journaling of their experiences could give more insight into the detail of soft-skills usage.

Regarding the introductory training, it could be argued that reference to professional coach competencies was not necessary for project managers. Certainly not all project managers may coach at work. Some project managers reported feeling uncomfortable during coach practice due to the topics for coaching. This suggests an opportunity to investigate specific training needs for being supportive or collaborative. However, the project managers did manage to coach and the discomfort may have supported their learning (Mezirow, 1994). Some found coaching useful for team members with delegated tasks. This presents an opportunity to explore the benefits of coaching conversations for project managers. Claxton et al (2011) reinforce that learning must become second nature for teaching to be considered successful, so continued coaching practice is needed to improve coach skills. This study used only six coaching practice sessions with one coachee which enabled an understanding of the disposition to act like a coach. Experiments with different amounts of practice would be good, as well as monitoring for ongoing training needs. A range of additional training topics could also be considered, such as trust in relationships and encouragement versus negotiation and agreement.

Predicting whether coaching practice will be valuable to any project team members is challenging because assessing soft skills is difficult. Yet this study suggests that serious consideration is given to the potential for personal growth. Perhaps more importantly for an organisation, there is potential for improved teamwork through effective communication with a collaborative mindset. The questions are whether improved self-efficacy and teamwork skills are sufficient justification and whether all employees will respond as well as project managers, who admittedly chose to participate. Offering the opportunity may identify those wanting to grow.

7.4.3. Opportunities for the soft-skills discipline

The use of the word disposition rather than soft skill (Claxton et al, 2016) is interesting because disposition represents the likelihood of using a soft skill in an appropriate situation. Disposition is associated with an individual and has the benefit of separating motivation and capability for any specific situation. Coach training and practice potentially develops the disposition to act as a coach. Using this terminology could support clear separation from issues of motivation and when to use the skills. Those colleagues who

respond well to support or empowerment are potentially likely to receive more support or empowerment.

Further work is necessary to build a general set of communication and relationship-building skills that are clear and distinct. The study has shown a lack of understanding and attention to the linkages between communication and relationship-building. The soft-skills framework aims to put focus on this gap. Although neuroscience may be needed to fully understand this linkage, project managers can understand that presence when listening has significant effect and easily make improvements using existing capabilities. More attention on tools for individuals to sense their presence, empathy, rapport, trust and respect in different situations could help.

According to Matteson et al (2016), 'developing skills merely requires [...] the opportunity to practice the actions, and feedback on those actions' (p83), which implies ongoing practice and feedback. In coaching, feedback is challenging, because any observer of the skills is not part of the coaching relationship and therefore may not understand what is happening (Myers, 2014). Yet, assessment of coaching practice is available for professional credentials, by observing for coaching competencies. However, this assesses coaching rather than soft skills. Assessment and feedback on effective communication skills might be a good focus for research.

The lack of understanding of soft skills suggests an opportunity to increase the general awareness in organisations, particularly of effective communication skills for collaboration. Because the findings suggest that collaborative skills are a subset of coaching skills and a professional competency framework exists for coaches, it is possible that a competency framework could be created for effective collaboration. For development, collaboration is a recognised organisational activity and thus provides real practice.

Further work on the soft-skill framework is recommended. Separation into effective communication and role-related skills could avoid *soft* terminology, which is unhelpful according to Jubas and Butterwick (2008). Cockburn (1991) also explains how technological change caused men to feel deskilled through having to retrain into softer roles. Claxton et al (2011) advocate measures of *strength*, *breadth* and *depth* in soft-skill learning, which could potentially be incorporated into a competency framework. Strength is a measure of self-initiation of any skill. Breadth is a measure of the range of contexts in which a skill is displayed. Depth is a measure of sophistication of use of the skill.

7.5. Review of study

The research question demanded focus and pragmatism has helped to keep me focused on the usefulness of coaching practice to project managers. Abduction has provided valuable insights through using established soft-skills groupings from the literature review including that coaching philosophy was being applied at work in association with learned soft skills. The soft-skills framework has arisen from what project managers perceived as learning, without necessarily understanding all the details of how communications and relationship-building skills work. Coaching apparently sets a framework for soft skills that is potentially generalisable yet sets a philosophy for human relationships.

The learning process of a thesis has been longer than expected but has sustained my interest through the evolution of my understanding of coaching and soft skills. I am attracted to this quote from Forester (2013, p3) who advocates critical pragmatism to engage, 'deconstructive skepticism toward a reconstructive imagination, from presumptions of impossibility to explorations of possibility'. My scepticism about people desiring coaching, as well as the likelihood of them not being professionally coached in organisations, prompted the study. This study validates my belief that the learning to coach, even to dip into it, brings valuable understanding about coaching, to enable the desire for coaching and self-management to be a coachee.

I am quietly hopeful that the use of coaching practice to develop soft skills in project managers can open minds to better understand the potential of coaching practice, particularly for personal growth and improved teamwork. Yet, there are challenges with optimism because of the apparent difficulty in understanding coaching, particularly the non-directive style. Yet, I have shown that project managers think, feel and act differently after coaching practice; the implication is others can too.

The results seem very positive because the participants are all very happy about their outcomes and several have taken more coach training. I have struggled to make sense of the soft skills throughout the study and am very pleased to share my ideas on the soft-skills framework. I am now more aware of the many nuances to a definition of managerial coaching and feel positive about what could be achieved by the coaching and soft-skills disciplines working together on this. Exploring agreement for a better understanding of shared intention feels like a valuable concept for my coaching practice.

Managerial coaching was chosen for good reasons over peer-coaching, which could be used in an equally interesting but different study. The coaching practice may be easier to arrange, but the practice coachee being someone unknown potentially assists learning

and ensures contracting is covered. The readiness of colleagues for collaborative working would be interesting to compare with coachee readiness (Kretzschmar, 2010) but all learners in peer coaching would learn about coaching.

This study has not addressed emotional intelligence and it is interesting that emotional sensitivity increases (Grant, 2007) through coaching practice. A better understanding of emotional sensitivity is potentially open to research. This may be a feature of the need for agreement to achieve a specific type of relationship, say a collaborative one at work.

There are some niggling frustrations inevitably, but all represent learning. The loss of Coachee1 and the trust issue for Coach2 and Coachee2 suggest I could have asked more questions when selecting participants. I also wish I had asked the participants to draw their own stick figures because this would have made them an even more powerful indicator of personal growth. I wish I had had more experience of emotional content in my coaching to anticipate emotional sensitivity being an important area for questioning, but project managers may find this difficult, as I do. Although I took a coach supervision course to support the study, I did not have enough experience in time, to explore whether some interviews could have been framed as coach-like supervision to look at the coachee progress as well as coach progress, though this would have required sharing of confidential data and over-complicate the study.

My coaching practice is likely to be affected most by the main outcome of the study in using coaching practice to develop soft skills in project managers and possibly managers or others who lead projects. I realise that my strengths are in understanding the project manager viewpoint and how coaching broadens soft-skill awareness. I feel confident to support others' development. What the support will be called is unclear, but it is possibly more coach-like supervision than coaching since the target group aim to use coach-like soft skills.

[End]

References

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Appendix 2.1. Interpersonal skills from soft skills and project management literature

<u>Named skills</u>	<u>Soft skills literature</u>	<u>PM literature</u>
<u>Interpersonal.</u> People skills, human skills. 21st Century skills. Social skills.	Weber et al, 2010; Mahasneh, 2016. Katz,1974; Whitmore, 1974; Axline, 1981; Souder, 1983. Humphrey, 2013; Claxton, 2011; Kechagias, 2011; Oliveri, 2017. Hurrell, 2013.	Van Rooij, 2012; Awan, 2015. Brill , 2006; Azim, 2010.
<u>Service orientation.</u> Sensitivity when dealing with clients.	Peterson, 2001 Lear, 2011. Becker-Avin, 2014; Bailly, 2012.	
<u>Communications.</u> Socio-communicative.	Osman, 2017; Klein, 2006. Nilsson, 2010.	Brill, 2006; Stevenson, 2010; Pinkowska, 2011; El Sabaa, 2001; Skulmoski, 2010; De Carvalho, 2015; Saunders, 2015; Ingasson, 2009; Awan, 2015; Ramaprasad, 2003.
<u>Leadership.</u> Influencing. Setting positive example. Creative leadership.	Osman, 2017. Weber, 2010. Munro, 2017.	Brill , 2006; Stevenson, 2010; Pinkowska , 2011; Skulmoski, 2010; Awan, 2015; Ingason, 2009. Saunders, 2015; Fisher, 2011.
<u>Working with others</u> Understanding behaviour +concern for others. Leader-follower chemistry. Relationship management. Stakeholder relationships. Teamwork.	Weber, 2010. Robles, 2012.	Fisher, 2011. Pryke, 2015. Ingason, 2009. De Carvalho, 2015; Bourne,2004; Saunders, 2015; Ahsan, 2007. Ramazani, 2014; Bourne, 2014.
<u>Managing.</u> Mobilization.. Facilitation. Coordination. Team management. Supporting.	Munro, 2017. Pichler, 2014.	Geoghegan, 2008. El Sabaa, 2001. Saunders, 2015; Ingason, 2009. Awan , 2015. Pinkowska, 2011; Saunders, 2015; Fisher, 2011.
<u>Motivating.</u> Team-building.	Pichler, 2014.	Geoghegan 2008. Ingason, 2009; Awan, 2015.
<u>Conflict management.</u> Coping e.g. complexity. Crisis management. Consensus-building. Negotiation.	Pichler, 2014.	Pinkowska, 2011; Ingason, 2009. El Sabaa, 2001; Saunders, 2015. Azim, 2010; Clarke, 2012. De Carvalho, 2015;Skulmoski, 2010. Ika, 2003.
<u>Developing others.</u> Delegation. Empowering	Sisson, 2013.	Geoghegan, 2008. El Sabaa, 2001; Awan, 2015. .

Appendix 2.2. Personal skills from soft skills and project management literature

<u>Named skills</u>	<u>Soft skills literature</u>	<u>PM literature</u>
<u>Social acumen.</u> Balance task / people. Cultural awareness. Thinking, feeling skills. Emotional/social intelligence.	Weber, 2010.	Parker, 2013. Fisher, 2011; Ramaprasad, 2003. Ramazani, 2014; Thomas, 2007. Pant, 2015; Clarke, 2010; Pryke, 2015.
<u>Problem-solving.</u> Strategic decision-making. Analytical skills. Thinking skills.		Brill, 2006; Awan, 2015; Ingason, 2009. Carvalho, 2015; Ika, 2012. Brill, 2006. Ramazani, 2015; Thomas, 2007.
Conceptual, creative skills.	Weber, 2010.	

Appendix 2.3. Managerial coaching skills from literature review

<u>Coaching skill</u>	<u>Literature reference</u>	<u>Maltbia et al (2014) taxonomy grouping</u>
Goal-focused conversations. Facilitation of dialogue. Open communication, team approach. Authentic listening, non-directive questions. Active listening, powerful questioning.	Grant, 2017. Bommelje, 2015. Park, 2005. McCarthy, 2013. Chong 2016. David, 2013.	Conversational.
Trust in relationship. Trust and respect.	Spaten, 2013; Zhang, 2008; Ladyshewsky, 2010. Chong, 2016.	Relational.
Give constructive feedback.	Katsikea, 2015.	Facilitative.
Contracting.	Lawrence, 2017.	(Structural.)
(Rest relate to coaching mindset)		
Willing to develop others. Teacher to facilitation continuum.	Park, 2005. Lawrence, 2017; Ellinger, 2010; Joo, 2012; McCarthy, 2013.	
Empowering others, co-create the relationship.	Chong, 2016.	
Equal power relationship with employee.	McCarthy, 2013.	
Confidentiality of conversations.	McCarthy, 2013.	
Develop oneself.	McCarthy, 2013.	
Believe employees abilities malleable.	Özduvan, 2016.	
Team approach, value people over task, accept ambiguity.	Park, 2005.	
Employee outcomes attributed to managers' skills (and expected of managers) follow.		
<u>Employees' outcome</u>	<u>Literature reference</u>	<u>Skill attributed</u>
Better relationship with manager.	Ahmad, 2016;	Managerial support.
Improved job performance (team-role clarity).	Badrinarayanan, 2015; Kim, 2013; Pousa, 2017 Dahling, 2015; Katsikea, 2015..	Coaching behaviour. Feedback, behavioural modelling, goals. Activity control.
Developmental learning. Leadership, communication skills, career advancement. Customer service orientation.	Badrinarayanan, 2015; Chong, 2016; Frisch, 2001; Beattie, 2014 Katsikea, 2015 Chong, 2016.	Managerial coaching. Capability control. Managerial coaching.
Empowerment	Ellinger, 2010; Joo, 2012; Batson, 2012.	Developing others, better relationships.
Team learning, empowerment. Team reflection.	Beattie, 2014; Hagen, 2012. Matsuo, 2017.	Team coaching. Surveillance, dialogue and debate.
Innovation.	Wojtczuk-Turek, 2015.	Team coaching.
Employee satisfaction, career commitment, organisation commitment.	Kim, 2013; Kim, 2015.	Managerial coaching.
Self-regulation.	Pousa, 2015.	Managerial coaching.
Goal attainment, self-efficacy. Self-confidence.	Schinde, 2017. Edwards, 2016.	Managerial coaching.

Appendix 3.1a. Advertisement for Coach Participants

Would you be interested in having some experience of acting as a coach?

I am conducting a nine month research project, as a Doctoral student at Oxford Brookes University, Faculty of Business, entitled:

Developing soft skills: whether practising as a coach develops project managers' soft skills

Would you like to be involved in a research project with other project managers, where collaboration will be encouraged to share experiences and inform this important topic?

Your coachee (the person being coached) would also be a project manager and volunteer participant. It is expected that all participants have some awareness of coaching, but that coaches will have little or no practical experience of coaching others. Coaching will be arranged by participants and will be conducted by telephone, by online messaging, or face-to-face in a suitable location, as agreed by both parties.

Soft skills cover a wide subject area, they're not well defined and many different terms are often used for them: people skills, leadership, emotional intelligence being just three. Coaching skills on the other hand are becoming more specifically defined through the developing coaching profession**. Being specific about skills and behaviours makes it easier to practice them!

Here is an outline of the expected participation:

Typical workplace coach training (1 day)

Act as a coach in 6 coaching sessions for your coachee (allow 1 hour each)

3 short telephone interviews with the researcher after each of the 1st 3 coaching sessions and one longer telephone interview after all sessions (2.5 hours in total) after the 1st 3 sessions, a focus group (webinar) to share experiences with other participant coaches (1.5 hours)

This is a significant contribution of effort, but the training and practical experience within an action research framework also offers a developmental opportunity.

All recorded data will be transcribed and anonymised as agreed by the Oxford Brookes University Research Ethics Committee, which has given approval for this project.

If you'd like to know more, then please email 11004491@brookes.ac.uk. In responding, there is no immediate commitment since we'll need to share detailed information with you, before your decision, to ensure you want to participate.

All applicants will be contacted, to have an initial discussion about previous experience, since some coaching knowledge, say through being coached or mentored, is ideal, although the aim is that participants have not previously acted as a formal coach.

**The International Coaching Federation is a recognised organisation promoting the profession; it offers this definition of coaching: 'Coaching is partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential'. (This project will use the term coachee rather than client because 'client' is often confused with the sponsor of a project.)

Appendix 3.1b. Advertisement for Coachee Participants

Would you be interested in receiving coaching as part of a research activity from a project manager practising as a coach?

I am conducting a nine month research project, as a Doctoral student at Oxford Brookes University, Faculty of Business, entitled:

Developing soft skills: whether practising as a coach develops project managers' soft skills?

Would you like to be involved in a research project with other project managers, where collaboration will be encouraged to share experiences, to inform this important topic?

Your coach would be a project manager and volunteer participant in this research project. It is expected that all participants will have an awareness of coaching, and it is ideal that those being coached have been coached or mentored previously. Coaching will be arranged by participants and will be conducted by telephone, by online messaging, or face-to-face in a suitable location, as agreed by both parties.

Soft skills cover a wide subject area, they're not well defined and many different terms are often used for them: people skills, leadership, emotional intelligence being just three. Coaching skills on the other hand are becoming more specifically defined through the developing coaching profession**. They are being used in many different situations and are designed to support the development of the coachee (person being coached).

Here is an outline of the expected participation:

6 coaching sessions (each up to 1 hour) where you are the coachee

Regular contact with the researcher during the process to raise any concerns or give feedback about the coaching that might be relevant to the research; the latter may be recorded.

All recorded data will be transcribed and anonymised as agreed by the Oxford Brookes University Research Ethics Committee, which has given approval for this project.

If you'd like to know more, then please email 11004491@brookes.ac.uk. In responding, there is no immediate commitment since we'll need to share information with you, before your decision, to ensure you want to participate.

All applicants will be contacted, to have an initial discussion about previous experience of coaching, since some coaching knowledge, say through being coached before, is ideal.

**The International Coaching Federation is a recognised organisation promoting the profession; it offers this definition of coaching: 'Coaching is partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential'. (This project will use the term coachee rather than client because 'client' is often confused with the sponsor of a project.)

Appendix 3.2. Information sheet for coach participants



(Side 1)

Study Title: Developing soft skills: whether practising as a coach develops project managers' soft skills

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

What is the purpose of the study?

The aim of the study is to explore what skills are developed and how they are developed, while practising as a coach. Both coach and coachee are volunteer participants and project managers. I am conducting this project as part of study for a Doctorate in Coaching and Mentoring (DCaM). I hope that many project managers will find this study interesting and valuable since little is known about the benefits of coaching in a project management context.

Why have I been invited to participate?

I am inviting you to take part because you are a professional project manager, and have expressed an interest in this project to explore soft skills development through serving as a coach.

Do I have to take part?

It is your decision whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, after reading this information sheet, you will be asked to sign a consent form. If you consent to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason. Your unprocessed data will be deleted. Please note the involvement in this research will cover a nine month period in 2015.

What will happen to me if I take part?

Two three month cycles of action research are anticipated where participants act as co-researchers. Initially, there will be one day for coach training for all participant coaches to meet one another and understand the requirements of this project, then you will be asked to complete (over 9 months):

- (1) 6 coaching sessions, where you act as coach to another participant project manager and record personal reflections; one hour is expected each session. There will be a confidentiality agreement between you and your coachee so that information will be kept confidential.
- (2) After the 1st 3 sessions, a short (15-30 minutes expected) follow-up telephone interview with the researcher after each session, to explore your reflections.
- (3) After the 3rd session, an online focus group (1.5 hours expected), to share experiences and learning, as well as review emergent findings
- (4) Near the end of the coaching sessions, one in-depth (60-75 minutes expected) semi-structured telephone interview with the researcher, to explore any skills you have developed and their relevance to your work role.
- (5) Optional participation in additional (virtual) training, if suggested and agreed by participants.

What are the possible benefits of taking part? 'What's in it for you'?

This is an opportunity for you to experience acting as a coach. Practising as a coach could help you gain valuable skills and insight for your own project management career. Participating as a co-researcher will allow you to contribute your thoughts and perspectives.

(Side 2)

Will what I say in this study be kept confidential?

All information that becomes research data is anonymised. Participants will be de-identified and replaced with a code. You and I can agree how you (and other details if necessary) are described. Data and codes and all identifying information will be kept solely in my possession during the research project, on a password protected USB stick.

Data generated by the study will be retained in accordance with the University's policy on Academic Integrity. The data will be kept securely in electronic form for a period of ten years after the completion of the research project. The research data will be transferred to Oxford Brookes University for long-term storage, in accordance with the Oxford Brookes University data management policy. Data security is important during transfer and encryption will be used.

Identifiable data such as the interview recordings will be kept by Shirley Thompson and destroyed after the DCaM is completed. (You may have a copy of the anonymised transcripts or recordings of your interviews, on request within twelve months of the recording.)

What should I do if I want to take part?

Please read this information sheet and contact Shirley Thompson via email or phone. You will be asked to sign a consent form.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results of the research will be used in the dissertation for the Doctorate in Coaching and Mentoring degree. An executive summary will be sent to the participants. The research results may also be published in academic papers. [Identifiable data such as the interview recordings will only be used for the purposes of this research project, then destroyed].

Who is organising and funding the research?

I am conducting the research as a student at Oxford Brookes University, Faculty of Business. I am self-funding.

Key contacts

Student: ShirleyThompson, 01425 480631, 11004491@brookes.ac.uk

Director of Studies & Supervisor: Dr Elaine Cox, 01865 488350, ecox@brookes.ac.uk

Supervisor: Dr Adrian Myers, 01865 485936, amyers@brookes.ac.uk

If you have any concerns about the way in which this exercise has been conducted, you may also contact the Chair of the University Research Ethics Committee on ethics@brookes.ac.uk

Thank you for taking time to read the information sheet.

Doctorate in Coaching and Mentoring-

Department of Business and Management

Oxford Brookes University Business School December 2014

** Legal implications means we have to abide by any legal demand to disclose, but this is not expected. Also, there is a small number of participants (8 coaches and 8 coachees) in this research, so a higher risk to anonymity of the data within the group, but all de-identification procedures will be carefully followed to minimise the overall risk.

Appendix 3.4. Interview questions for action cycle 1

[Aim is to facilitate the coach's reflection and gather immediate experience of acting as coach.]

Thank you for completing your coaching session. The purpose of this interview is to gather your reflections from the coaching session and explore your reflections a little more. Is that OK?

Did you fill in your reflection sheet? Perhaps we could refer to that now.

1. What was your overall impression of this coaching session?

a. What do you think or feel went well, what did you find interesting, useful or otherwise positive?

b. What skills do you think are new to you and you'll be developing as you coach?

2. What support as a coach might you need going forwards?

[Earlier coaching sessions may not need further questions; rather explore the foregoing]

Additional if appropriate for 2nd or 3rd session....

3. Let's think about your work environment now....what skills might you use there as a result of practising as a coach? (E.g. listening, questioning, empathy; there may be a better prompt list after the literature review).

4. What skills are you using as a coach that you wouldn't use in the workplace, or might use differently?

5. What are you learning....what might be different in your work role as a result of this learning?

Many thanks for this. Very useful.

Is there anything you'd like to add?

Thank you for your time; good luck with the next session.

Appendix 3.5. Interview questions for action cycle 2

Thank you for completing your coaching sessions. In this interview, I'd like to build on all your reflections over the last 3-6 months.

1. Let's consider what soft skills you think you've developed and what happened to suggest this;

(aim to get development scenarios where a difference of behaviour was noticed by themselves or others)

2. Let's consider which of these soft skills have been the most relevant to your work as a project manager:

(aim to get top 3, and to get specific instances of work scenarios where skills are relevant and what has changed)

3. How do you envisage you will use the coaching skills in your job role. Can you give some examples of where you might act as coach?

4. Is there anything you'd like to add about your experiences?

Many thanks for your time. (Announce plans for sharing results.)

(Subsequently added between questions 3 and 4. If you were to draw yourself as a stick figure now, compared to before coaching practice, what would you draw?)

Appendix 3.6 Agenda for group review, including initial soft skills list

Agenda for group review discussion

1. Anything you want to share on coaching role

E.g. Some comments from last round of interviews

- 'It's nice actually to be divorced from their outcomes and people affected by the outcomes it's a level where you're listening but you're standing back from it and they decide what they want to do, rather than being involved which is what I think is you're saying I'm not involved I'm not directing it I'm observing'
- How does one get the trust of someone one doesn't know?
- Lots of feelings/emotion evolved in discussions and feedback. Where is the line between coaching and therapy?
- 'professionalism' – what is that?
- How much does the coach have to understand the solution?
- Do you have to be motivated to help others, to be a coach? E.g. 'I just want to pass [knowledge] on'
- PM as coach – could there a definition, for use with team members and stakeholders? (e.g. (1) 'you don't seem motivated', what do you think the solution is (2) this is the agenda for our call which is going to run like this
- If the coach initiates the conversation, without contracting, does that make it management using coaching as a tool, rather than coaching, where the coachee fully contracts for the conversation?

2. Soft skills – what they are and which to measure (those in brackets from Shirley based on comments)

- Probing, open questioning
- Active listening
- Slowing down, pause, using silence
- (Building trust?)
- (Win-win for both parties?)
- Get others to give me the solution instead of trying to always as a project managers say do this
- Awareness of needs of the other person? (e.g. agreeing meeting dates, doing something different?)
- Skill coaching. E.g. demonstrating what I do, [then] rather than demonstrate it to them again I would go through it and say right you've done that what would you do if you going to do it again, I try to get them to press the buttons and do things. It's about taking away the fear I think.
- Patience with others (for their developmental benefit?)
- Using communication in language the other person can understand, offering stories, ideas, instruction
- (Reflecting back to others what you've noticed)
- (Challenging others?)
- 'may ask manager how she measures soft skills'
- 'may ask my team if I'm managing them differently'

3. Ensure OK to proceed to last 3 interviews - no more calls after that until final interview in October.

4. AOB

e.g.

Contracting? E.g. Willingness of coachee

Additional training needed for coaching? e.g. Share more tools e.g. tools shared with coachees by some

Metaphors for coaching?

- A game, chess game.
- Slowdown, Removing fear, Relaxing, Journey, Making habits more conscious
- Investment of time

Virtual meetings/Technology? E.g. 'Skype not ideal'

Appendix 3.7. Soft skills list after group review

The list is the same for all participants; this list shows Adèle's scoring

A. Interpersonal - with others

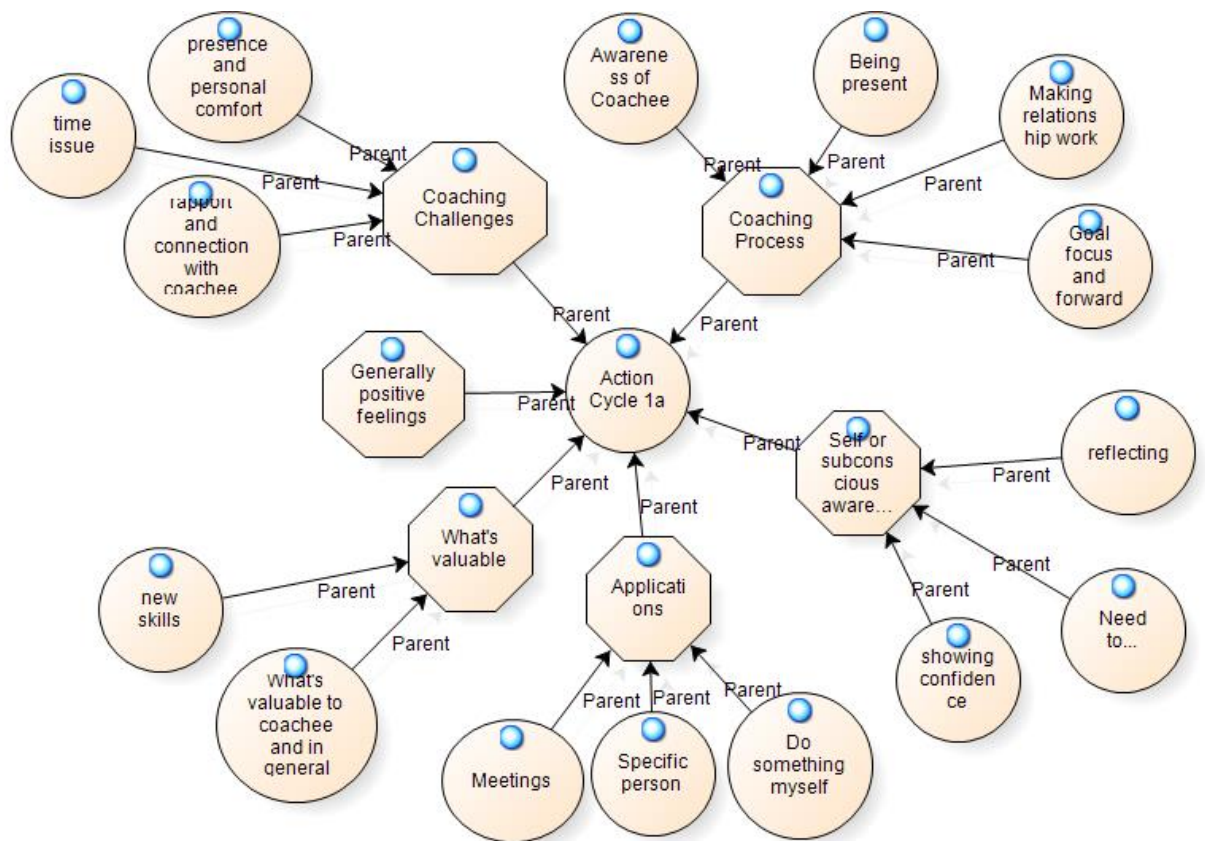
1. Contracting: agreeing responsibilities, empowering others, setting boundaries, aim for a win-win relationship, two-way feedback, agreeing goals) 4/7
2. Questioning 3/8
3. Listening 6/8
4. Using pause and silence 6/7
5. Reflecting back to others 5/8
6. Challenging others 3/6
7. Improving skills, supporting learning 5/9
8. Awareness of others' (emotions, behaviour) 6/9
9. Gaining rapport, building trust 4/7
10. Talking about values? 5/7

B. Intrapersonal/Cognitive - within self

1. Reflective practice 5/7
2. Self-awareness 7/9
3. Attitude (to communities), intentions (e.g. relaxed, go with flow) 7/9
4. Willingness to be out of comfort zone 10/10
5. Self-confidence (comfortable, trusting self) 4/9
6. Willingness to ask for feedback 5/8
7. Personal goal-setting 8/10
8. Knowing your own values 6/9
9. Being present 5/6
10. Willingness to support/challenge others 3/7

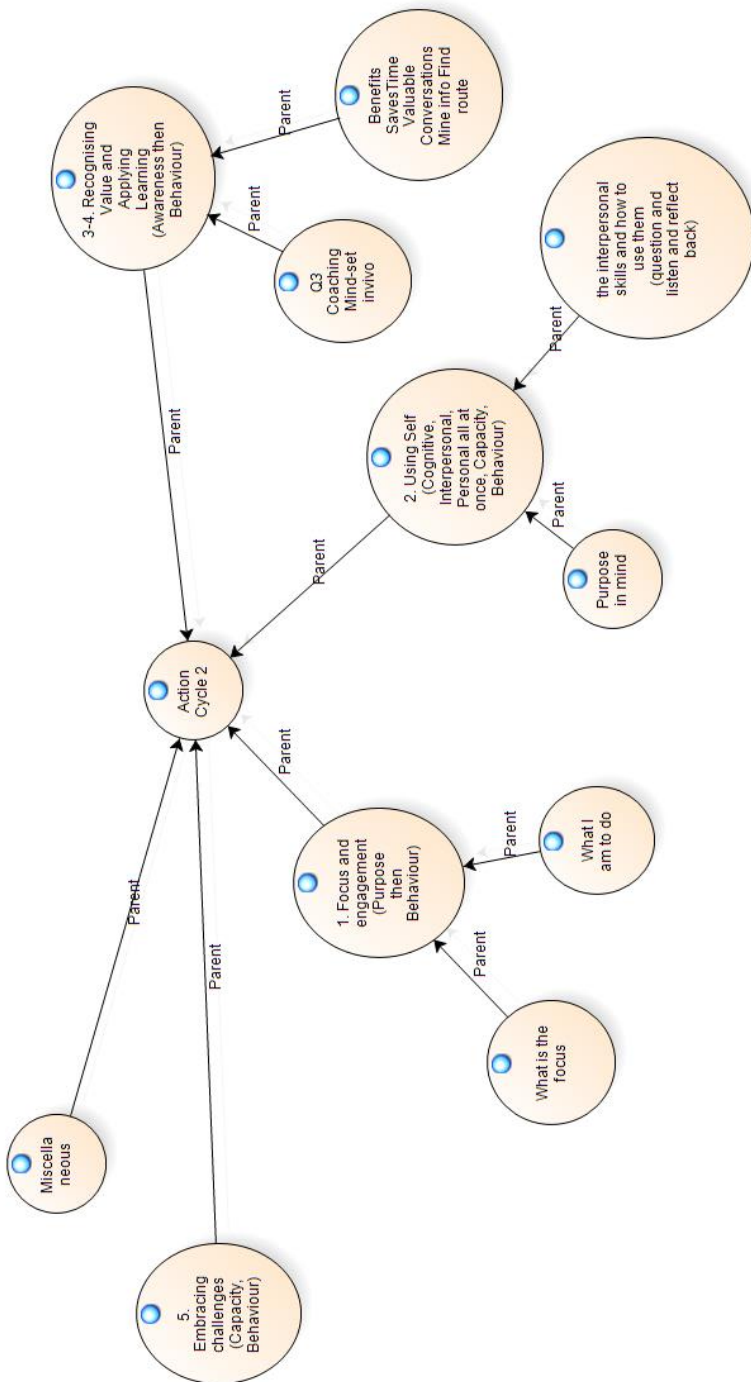
Appendix 3.8. Initial theme groupings from action cycle 1 data

Although initial analysis was done on action cycle one data, the structure shows that participants started to think about application of skills straightaway despite challenges. Learned skills related to self, through being present and getting awareness through the coaching relationship. This suggested a framework for analysis where skills were applied based on what was considered useful, because the learned skills were known to be coaching skills and would only show how the project managers felt challenged. (All the diagrams in this and next appendix were created in April 2016.)



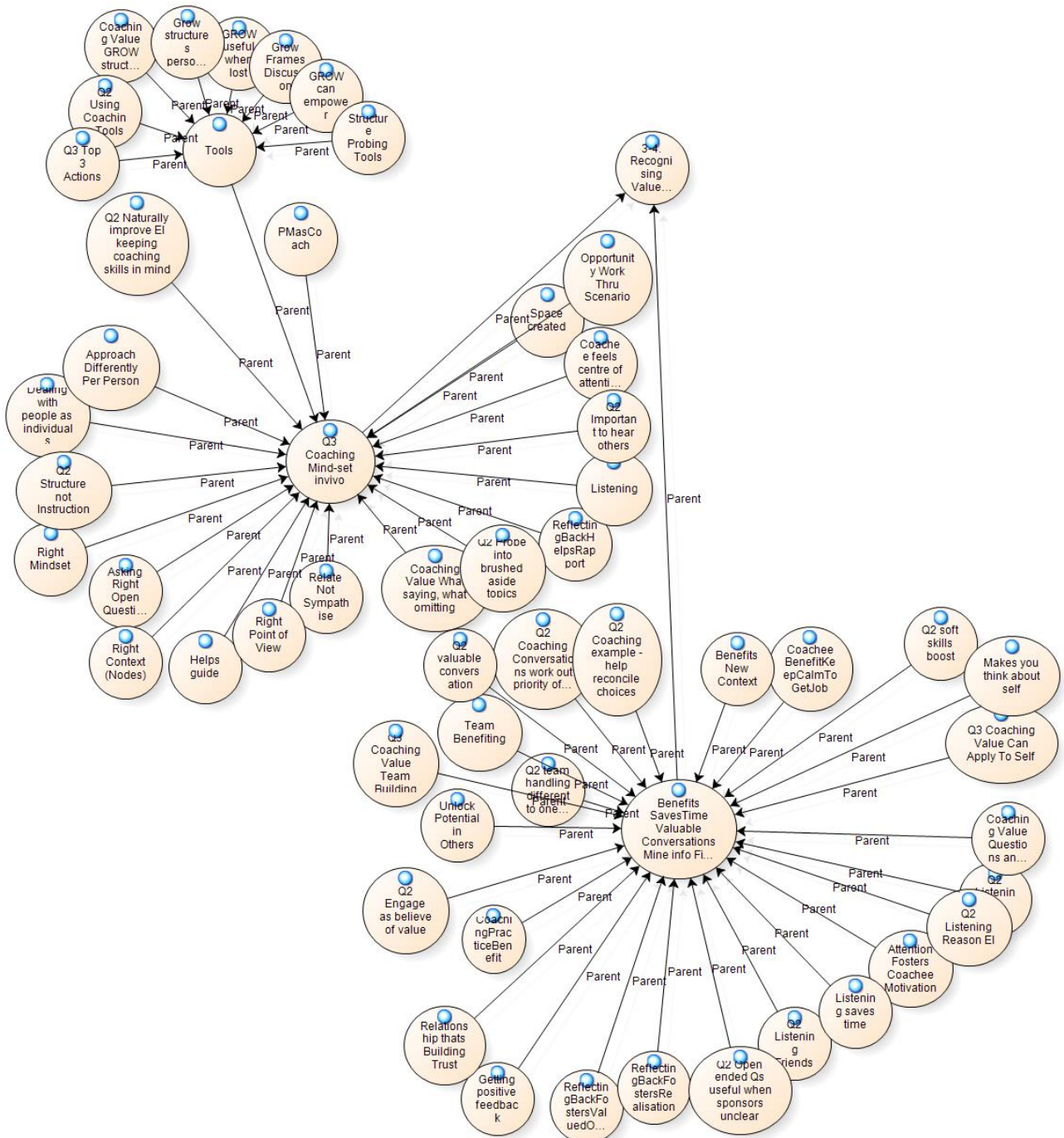
Appendix 3.9. Initial theme groupings from action cycle 2 data

The most successful grouping used four main themes: focus and engagement, using self, recognising value and embracing challenges, as shown in the following figure.



These first three of these covered most skills; their grouping of skill codes are depicted in the next three figures.

Recognising value



Appendix 3.10. Ethics approval letter for study



Dr Elaine Cox
Director of Studies
Department of Coaching and Mentoring
Faculty of Business
Oxford Brookes University
Wheatley Campus

20 February 2015

Dear Dr Cox

UREC Registration No: 150893
Developing soft skills: how does practising as a coach develop project managers' soft skills

Thank you for your emails of 9 and 13 February 2015 outlining your response to the points raised in my previous letter about the PhD study of your research student Shirley Thompson and attaching the revised documents. I am pleased to inform you that, on this basis, I have given Chair's Approval for the study to begin.

The UREC approval period for this study is two years from the date of this letter, so 20 February 2017. If you need the approval to be extended please do contact me nearer the time of expiry.

Should the recruitment, methodology or data storage change from your original plans, or should any study participants experience adverse physical, psychological, social, legal or economic effects from the research, please inform me with full details as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely

Morag MacLean
Deputy Chair of the University Research Ethics Committee

cc Adrian Myers, Second Supervisor
Shirley Thompson, Research Student
Sarah Quinton, Research Ethics Officer
Jill Organ, Research Degrees Team
Louise Wood, UREC Administrator

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Appendix 4.1. ICF competencies

- **A. Setting the Foundation**
 1. Meeting Ethical Guidelines and Professional Standards
 2. Establishing the Coaching Agreement
- **B. Co-creating the Relationship**
 3. Establishing Trust and Intimacy with the Client
 4. Coaching Presence
- **C. Communicating Effectively**
 5. Active Listening
 6. Powerful Questioning
 7. Direct Communication
- **D. Facilitating Learning and Results**
 8. Creating Awareness
 9. Designing Actions
 10. Planning and Goal Setting
 11. Managing Progress and Accountability

More information can be found on the ICF website here

<https://coachfederation.org/core-competencies>

Appendix 4.2. Sample Grow questions

GROW – Coaching Model - Side 1

G Goal
R Current Reality
O Options
W Will

Use the following steps to structure a coaching session:

Establish the Goal:

First, with your team member, you must define and agree the goal or outcome to be achieved. You should help your team member define a goal that is specific, measurable and realistic.

In doing this, it is useful to ask questions like:

“How will you know that you have achieved that goal?”
“How will you know the problem is solved?”

Examine Current Reality:

Next, ask your team member to describe their Current Reality. This is a very important step: Too often, people try to solve a problem without fully considering their starting point, and often they are missing some of the information they need to solve the problem effectively.

As the team member tells you about his or her Current Reality, the solution may start to emerge.

Useful coaching questions include:

“What is happening now?”
“What, who, when, how often?”
“What is the effect or result of that?”

GROW – Coaching Model - Side 2

Explore the Options:

Once you and your team member have explored the Current Reality, it's time to explore what is possible – meaning, all the many possible options you have for solving the problem.

Help your team member generate as many good options as possible, and discuss these.

By all means, offer your own suggestions, but let your team member offer his or hers first, and let him or her do most of the talking.

Typical questions used to establish the options are:

“What else could you do?”

“What if this or that constraint were removed?”

“What are the benefits and downsides of each option?”

“What factors will you use to weigh up the options?”

Establish the Will:

By examining Current Reality and exploring the Options, your team member will now have a good idea of how he or she can achieve their Goal. That's great – but in itself, this may not be enough! So, your final step as coach is to get your team member to commit to specific action. In so doing, you will help the team member establish his or her will and motivation.

Useful questions:

“So what will you do now, and when?”

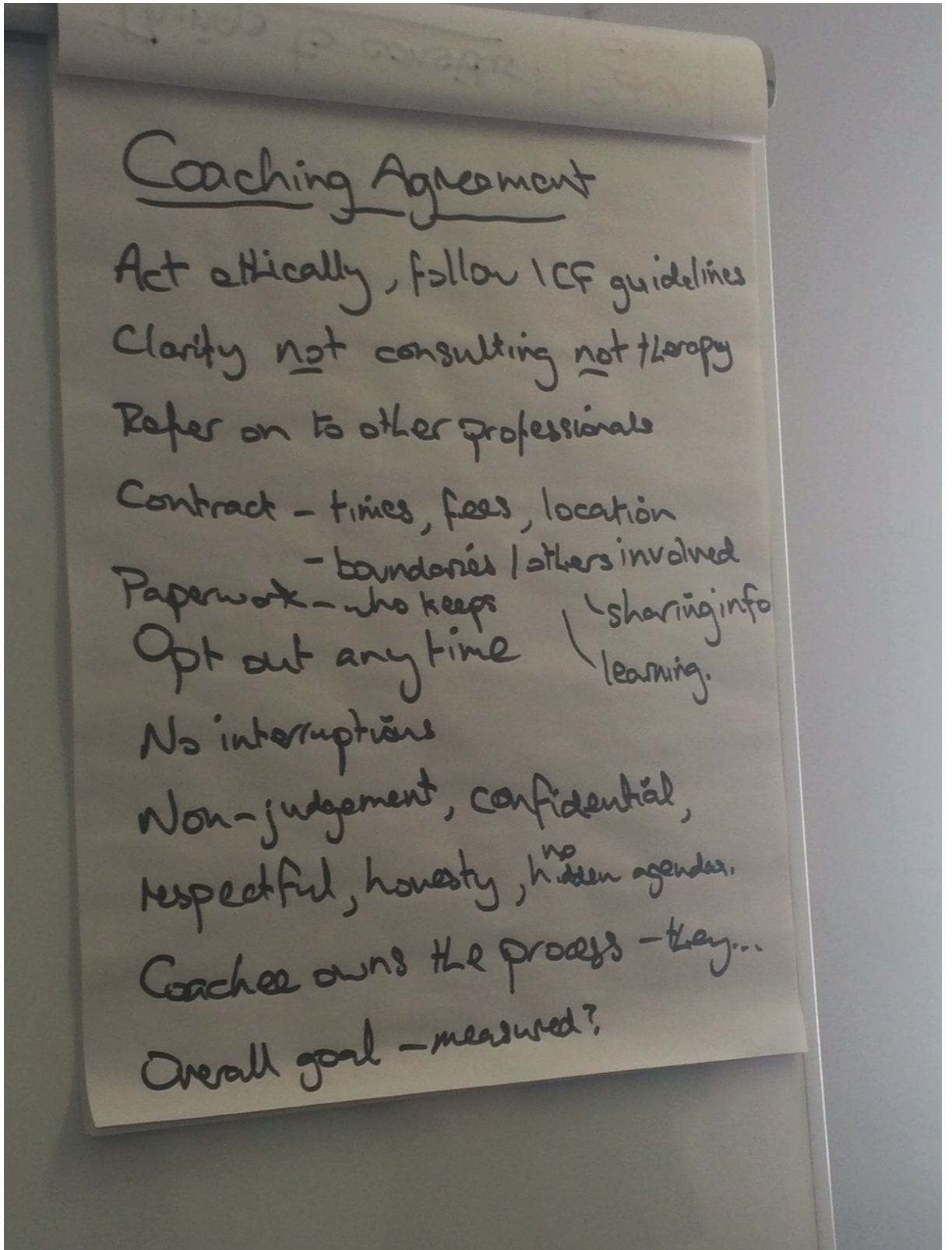
“What could stop you moving forward?”

“And how will you overcome it?”

“Will this address your goal?”

“What else will you do?”

Appendix 4.3. Contracting checklist



Appendix 4.4. Skills reflection sheet

Side 1

Rapport	How did the coach establish rapport?	
	Were there any clues which demonstrated the coach and candidate were in rapport?	
	Were there any signs that rapport had been broken?	
Questions Used:	Did the coach use questions?	
	If so were they closed questions (resulted in Y/N)	
	Or open questions (who, what, where, when, why, how)	
	Did the question lead the candidate to the answer the coach wanted to hear?	
Listening:	Did the coach listen to the candidate?	
	In what way did they show they were listening?	
	What evidence did you observe of a lack of effective listening skills?	
Empathy and Respect	In what way did the coach demonstrate empathy and respect for the candidate?	
	Did you observe anything which demonstrated a lack of empathy or respect?	
	Did the coach appear sympathetic as opposed to empathetic at any time?	

Side 2

Techniques	What tools and techniques, if any, did you observe?	
Boundaries	Comments on any breaches in boundaries e.g. ethical, political, legal issues?	
	Comment on any conflicts of interest or confidentiality issues you may have noticed	
Summarising	Did the coach use summary or reflect back what the candidate had said during the session?	
Goals	Were any goals set?	
	If yes, were they SMART?	
	Whose idea was the goal (the coach or the candidate)?	
	Was the candidate committed to the Goal	
Solution	Who came up with solutions – the candidate or the coach?	
Action	Was an action identified?	
	Did the candidate appear committed to it?	
	If not, why do you think that was?	

Appendix 6.1. Useful interpersonal skills adopted from coaching practice

Skills from PM literature	Literature Source	Exercised in coaching practice	Learned & applied skill
Interpersonal: people skills, human skills, social skills.	Van Rooij, 2012; Awan, 2015; Brill , 2006; Azim, 2010; Skulmoski & Hartman, 2010;	√	Increased capacity Increased confidence
Leadership: influencing	Brill , 2006; Stevenson, 2010; Pinkowska , 2011; Skulmoski, 2010; Awan, 2015; Ingason, 2009; Saunders, 2015; Fisher, 2011.		Increased capacity Increased confidence
Conflict management	Pinkowska, 2011; Ingason, 2009; El Sabaa, 2001; Saunders, 2015; Azim, 2010; Clarke, 2012.		Increased capacity
negotiation, consensus-building	Ika, 2003; De Carvalho, 2015; Skulmoski, 2010.	√ - contracting	Inviting contribution
Communications	Brill, 2006; Stevenson, 2010; Pinkowska, 2011; El Sabaa, 2001; Skulmoski, 2010; De Carvalho, 2015; Saunders, 2015; Ingasson, 2009; Awan, 2015; Ramaprasad, 2003.	√	Listening to hear more. Questioning to understand
Working with others: Team relationships. team building Stakeholders	Fisher, 2011; Ingason, 2009; Awan et al , 2015; Fisher, 2011; Saunders et al, 2015;	√	Inviting contribution Inviting agreement
Developing others	Geoghegan, 008; El Sabaa, 2001; Awan et al, 2015;	√ - coachee responsible	Letting others drive, coaching
Managing: facilitating	Geoghegan, 2008; El Sabaa, 2001; . Saunders, 2015; Ingason, 2009; Awan , 2015; Pinkowska, 2011; Saunders, 2015; Fisher, 2011.	√ - coaching process	Facilitating work goals

Appendix 6.2. Useful personal skills adopted from coaching practice

<u>Skills and characteristics from PM literature</u>	<u>Literature source</u>	<u>Exercised in coaching practice</u>	<u>Learned & applied skill</u>
<u>Social acumen:</u> balance between task and people	Jacques et al, 2007; Parker et al, 2013;		Increased capacity Personal confidence
<u>cultural awareness</u>	Fisher, 2011; Ramaprasad, 2003;		(Potentially sensitivity increased)
<u>Problem-solving</u>	Brill et al, 2006; Awan et al , 2015;		(Possibly through facilitation of work goals or letting others drive)
<u>thinking and feeling skills</u>	Ramazani & Jergeas, 2014; Thomas et al, 2007;	√ - coaching process	(Potentially increased capacity)