



CSA Leadership Research Update August 2013

The Impact of Strength Based Leadership Coaching on transformational leadership behaviour.

↻ What is Strength Based Leadership Development?

Leadership development has historically been focused on building capacity and addressing deficits in areas seen as essential for effective leadership. Recently positive psychology has suggested a different approach – that by building on strengths and aligning development with what energises individuals and where they already feel competent, leadership performance can be enhanced and sustained more readily. We began a research program on strength-based leadership coaching to test this model in November 2011. This is the largest controlled trial of strength based coaching every undertaken. The study has two aims. Firstly to see if it's possible to identify in advance who will benefit most from coaching by assessing readiness to change. Secondly to investigate whether focusing primarily on the identification and enhancement of strengths in a coaching process is an effective methodology for enhancing leadership effectiveness.

↻ What methodology have we used?

Our approach to research has been to partner with an organisation in the NFP sector that embraced the opportunity to put all its top management through a rigorous and evaluated leadership coaching process. We recruited 37 executives and senior managers from the client and trained 10 coaches in a strength based coaching methodology. We then divided the coachees into 2 cohorts so that one could act as the control group whilst the other received the coaching. The two groups then swapped over at the mid point of the study. Each coachee received 6 sessions of strength based leadership coaching from a highly experienced coach. The coaching included both an assessment and a strengths development phase. The coaching was manualised to encourage adherence to the strength based protocol and encouraged participants not just to raise awareness of their strengths but also to consider how aligned their strengths were with the business goals, how much they utilised their strengths and in what context.

↻ What psychometrics did we use in the research?

The majority of coaching research utilises only self-report measures in determining outcomes and ROI. This is a major flaw in that it largely measures satisfaction with the coaching process without addressing the key issue of leadership impact on peers, bosses and direct reports. Consequently we decided to utilise 360-feedback in this research (the Multi-Factor Leadership Questionnaire) as the dependant variable in order to assess changes in leadership behaviour as witnessed by a range of perspectives within the organisation. We also used a change readiness scale to see if this



correlated with coaching outcomes. Finally we used the Realise 2 inventory to give the coachees a view of their strengths as part of the assessment process.

What were the results of the program ?

- **Leadership Coaching works:** We found a highly significance difference in transformational leadership in the coaching group at Time 2 i.e. after 6 sessions of strength based leadership coaching. Participants increased their transformational leadership ratings by 13% on average in only 3 months.
- **Coaching Methodology matters:** Adherence to our strength-based protocol was strongly correlated with increased transformational leadership behaviour. This indicates that our rigourous and innovative strength based methodology was a major factor in improving leadership behaviour.
- **Leadership coaching impacts beyond the individual:** We also found highly significant increases in leadership outcomes (effectiveness, satisfaction and extra effort) as reported by all raters in the 360. Again this is a key finding as it suggests that follows are willing to increase their discretionary effort as a result of the changes in leader behaviour. Fig1 below shows the uplift in leadership outcomes on the MLQ360 immediately after coaching at Time 1 for Coaching group and Time 2 for Waitlist group.

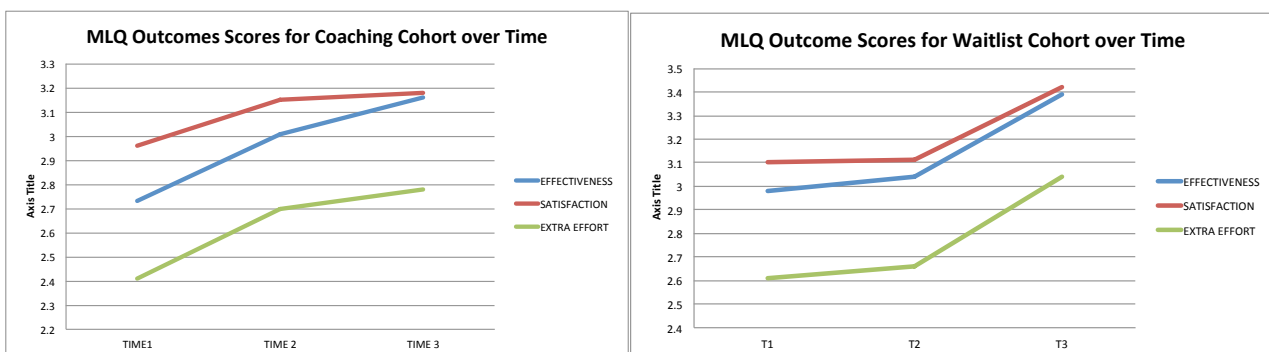


Fig1 Changes in Leadership outcomes after strength-based leadership coaching.

- **The evidence for effectiveness is tangible and objective.** This is one of the first studies to show convincing evidence of significant changes in leadership behaviour beyond self-report in an organisational context after executive coaching. This is an exciting finding indicating that 6 sessions of strength based coaching over a relatively short period of time in what was already a high performing cohort, can significantly increase transformational leadership behaviour even in a challenging and complex environment.



- **Leadership changes are viewed differentially within organisations.** We found that direct reports are the most sensitive to leader's change in behaviour and other levels in the organisation need to ensure they have good visibility on those undertaking changes in leadership behaviour. Peers in particular may need greater inclusion in the process.
- **The return on investment is significant:** This 13% uplift in executive performance leads to an estimated ROI of 825%. This is a conservative estimate as it does not include the cascade effect onto direct reports and other colleagues.

Summary and Conclusion

The results conclusively demonstrate that experienced coaches trained in a strength-based methodology can enhance transformational leadership in executives even in challenging and demanding organisational circumstances. This is one of the first studies to demonstrate the efficacy of a strength based coaching methodology in enhancing leadership in a controlled between subjects design. Further validity is derived from the utilisation of a 360-degree outcome data that provides an evaluation beyond the level of self-report and that controls for methodological heterogeneity through a manualised coaching process. Further research is needed to determine whether these gains in leadership effectiveness can be obtained by other coaching methodologies.

Contact Us

For more information about our Business Psychology Services, please contact **Doug MacKie** on **07 3010 9735** or doug@csaconsulting.biz