

A GROUNDED THEORY INVESTIGATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY COACHING AND THRIVING

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative, grounded theory study was to understand the relationship between positive psychology coaching and thriving in the workplace. Thriving was defined as a marked sense of learning, vitality, energy, and connectivity to others and the work, and positive psychology coaches included coaches who are trained in strengths-based, appreciative, co-active, and positive psychology coaching methods. Twenty people who had participated in positive psychology coaching as a method for achieving change in attitudes, behaviors, or skills were interviewed to understand the key activities of the coaching process that contribute to thriving as well as to understand the individual outcomes of thriving and how they contribute to emotional well-being and vitality. Data analysis indicated a need to revise the definition of thriving since coachees did not distinguish between states of vitality and energy and thriving is more temporal than originally predicted. Other findings revealed that positive psychology coachees utilized strengths-based assessments and activities to help coachees learn how to identify, use, and regulate their strengths, the results of which led to three types of transformation. Coachees experienced personal transformation in their connectivity to others and their work by making personal changes in themselves and how they interacted with others. Physical transformation occurred as coachees learned to recognize changes in their bodies, energy levels, and state of flow. Emotional transformation occurred as coachees changed their self-perception, self-worth, and self-efficacy. As they changed their self-concepts, coachees were able to reframe their attitudes and thinking, become more resilient, and change their careers to align their work with their values and strengths.

This study is unique in that it is the first to investigate positive psychology coaching and thriving, and it did so from the coachees' perspective, which is seldom investigated.

Understanding how coachees transform, the processes that enable transformation to occur, and the outcomes that are possible is important since organizations are investing significant resources in coaching and human development processes. Finally, positive psychology coaching is a change methodology coachees can use to create sustainable change that enhances their well-being, relationships, and careers—all factors that can lead to personal fulfillment.

Dedication

Unequivocally, this dissertation and the sweat, tears, and triumphs that resulted from it are dedicated to my family and to my loving husband.

Throughout this journey, my family has been there to support me. They asked questions about processes they were not familiar with in an effort to help me extend my thinking, and they compassionately lifted my spirits when I felt like this process would never end. Most importantly, they reminded me to continue to live and enjoy each day and to never lose sight of the ultimate goal. Individually, I would like to acknowledge them for their contributions.

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Forrest, thanks for showing me the value of finding time to enjoy the activities that nourish my soul, and Dad, I appreciate you believing in me and reminding me that I'm capable of achieving anything I set my heart on accomplishing. Pepe, thanks for modeling a strong work ethic and for teaching me to believe in myself. Grandma Owens and Grandma Vera, your love and prayers kept me going and gave me the support I needed to keep focused on the goal. Mom, your weekly phone calls and regular emails inspired me to be a better person and to be your Little Star.

Last, but certainly not least, this labor of love is dedicated to my husband and best-friend. Josh, you are the person I most want to share my life with: the challenges and

tribulations as well as the joys and celebrations. It is you whom I brainstormed with and who heard countless hypotheses and proposal ideas, yet your willingness to support me never wavered. In fact, it somehow seemed to grow stronger under the challenge. Your persistent belief in me, and in my ability to creatively approach this project, has been the foundation from which I gathered my strength, and your love and desire to see me achieve my goals gave me the courage to continue when I questioned my choices. Without you by my side, this would not have been possible. As I receive this degree, I accept it knowing that it belongs to both of us and is a testimony of the strength of our love and our willingness to support one another's goals. Thank you, Josh, for being with me throughout this journey and in those that will follow.

Perhaps, Albert Schweitzer says it best:

At times our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person.

Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us.

I want to thank all of my family for keeping my flame lit and for being a guiding light.

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Writing the acknowledgement page is perhaps the most difficult of the entire dissertation since there were so many people who were instrumental along the way. Countless teachers, students, colleagues, friends, and family members have helped pave the way to this culminating moment. It is through their strength, encouragement, guidance, and belief in me that this is even possible. Collectively, I bow my head in a moment of gratitude and wish to thank each of you for your role and support throughout my life. Individually, I wish to recognize the coachees and my committee members, as without their help, I would not have this degree.

To the coachees—you are the heart of this study.

This research would not have been possible without the generosity of the 20 coachees who freely shared their incredibly personal, transformative experiences. You began this process as co-researchers; however, you also became enchanting storytellers and teachers. For you took the time to ensure that I heard your stories and learned from them as well. You opened your hearts, reflected on the questions asked, and voiced such raw, vulnerability that I was often reminded of how fortunate I am to be able to hear your stories and share them in a way that honors our time together. So to each of you, thank you for entrusting me and for helping to demonstrate how transformative positive psychology coaching really is. You will never be forgotten.

To David—it came full circle.

Eight years ago, I accepted an invitation to learn a few fundamental coaching skills through your coaching program and then to participate in your doctoral research. I

remember driving to the course on the first day wondering what coaching was, how it could be helpful in my new management role, and whether I would be able to learn the skills. Immediately, you put my concerns to rest. Throughout the process, you not only opened my eyes to the power of coaching, but you inspired the passion of coaching. You gave me the language to use, the tools to help unpack situations, and the confidence to know that as a new manager I did not need to be an expert. It was that experience, David, several years ago that unknowingly set me on this path that I am so grateful for today. So, as this journey comes full circle, I hope I have the opportunity to pay this gift forward. Thank you, David, for accompanying me on this passage.

To Sara—your coaching book inspired me.

Shortly after beginning Capella, I learned of your appreciative coaching book. Due to the amount of coursework required at the time, I made the decision to read the book at a later date. However, as is always the case when something is meant to be, the idea and the feeling that I needed to read the book now would not abate. On impulse, I ordered your book. As “luck” would have it, the day it arrived, I had finished my projects and was in a good place to take a break. As I read that first page, I realized that a doorway had just opened for me. Your book spoke to me in a way that transformed my thinking and reframed my personal vision. By reflecting on what was working well in my life and what I wanted more of, I realized that I want and need to be involved in appreciative processes that are life-generating, enriching, and emanating from a place of abundance. In essence, your book was the catalyst to a new way of being in this world: A

way of appreciating life and of living in strength. Sara, I will always be grateful to you, and I am thankful that you too have shared this journey with me.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Once considered a strategy relegated to derailed executives, professional coaching is now a two billion dollar industry (Kauffman & Bachikrova, 2008) supported by high-performing coachees who view coaching as a professional development tool capable of facilitating positive results. Despite the gain in the popularity of coaching, many of its outcomes still need empirical validation given that the practice of coaching outpaces the research. There are debates in the literature about the efficacy and benefits of coaching (Sherpa, 2008; Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001), but scholars have yet to evaluate whether particular strategies of coaching are more effective, and if so, under what circumstances.

Positive psychology, the scientific study of positive experiences, positive individual traits, and positive institutions (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003), is one of the genres of coaching that remains unexplored and in need of validation. There is a need to create a clear canon and taxonomy that unmistakably depicts and defines the process of positive psychology coaching, differentiates it from other coaching strategies, and substantiates its efficacy as a coaching methodology. Questions such as: (1) what is the relationship between positive psychology coaching and thriving; (1a) are there key elements or activities specific to positive psychology that contribute to workplace

thriving; (1b) how does thriving contribute to emotional well-being and vitality; and (1c) what are the individual outcomes of thriving remain to be answered and are the focus of this grounded theory study.

Background of the Study

As global competition increases, organizations are in a race to streamline costs, develop more efficient and effective processes, and strengthen their human capital. Doing so distinguishes them from their competitors and provides leverage in a world where differentiation and product quality are key elements of business success. As part of their operational strategy, many organizations seek innovative methods to identify key talent and to help employees learn and hone the skills necessary to be successful in the workplace.

As an innovative professional development tool, coaching provides an avenue for people to reflect on their skill-sets, attitudes, and behaviors in a safe environment while simultaneously receiving assistance that enables them to improve their performance or find solutions to workplace challenges. Organizations are utilizing professional coaching services despite a paucity of research substantiating its results (Sherpa, 2008). Therefore, there is an organizational and scientific need to address the practice versus research gap before it grows wider. This research grew out of that awareness as well as an interest in understanding professional development processes that showed positive results.

Additionally, the researcher is a human resource manager with a history of approaching

work and staff through a strengths-based approach, so she is naturally inclined to investigate positive-based coaching strategies that parallel her own values.

Positive psychology coaching was chosen as the focus of this research because of its appreciation and utilization of strengths-based strategies that facilitate professional development. It does so by using principles from adult learning and psychology to help individuals achieve their goals (Palmer & Whybrow, 2006). Positive psychology coaches are trained in the principles underlying positive psychology (Grant, 2006), which allows them to use coaching methods and tools that build upon coachees' strengths to achieve optimal outcomes. By using a strengths-based approach, positive psychology coaches may play an instrumental role in helping coachees thrive professionally. Research has demonstrated that attending to people's strengths yields positive results in engagement, productivity, self-confidence, and decision making (Clifton & Harter, 2003); therefore, coaches who utilize this approach may provide their clients with the tools necessary to thrive. Additional research is still necessary to understand how positive psychology coaching differs from other coaching strategies and whether there are key elements or activities of the process that lead to optimal outcomes.

Positive psychology coaching was selected over other types of coaching not because it was believed to be a superior method, but because positive psychology coaches are steeped in positive principles and little empirical investigation has been done using this population. The selection is not meant to disparage coaches who utilize other methods nor is it meant to compare and contrast the differences between coaching methodologies. Instead, positive psychology coaches were chosen because they best

represent the population most closely aligned with the positive psychology construct of thriving, which is a key area of interest in the study.

Coaching and Thriving

One reason that coaching may be gaining favor is that individuals are seeking opportunities in which they can thrive in today's organizations. When people are thriving, they are able to "navigate and change their work contexts to promote their own development" (Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein, & Grant, 2005, p. 537).

Development and a sense of energy or accomplishment are prevalent themes in many of the definitions scholars have proposed to describe people thriving at work. Quinn (2007) and Baker and Dutton (2007) both allude to thriving in their depiction of high quality work relationships yet neither utilizes the term *thriving*. Quinn proposes that high quality work relationships provide a subjective energy that includes vitality and zest whereas Baker and Dutton suggest that high quality work relationships generate learning and connectivity. Both examples include key components of the more formal definition of thriving offered by Spreitzer, Fu Lam, and Fritz (2008): thriving is a psychological state encompassing a sense of learning and vitality where learning involves feeling progress in self-development and the ability to acquire and transfer knowledge to one's work.

Spreitzer et al. (2008) continue to clarify their definition of thriving by suggesting that individuals who enjoy learning are continuously devoted to self-improvement and professional growth though they may or may not feel a sense of vitality associated with learning. Vitality, or a sense of aliveness, manifests when people feel alert and full of

spirit. Individuals may feel energized but not interested in learning or they may be learning but not feel a sense of aliveness or positive energy. According to Spreitzer et al., both components must be present to exemplify a state of thriving.

As demonstrated, thriving manifests when individuals feel a sense of purpose, aliveness, energy, and learning. When people are thriving at work, they become engaged in their activities, which subsequently manifests in feeling energized. Csíkszentmihályi and Rathunde (1993) might even suggest that they are experiencing the psychological state of *flow*, which they describe as a mental state where individuals are absorbed in their work to the extent they lose track of time, become energized, and feel a sense of control and intrinsic reward from the activity.

Scholars are still constructing the definition of thriving, so this study builds upon previous definitions and adopts a more expansive definition to try and account for both the cognitive and affective components of thriving. For the purposes of this study, thriving is defined as a psychological construct manifested through a marked sense of learning, vitality, energy, and connectivity to others and the work one does professionally. All four components had to be present for an individual to be classified as thriving.

The more expansive definition of thriving suggests that positive psychology coaching might help coachees identify and regulate their sense of thriving by providing opportunities to reflect and learn from their experiences. By using thriving as a gauge of their own development, coachees would know whether they feel a sense of aliveness, vitality, and energy in their work and relationships or whether changes are necessary.

Positive psychology coaching could then serve as a useful tool in helping coachees learn how to identify and regulate their sense of thriving. In fact, Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein, and Grant (2005) propose that individuals who are thriving will seek opportunities that reinforce their feelings and create agentic work behaviors to sustain their sense of thriving.

With its reflective nature and focus on strengths, positive psychology coaching might provide the emotional space for individuals to explore and recognize when they feel energized and motivated to improve in their work. Research has demonstrated that engaging in exploratory behaviors increases vitality and learning; therefore, people are more likely to thrive when they are allowed to explore and reflect on their experiences (Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein, & Grant, 2005). Understanding how coaching helps people thrive in the workforce and develop professionally provides tangible benefits to both coachees and their respective organizations since the information can be used to develop human resource processes that facilitate and reinforce employee thriving.

Statement of Opportunity

Professional coaching has been linked to favorable outcomes for individuals and organizations, yet much of the literature lacks the rigors of scientific measurement (Kilburg, 2001). Consequently, conducting systematic research on coaching is a necessary endeavor. There are numerous published articles in trade journals touting the positive results of coaching without the research to substantiate the claims. Some coaches have even conducted their own independent case studies on their clients; however, they

have not provided enough information on their research to allow others to draw conclusions as to the validity of their results. Wasylyshyn's (2003) case study may have been scientifically sound, but she did not incorporate enough methodological information in her paper to allow readers the ability to assess its validity. For the scholarly community to accept their work, coaches must transcend anecdotal conclusions, build upon evidence-based models, and present their work in congruence with scientific methodology that includes transparency and a peer review process.

Many scholars and professional coaches have taken an interest in ensuring their work meets scientific rigor. The coaching literature has experienced a "three-fold increase between 1993 and 2003 in the number of academic published empirical and theoretical peer-reviewed papers" (Grant, 2003b, p. 2). However, much of the empirical evidence that exists examines coaching from the coach's perspective. As a result, there is a need to address coaching from the coachee's perspective. Additionally, there has been little investigation into positive psychology coaching, so there is an opportunity present to examine positive psychology coaching from the coachees' perspective.

The scientific evidence on professional thriving is also just beginning to surface, so many theoretical gaps still exist. Scholars already understand a great deal about knowledge, learning, and vitality, yet, there is only preliminary evidence on the construct of thriving and how it facilitates a pathway for human development (Spreitzer, Fu Lam, & Fritz, 2008). It is also unclear as to whether individuals purposely regulate their sense of thriving or if they are even aware of its manifestation.

A review of the coaching and thriving literature reveals that there is an absence of research available investigating positive psychology coaching and thriving individually or in tandem, and the voice of researchers who advocate scholar-practitioner coaching models built upon evidence-based practices is growing louder (Stober, Wildflower, & Drake, 2006; Grant & Cavanagh, 2007a; Laske, 2004; Mackie, 2007; Drake, 2009). This study begins to address the gap in the literature. Using a grounded theory methodology, it explores the relationship between positive psychology coaching and thriving in an effort to understand how coachees transform and develop through the process.

Purpose of the Study

The purposes of this grounded theory study were to better understand the relationship between coaching and thriving and to learn whether positive psychology coaching helps people thrive in the workplace, which is important since neither of these concepts have been previously studied. The field of positive psychology has only existed for a decade and many of its constructs have yet to be investigated. There is a need to investigate positive processes and understand how they work, under what circumstances, and with whom. This study also expands the definition of thriving by including both cognitive and affective elements, and provides insight which may help scholars achieve consensus regarding the definition of thriving. A clearer understanding of this concept might also provide immediate benefits to human resource professionals who are interested in utilizing empirically-based models and are charged with the responsibility of developing processes within their organizations that enable employees to thrive. It might

also help them understand the benefits of professional coaching and create systems that encourage human capital development. Doing so would help companies create a competitive advantage and a more energized and productive workforce.

Rationale

This study extends the theoretical knowledge of coaching and thriving by building upon Grant and Cavanagh's (2004) analysis of the coaching industry and Spreitzer et al.'s (2005) socially embedded model of thriving. Grant and Cavanagh encourage research from the coachee's perspective. Scholars have investigated coaching processes, identified key characteristics of coaches, debated the importance of particular disciplines, educational levels, and credentials, yet very little research has been conducted examining what it is like to be a coachee. This study begins to correct that imbalance by utilizing coachees' perspectives to understand their perceptions of the coaching process and to learn how positive psychology coaching has helped them thrive, if at all. It gave voice to a population that has yet to be understood and illustrates numerous coaching outcomes.

Another rationale for conducting the study was Spreitzer et al.'s (2005) suggestion that scholars should investigate the psychological construct of thriving in the workplace to understand its generative mechanisms. While this research did not specifically identify the organizational systems that contribute to thriving, it did examine the relationship between thriving and coaching. The results of this study can be used to help refine the psychological construct of thriving and to understand the processes involved in thriving in the workplace.

Research Questions

The proposed research examined positive psychology coaching and its relationship to thriving by asking the following research questions:

1. What is the relationship between positive psychology coaching and thriving?
 - a. Are there key elements or activities specific to positive psychology coaching that contribute to thriving at work?
 - b. How does thriving contribute to emotional well-being and vitality?
 - c. What are the individual outcomes of thriving at work?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it is the first of its type to investigate positive psychology coaching and thriving. Understanding how positive psychology coaching helps coachees transform and develop, and the outcomes that are possible as a result, will provide both organizations and potential coachees with information necessary to determine whether they want to invest their time and resources in the process. It will also help coaches better understand the transformation process, so they can recognize when it is occurring with their coachees and tailor their approach appropriately. Coaches' use of reflective questions may also help coachees learn how to identify and regulate their sense of thriving. This could have potential benefits for them personally and professionally. Additionally, the construct of thriving affords scholars an opportunity to increase their understanding of the agentic mechanisms that enable individuals to thrive in the

workplace, which could then allow organizations to modify human resource practices to encourage employee thriving.

Although coaching has been a promising profession for years, research on coaching still lags behind anecdotal reports (Grant & Cavanagh, 2004) even though the industry growth rate is “second only to that of the IT industry” (Griffiths, 2005, p. 55). In contrast, the literature on thriving is beginning to emerge in scholarly journals despite its status as a new paradigm. A newly validated measurement tool on thriving is almost ready for publication, (Porath, Spreitzer, Gibson, Cobb, & Stevens, in press) and additional research is examining the relationship between thriving and engagement at work (Spreitzer, Fu Lam, & Fritz, 2008).

Scholars have been advocating for further exploration of coaching, yet little research has been done examining the effectiveness of coaching (Sue-Chan & Latham, 2004; Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001; Wasylshyn, 2003) or on identifying the outcomes of evidence-based coaching models (Grant & Cavanagh, 2007a). Evidence-based coaching grounds the practice in theoretical knowledge, extends the knowledge on coaching efficacy, and encourages the development of educated and informed practitioners (Grant, 2008a). Citing Grant and Stober (2006), Spence writes that evidence-based coaching “provides theoretical frameworks, information, critical thinking, and methodological rigor that the practitioner can use to navigate the ever-changing waters of the coaching intervention” (2007, p. 255). By examining positive psychology coaching and its relationship to thriving, this research answered the call for evidence-based studies while simultaneously benefitting both the coach and the coachee.

Conducting a grounded theory study enables the development of theory, which may broaden the knowledge base from which practitioners can draw upon to help their coachees connect behavior to specific goals and outcomes because it illuminates how the coaching process helps coachees transform. Coaches can then use that information to individualize their approaches with coachees. From the coachees' perspectives, the study may validate their experiences and provide a voice that is often absent in the coaching literature. It may also provide an opportunity for the coachees experiencing the transformation to reflect on why it occurred, which can be helpful and provide insight to coaches and coachees engaged in transformative work. This study also illustrates the benefits of positive psychology coaching as a professional development tool human resource professionals can use to help employees thrive.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions provided guidance for this research project:

Coachee refers to the individual who receives professional coaching services.

Coach is a professional facilitator of reflective services that encompass professional development, career choice, relationships, health, and emotional well-being.

Coaching “is an ongoing professional relationship that helps people produce extraordinary results in their lives, careers, businesses, or organizations. Through the process of coaching, clients deepen their learning, improve their performance, and enhance their quality of life” (International Coach Federation, 2008, p. 6).

Positive psychology is an umbrella term representing the positive mental and emotional aspects of life. Positive psychology researchers investigate strengths-based, positive phenomena (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004).

Positive psychology coaching describes coaching that is conducted by individuals who are steeped in the principles of positive psychology. They focus on wellbeing and enhancing work performance of their coachees by building upon their coachees' strengths. They have received training in the principles of positive psychology, which may vary from a few classes to an advanced degree in positive psychology.

Thriving is a psychological construct manifested through a marked sense of learning, vitality, energy, and connectivity to others and the work one does professionally.

Assumptions

Research assumptions are beliefs the researcher has about the study, and like the definitions guiding the investigation, they need to be explicitly described so that others may understand how the researcher approached the study. The researcher is a constructivist who believes that experiences and beliefs shape the way people interpret the world, so a primary assumption of this study was that coaching is socially constructed by the individuals participating in it, and as such, perspectives will be unique and varied. This study could not be conducted without the help of those who have experienced coaching, and the researcher was appreciative of the coachees and treated them as co-researchers. Their stories were accepted at face value and they had the opportunity to

check their transcripts to ensure they were quoted accurately. Positive psychology coaching is built upon appreciative principles and processes that utilize coachees' strengths, so it was presumed that coachees perceive their coaching experiences favorably. As a professional development tool, coaching yields positive results, including helping coachees feel a marked sense of energy, emotional well-being, and vitality.

Limitations

As with all research, this study had its limitations. Cooper and Schindler (2008) believe that the hallmark of a good study is the researcher's frank acknowledgement of the investigation's limitations. This enables others to gauge the limitations' effects on the study's outcome. In an effort to be transparent and provide opportunity for replication and subsequent validation, the study's limitations are described next.

A primary constraint of all qualitative research is that it is subject to interpretation (Creswell, 2003). Qualitative researchers typically investigate socially constructed phenomena; therefore, their results may vary depending upon their attitudes, values, beliefs, experience, and skill. As a novice researcher, my interpretations may diverge from a more skilled investigator's or one who has had different experiences than mine.

The data collection method created two additional limitations of this study. First, because coachees were geographically located throughout the United States, conducting face-to-face interviews with them was not a feasible option. Data was gathered via telephone interviews. In a global analysis of the coaching industry, the American Management Association (2008) discovered that as much as 37% of coaching sessions

are conducted via a combination of electronic technologies, such as video conferencing and telephone. Most of the coachees were accustomed to providing information over the telephone, and although the method was still a limitation it was well within the scope of typical coaching practices. Second, conducting phone interviews inhibited the researcher from observing coachees' body language during the calls. Since much of the meaning of conversation is derived from non-verbal communication (Ashford, 2006), not being able to witness coachees' hand gestures, eye contact, and other behavioral cues presented a limitation in data collection.

Additional limitations included cross-sectional research and reliance on a purposeful sample. Cross-sectional research is a study that occurs only one time and provides a brief glimpse into the phenomena, and a purposeful sample is an approach researchers use when they select participants for their unique perspectives or characteristics rather than randomly assigning them to groups (Cooper & Schindler, 2008). Cross-sectional research might reveal different outcomes than would be evident if positive psychology coachees were studied for a longer period of time. Creswell (2003) posits that purposeful sampling provides qualitative researchers with participants that can best elucidate the phenomena; however, results are not generalizable.

A small sample size also restricted the ability to generalize across other people, places, and time (Creswell, 2007). However, a small sample enabled the researcher to view the phenomena in its natural context, thereby providing rich, descriptive detail that would not be possible with a larger sample. It is also possible that coachees' self-reported examples may not be representative of others' experiences, and they may have forgotten

important details. Although all of these limitations were present, a tenet of grounded theory methodology is that it builds theory based on a unique, purposeful sample. Its flexible approach encourages data collection using a variety of techniques, of which phone interviewing is one, and it assumes a small sample size will be necessary.

Nature of the Study

This qualitative study employed a grounded theory analysis. It did not attempt to test theory nor did it investigate correlations or cause and effect relationships. The purposes of this grounded theory research were to explore the relationship between positive psychology coaching and the psychological state of thriving and to learn whether coaching contributes to people thriving in the workplace. Results from this study provide a foundation for future research into the transformative aspects of positive psychology coaching and thriving.

Organization of the Remainder of the Study

Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive analysis of the literature on coaching and thriving. It includes their histories, various coaching models, and their associated theoretical underpinnings. It concludes with a summary analysis and identification of where the research proposal fits within the current body of knowledge.

Chapter 3 provides a transparent and detailed account of the methodology so that others may replicate the study and verify the results. In addition to providing the data source, information on the coachees, and how the design reflects the research questions,

this section also describes concerns relating to the validity and reliability of qualitative data and the ethical considerations related to the study.

Chapter 4 provides visual display of key pieces of data as well as a review of the data collection process and a summary of the results.

Chapter 5 concludes the dissertation research. It provides an evaluation of the work and personal insights learned throughout the process, and it addresses the original research questions in context with the results and existing knowledge within the field. Final recommendations and directions for future research are also stated.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Researchers review the existing literature on their phenomena to understand more about the subject, including previous researching findings, theories underpinning the phenomena, and research gaps. Doing so allows them to understand where their study would be positioned within the literature. Creswell (2003) claims that a literature review “provides a framework for establishing the importance of the study as well as a benchmark for comparing the results of the study with other findings” (p. 30). To determine where this study would be positioned within the scientific literature, the researcher reviewed contextual and research-based articles on coaching and positive psychology and discovered that research exists on coaching; however, there is very little information on strengths-based coaching methodologies. Throughout this chapter, the literature will reveal disagreements on the definition of coaching and its origin as well as its supporting theories. It will also show there is agreement that coaching is a tool people can use to bring about change; however, there is a lack of consensus on how that occurs, under what circumstances, and which coaching methodologies are most effective. There is also agreement that additional research is necessary to identify the return on investment and the outcomes that are possible as a result of coaching. Several literature reviews on coaching were reviewed and are presented in this chapter, as are studies depicting positive psychology constructs, such as resilience and thriving. Adult learning, change management, and positive psychology theories and models are also presented and provide a framework for understanding how positive psychology coaching may serve as a change

methodology coachees can use to transform their lives. This study is positioned at the junction of positive psychology and coaching and incorporates theories and models that support human development.

Kilburg (2001) conducted a literature review on coaching and discovered that despite a growing popularity in coaching books, the empirical literature lagged behind the practice of coaching and additional scholarly work was necessary. A decade later, scholars are still calling for additional research despite a substantial increase in published work because there is much to be learned regarding the efficacy, methodologies, tools, approaches, and outcomes of coaching. Grant and Cavanagh's (2007a) literature review revealed that only 69 outcome-based studies were conducted between 1980 and 2007; but 262 articles were published between 2000 and 2007. However, much of the scientific literature remains "contextual or survey-based research about coaching as a professional activity or about the characteristics of coaches and coachees, rather than outcome research into the effectiveness of coaching as a methodology for creating and sustaining human change" (Grant & Cavanagh, 2007a, p. 243). Coaching can be seen as an interactive application of human development, yet *how* it actually facilitates development is still unknown. According to Zeus and Skiffington (2002), "Coaching is about change and transformation—about the human ability to grow, to alter maladaptive behaviors, and to generate new, adaptive, and successful actions" (as cited in Bluckert, 2005, p. 172), yet it is unclear as to how coaching creates positive outcomes (Olson, 2008). Thriving manifests as individual change and transformation, but how individuals create or maintain a sense of thriving is still unknown. As a human development tool, positive

psychology coaching may provide a methodology for coachees to thrive and transform; therefore, additional research is necessary to explore the relationship between positive psychology coaching and thriving at the coachee level.

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss and synthesize the coaching literature as it pertains to professional development and the positive psychology construct of thriving. The chapter begins with a comprehensive overview of the field of coaching including some of its challenges, models, and supporting theories. Next, literature on positive psychology is introduced to provide context and explain how principles of positive psychology can be utilized to help coachees maximize their outcomes. A framework is presented which describes the relationship between coaching and thriving and enables better understanding of how positive psychology coaching can be used to help people thrive. The chapter concludes with a summary analysis of the literature.

The literature review targeted peer-reviewed journal articles that explore executive and professional development coaching, appreciative and strengths-based coaching, scholar-practitioner and appreciative coaching models, and outcome-based coaching studies as well as seminal articles and books on coaching. The focus of the thriving literature was on peer-reviewed articles and seminal books on positive psychology. Excluded in this inquiry were articles and books on coaching interventions, group or team coaching, the role of the unconscious in coaching, and personality factors since they were beyond the scope of the research.

The Role of the Literature Review in a Grounded Study

Most scholars begin their research by assessing the available literature on the phenomena. Simon (1994) believes that reviewing the literature is a necessary component to data collection and the generation of research questions (as cited in Peel, 2005). However, there has been an ongoing debate among grounded theorists as to the role and timing of the literature review in a grounded study. Glasser and Strauss (1967) initially recommended that researchers “ignore the literature of theory and fact on the area under study, in order to assure that the emergence of categories will not be contaminated by concepts more suited to different areas” (p. 37). They later disagreed, and Corbin and Strauss (1990) advocated for earlier literature reviews because they stimulate theoretical sensitivity and research questions, guide theoretical sampling, increase validity, and serve as a secondary data source (as cited in McGhee, Marland, & Atkinson, 2007). Backman and Kyngas (1999) acknowledge the literature debate and suggest that novice researchers, and those studying topics where some knowledge exists but a new perspective is necessary, conduct a literature review before beginning the grounded study but remain vigilant against introducing bias. The researcher opted to conduct a literature review since she is a novice scholar and very little knowledge exists around the construct of thriving and how positive psychology principles can be used as a coaching methodology.

Professional Coaching

A review of the literature on coaching revealed a lack of consensus around the origination and definition of professional coaching. Although many scholars have

speculated as to its beginning, Tobias (1996) claims that coaching originated in the late 1980s because executives needed to positively reframe interventions and refrain from offering counseling to address performance problems (as cited in Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001). Coaching was initially developed to address organizational challenges, such as correcting deviant or negative behavior. Coaching has transcended its negative stigma and is now viewed favorably as a status symbol signifying high-potential employees who are in line for promotion (Joo, 2005) or as a tool for professional development. Coaching services are also found outside of organizations, such as coaching to address familial relationships, health, exercise, diet, and finances.

Harris (1999) disagrees with Tobias's (1996) claim that coaching began in the 1980s. Harris contends that coaching, or developmental counseling as it was originally called, can be classified into three distinct periods. Consultants performed most of the coaching during its first stage, which occurred from 1940 to 1979. Managers began dabbling in coaching during the 1980s through 1994 due to rapid expansion, downsizing, mergers, and outsourcing. During which time, standardized coaching services began to emerge and were more readily accepted as a performance tool. From 1995 to the present, the coaching industry has worked to create unified definitions, standards, certifications, and professional organizations even as today's coaches are diverse in backgrounds, education, experience, and skill (International Coach Federation, 2007). Drake (2008) contends that coaching is now at a crossroads that requires its practitioners to engage in innovative thinking based on sound evidence across a variety of disciplines. He proposes "the need to establish a clearer canon and taxonomy of evidence that addresses core

questions for the field” (Drake, 2008, p. 22). To advance the coaching industry, scholars should identify key research questions about coaching and provide evidence as to why it is effective as well as articulate its relationship to other constructs.

Coaching Definitions

A review of the literature showed eight different definitions of coaching. Joo (2005) discovered definitions that restrict coaching to individuals and broader definitions that include organizations and groups. Definitions also vary in their inclusion of the types of relationships, the reasons or results of coaching, and their theoretical foundations. Joo found that Peterson (1996) defines coaching as a process for equipping people with tools and knowledge while Kampa-Kokesch and Anderson (2001), Orenstein (2002), and McCauley and Hezlett (2001) refer to it as an intervention to improve personal effectiveness and performance. Bacon and Spear (2003) infuse their definition with more relationship-friendly words choosing to incorporate the terms dialogue and facilitation. Moving from Hall, Otazo and Hollenbeck’s (1999) definition that coaching is a goal-focused learning opportunity, both Kilburg (1996) and the International Coach Federation (2009) define coaching as a professional relationship to help individuals experience and produce extraordinary results, including maximizing their professional potential and increasing the quality of their lives.

Further compounding the definition debate, Jackson (2005) found that many scholars are employing their own coaching definitions based on their theoretical backgrounds. They define coaching using terms such as behavioral, cognitive-behavioral, developmental, or pragmatic, and many offer examples to limit the focus of coaching by

narrowing the definition to the type of coaching discussed (i.e. life, business, and executive coaching). This study adopts ICF's definition: "Professional coaching is an ongoing professional relationship that helps people produce extraordinary results in their lives, careers, businesses, or organizations. Through the process of coaching, clients deepen their learning, improve their performance, and enhance their quality of life" (2003, p. 467). Coaching is a positive process that promotes human development.

How Coaching is Delivered

Coaching sessions are conducted through face-to-face meetings or electronically by a telephone or video conference call. The coach and coachee establish the length and duration of the sessions and define the scope of the project. They also set priorities, articulate the reasons for entering into coaching, and define the intended outcomes (ICF, 2009). In addition to establishing a rapport, the coach may also discuss expectations, communication styles, and specific strategies used. Since the reasons people enter coaching vary, it is important that coachees articulate their motivations and coaching goals.

Reasons People Seek Coaching

Fillery-Travis and Lane (2006) and Witherspoon and White (1996) found that people enter coaching to strengthen business and interpersonal skills, to increase productivity and performance, and to adopt new behaviors or unlearn behaviors and attitudes that are no longer useful in their current roles. The American Management Association (AMA) (2008) found that organizations also utilize coaching as a methodology for improving performance, developing leadership, and enhancing skills.

Coaching can lead to increases in employee engagement, retention rates, and recruitment (AMA, 2008); reductions in anxiety (Grant, 2008b); and increase in both leadership effectiveness (Thach, 2002) and customer service (Hannah, 2004).

Although coaching is widely recognized as a learning and development strategy for enhancing job performance (Stewart, O’Riordan, & Palmer, 2008), there are other reasons people engage in coaching relationships. Berg and Karlsen (2007) found that coachees are interested in developing new thinking, behavior, learning, or emotional patterns. Thinking patterns include developing mental maps that enable coachees to understand situations better while behavior patterns provide specific tools to act in various situations. As they become more proficient at interpreting and responding to diverse situations, coachees develop learning patterns that help fine-tune the techniques and internal cognitions that accompany the sense-making process. This helps them make better decisions. While developing emotional patterns, coachees learn how to respond to situations and employ their full scale of emotions rather than avoiding fearful emotions or situations that make them uncomfortable. By allowing themselves to feel all their emotions, rather than limiting it to those they are comfortable with, coachees have a wider breadth of experiences from which they can learn and develop.

Kampa-Kokesch and Anderson’s (2001) literature review on coaching found that a rapidly changing economy, lack of developmental opportunities for executives, and the realization of the importance of effective communication were central themes in executives entering into coaching relationships. However, Kilburg (1997) argues that coachees’ primary purposes are to increase personal awareness and reflection. Coachees

enter into coaching relationships for a variety of reasons, so it is important for coaches to understand their motivations and goals before services begin.

According to Feldman (2001), there are certain individuals and circumstances when coaching is not appropriate. Coaching is not appropriate for addressing personal or family crises, addictive behaviors, illegal or borderline ethical behaviors, or an inability to self-monitor. Feldman suggests that these are counter-indicators of coaching and identification of these issues should result in referral to trained mental health professionals.

Research on the Effectiveness of Coaching

Social scientists have studied the coaching process in order to identify its benefits and outcomes. Laske (1999) found that the developmental level of coaches and coachees is an important predictor of transformational change, and coachees must be ready to experience change before it can happen successfully. As a consultant to several Fortune 500 firms, Kralj (2001) found an increase in trust and accountability, reduced territoriality of key leadership staff, and increased collaboration and dialogue. However, Kralj's findings should be considered cautiously since she did not describe her methodology or provide details on how she arrived at her conclusions.

Over the past six years, Grant has conducted at least three studies that demonstrate positive results for coachees that target life issues rather than work-related or career-focused concerns. For example, he (Grant, 2003a) found that life coaching enhances mental health, life quality, and goal attainment, and from a meta-cognitive

standpoint, coaching decreases self-reflection and increases the level of insight coachees experience. In 2007, Grant used high school seniors as his participants and found that coaching increases their hardiness and hope and decreases their depression levels, and in 2008, Grant concluded that coaches-in-training can increase goal attainment, hardiness, and personal insight in coachees while simultaneously reducing anxiety. Grant's discoveries are relevant to workforce coaching because they demonstrate that coaching can lead to positive health consequences. Although further research is necessary, improving coachees' health could result in positive outcomes for organizations such as utilization of less sick time, reduced health insurance costs, and lower turnover rates. Grant's research findings also demonstrate that coaching can be used to identify and manage emotions, and emotional management may be a factor in employee thriving and relationship building.

Industry Challenges

The benefits of coaching seem infinite, yet the coaching industry still experiences challenges justifying itself as a viable profession. Similar to organizations that experience challenges due to rapid growth, there are growing pains in an industry where practice outpaces research. The coaching industry is no different. The coaching literature is replete with declarations that the industry lacks empirical research, assessments to measure the return on investment, and theoretical consensus.

Research Challenge

There is little empirical coaching evidence substantiating return on investment, methodology, effectiveness, and outcomes (American Management Association, 2008; Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001; Gyllensten & Palmer, 2005; Peel, 2005; Olson, 2008). Longitudinal coaching research is virtually non-existent as are randomized experimental studies (Grant & Cavanagh, 2007a). Scholars are appealing to organizations and researchers to assess and measure the effectiveness of coaching. In a conversation with Grant and Cavanagh (2007a), Manfred Kets de Vries states that longitudinal research would help assure that the results from coaching are more than engagement in a helping relationship, and David Clutterbuck argues that measurement would improve learning and coaching programs while demonstrating a return on investment (ROI).

Measurement Challenge

Anecdotal evidence on coaching success rates and outcomes account for the majority of the articles in the coaching literature. Sherpa (2008) and Grant (2007) found that as few as 12-30% of organizations have a formal process in place to measure return on investment. Mackie discovered, “There are to date no meta-analytic studies of the effectiveness of coaching and no component analyses of what specific element of the intervention is responsible for a positive outcome” (2007, p. 311). Mackie argues that a primary reason for a lack of standardizing outcomes is the number of targets that encapsulate the coaching process. Coaches can assist with individuals, groups, teams, or organizations. They also provide interventions geared toward interpersonal skills, management style, leadership agendas, change initiatives, transitions, promotions, skill

development, and conflict resolution. Since coaching is a personalized process that can have different outcomes for individuals, it is difficult to formally measure its outcomes or return on investment. Sherman and Freas (2004) suggest, “The essentially human nature of coaching is what makes it work—and also what makes it nearly impossible to quantify” (as cited in American Management Association, 2008, p. 16).

As difficult as it may be, measuring ROI is an important step in justifying coaching expenditures and demonstrating coaching efficacy. Scholars are not suggesting that coaching outcomes cannot be measured. Rather, they are pinpointing the difficulties that exist while simultaneously proclaiming a need for evidence-based practices (Grant, 2006; Mackie, 2007; Grant & Cavanagh, 2007a; Spence, 2007). Measuring ROI is important because ROI results can be used in human resource planning to determine how to support professional development and which employees should receive coaching services.

Organizations should measure non-monetary outcomes as well. Since coaching has been linked to positive results in employee satisfaction and performance, human resource staff should measure those outcomes (Hannah, 2004). Preliminary evidence suggests that increased positive affect can be attained by utilizing strengths-based interventions (Mackie, 2007), so measuring the efficacy of strengths-based interventions and positive affect should also be measured.

To measure strengths, Linley and Harrington (2006) believe there are two highly respected assessments available: the Clifton Strengthsfinder developed by Clifton and the Gallup organization and Chris Peterson and Martin Seligman’s Values-In-Action (VIA)

Strengths questionnaire. The Strengthsfinder evaluates 34 talent themes within an occupational context and provides a report identifying the individual's top five talents (Gallup, 2009). The VIA questionnaire measures 24 strengths underpinning six core virtues (VIA Institute, 2007). The report provides respondents with their top five signature strengths and a brief description of them. Coaches then utilize the assessments to gain a greater understanding of their coachee's strengths, which enables them to develop specific interventions.

Theoretical Framework Challenge

One reason it may be difficult to utilize assessments to capture the outcomes of coaching is that the industry lacks consensus on a theoretical framework for coaching (Gray, 2006; Berman & Bradt, 2006). The coaching industry needs to gain consensus and develop or identify theories that form the framework for coaching. Glaser and Strauss contend that theory development is important because "theory enables prediction and explanation of behavior" (1967, p. 3). It provides theoretical advancement of the discipline or area of inquiry, assists in understanding the situation or phenomena, provides perspective on the data, and guides the research. Lynham (2000) agrees and further suggests that theory development helps legitimize a profession, reduces the tension that occurs when practice outpaces research, and enables further investigation. Lynham also believes it is important to understand that researchers' worldviews influence the development of theory through the questions they ask and the methodologies they employ. For example, a constructivist asks more qualitative questions while a positivist might investigate cause and effect relationships. Both are important because they provide

different perspectives, and theory built from multiple research perspectives provides more comprehensive and complete results.

Researchers have touted multiple theories as the cornerstones for coaching, so there is a strong foundation from which to try and build consensus. Theories currently being debated in the coaching literature include behaviorism, adult learning, psychoanalysis, systems, humanism, cognition, and positive psychology (Peel, 2005; Jackson, 2004; Barner & Higgins, 2007; Berg & Karlsen, 2007). However, scholars have yet to develop consensus on which theories are most important, and therefore cannot effectively foster the progression of the field. More work is necessary, as developing agreement on the theoretical and methodological cornerstones of a field or practice is an important predictor of the maturation and professionalization of a field (Lynham, 2000).

Coaching Models

The coaching industry is still working to overcome many of its challenges, including the lack of consensus around coaching models. There are a number of models available since many scholars have their own classifications systems for categorizing and defining them. Some describe them based on academic versus practitioner models (Joo, 2005) whilst others depict them as “models *of* coaching and models *for* coaching” (Stewart, O’Riordan, & Palmer, 2008, p. 127). Coaching models have transcended practitioner-based models as the coaching industry has matured and incorporated scholar-practitioner models that are theoretically informed and based on empirical evidence. Both types of models exist; however, there is an increased awareness that no single evidence

based model or theory can properly account for the “dynamic, interactive, socially constructed nature of coaching” (Stewart, O’Riordan, & Palmer, 2008, p. 130). The coaching community has accepted that practitioners employ multiple methods to meet their client’s needs.

For the purpose of this grounded theory investigation of the transformational aspects of coaching, models that depict human development, change, and positive psychology are discussed as are theories that undergird the coaching models and their research outcomes. Even with an expansive selection of theories, there is little empirically-based research on positive psychology coaching. Therefore, various coaching models will be presented that show elements germane to positive psychology coaching in an effort to integrate the models into a unified framework that depicts the relationship between coaching and thriving.

Human Development Models of Coaching

Coaching is a methodology for human development. With its emphasis on appreciative, strengths-based processes, positive psychology coaching interweaves theories from human development, adult learning, positive psychology, and humanism to help coachees develop and achieve their goals. While there are many coaching models to choose from, six models were selected because they most closely align with the purpose of the study. Kilburg’s (2001) model was chosen because it illustrates how coachees transform and develop over time while Joo’s (2005) model provides the antecedents, processes, and outcomes that are possible as a result of coaching. Drake’s (2009) model

emphasizes the importance of the relationship between coach and coachee, and Laske (1999) illustrates how the development of coach and coachee are important to the outcomes. Finally, Berg and Karlsen's (2007) model highlights different phases of coaching and provides a foundation for understanding progression and Jackson's (2004) four-cornerstone model illustrates how reflection can empower action. Collectively, these models provide a strong foundation to understand how coaching works, the processes and phases, and the transformation and outcomes possible.

Kilburg (2001) created an eight-step model to understand the mechanisms that enable transformation and the elements that make coaching effective. In his model, both the coach and the coachee commit themselves to progressive development. Through their commitment, they characterize the challenges they face as well as the structure of their coaching relationship and agreement. They enter into authentic relationships where each is respected, and they remain open to a wide variety of interventions. They anticipate resistance, so they develop and identify techniques and motivators that are based on the coachees' strengths. They also work to assure that there are supportive organizational processes and people in place that will enable the coachee to continue experimenting with different behaviors and techniques while receiving feedback on progress made. When done correctly, the eight-step model facilitates desired outcomes; however, if any of the processes are flawed or missing, the coachee will stall or experience unfavorable results.

Joo (2005) is also interested in generating a model that illustrates the coaching process. Similar to Kilburg's model that describes phases involved in effective coaching experiences, Joo's model includes the antecedents and processes of coaching as well as

the outcomes. Joo suggests that coach and coachee characteristics and organizational support are antecedents to the process of coaching, which includes the approach used, the relationship between coach and coachee, and the feedback reciprocity they have developed. Successful coachees will experience proximal, or immediate outcomes that include behavior changes based on an increase in learning and self-awareness. This breeds positive distal outcomes such as individual and organizational success. Joo's framework depicts the factors involved in successful coaching and hints at the possibility that coaching could improve relationships and personal insight.

Drake (2009) also developed a coaching model that depicts relational aspects of the coaching process. His model represents a “dynamic interaction among four knowledge domains and the relational process between a coach and a client” (Drake, 2009, p. 3). Using the four domains of knowledge (foundational, professional, self, and contextual), Drake suggests coaches individualize their approach by addressing both the expertise of the coach and the experiences of the coachee. Integrating four domains of knowledge while acknowledging the strengths and limitations of each enables coaches to “improve their work with each unique client situation” (Drake, 2009, p. 5). It also contributes to an evidence-based practice that helps establish coaching as a profession while illustrating the importance of adopting a holistic perspective in understanding complex human dynamics.

Laske's (1999) integrated model of development also illustrates the coaching process. However, unlike Drake's (2009) pragmatic approach, Laske elucidates the mental space involved in the coaching activity by creating a typology based on earlier

theories using three houses in which each house has four floors that represent available coaching topics. The “three houses define the mental space in which coach and client mentally reside at any moment during their partnership” (Laske, 1999, p. 140). In the first house, the coachee works on developing self-awareness and awareness of others by attending to personal culture, professional agendas, work content, and the evolving self. Coachees then progress to the second house, which targets role integration and helps the coachee see organizational processes from a leadership perspective. Coachees in the second house discuss issues relating to role authority as well as topics focused on interpersonal, informational, and decisional roles. In the third house, coachees integrate the skills necessary to be effective leaders, including understanding issues relating to symbiotic relationships, human resources, politics, and organizational structure. Where the coachee is at any given time dictates the type of coaching intervention and theoretical stance coaches take. Moving from developmental to cognitive-behavioral and psychodynamic approaches, Laske’s model describes how the coachee and coach can occupy different houses and be at different developmental levels (see Figure 1).

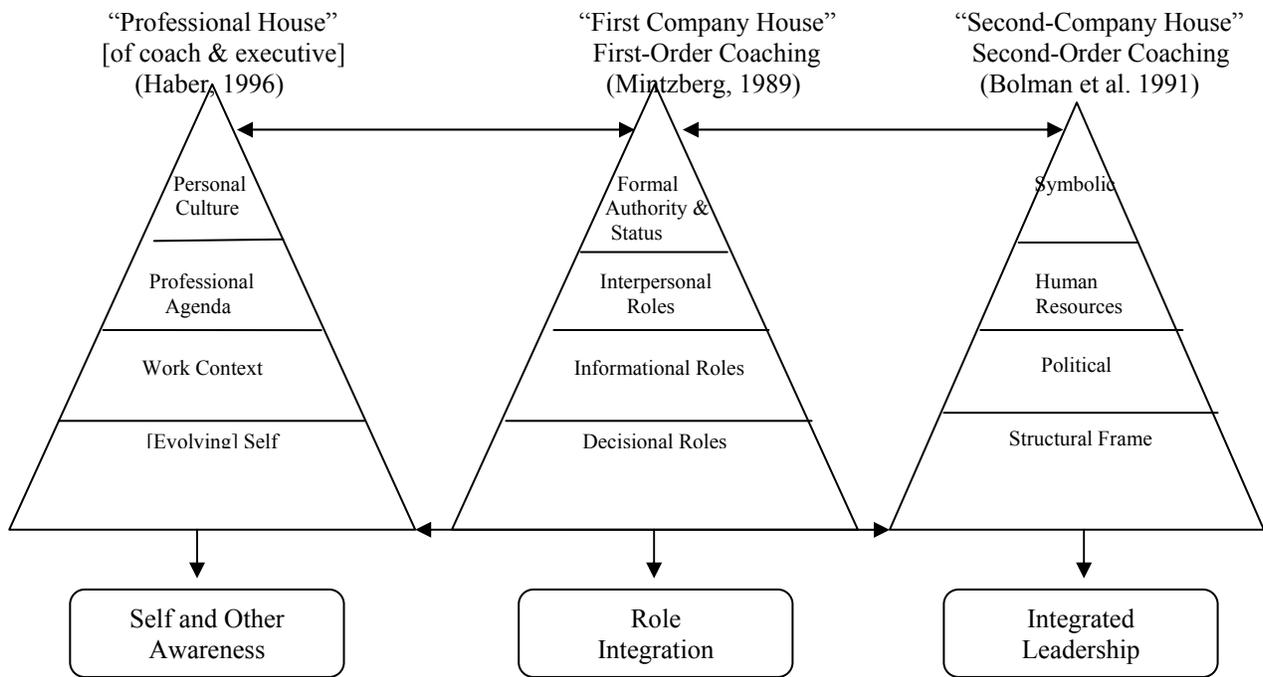


Figure 1. Laske's (1999) The mental space of coaching activity. From “An Integrated Model of Developmental Coaching,” by O. Laske, 1999, *Consulting Psychology Journal*, 51(3), 140. Copyright 1999 by the Educational Publishing Foundation and the Division of Consulting Psychology.

In contrast, Berg and Karlsen’s (2007) process model takes a different approach by highlighting the phases of coaching rather than the development that occurs within them as Laske’s model demonstrates. Berg and Karlsen introduce Berg’s (2006) five-stage process model of coaching where time involved and complexity of the issues discussed increases with each phase (see Figure 2). The model begins with a focus on developing trust; however, Berg and Karlsen expand that stage by suggesting that coaches should then engage in a process of discovery with their coachees to diagnose the situation and identify their coachees’ strengths and challenges. This facilitates critical reflection and self-awareness for the coachees, which serves as an empowerment tool for

later development. Next, the coach and coachee define goals and determine what type of change is necessary. The assessments they conduct in the final three stages provide the data that drives the planning, implementation, and evaluations phases. Once the goal is attained, the process can start over.

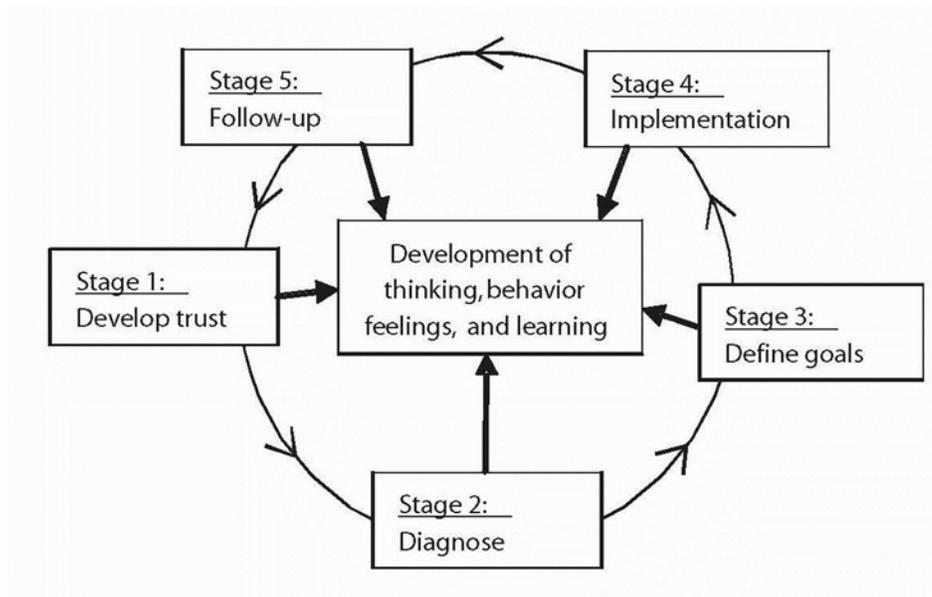


Figure 2. Berg's (2006) Stages in the coaching process. From "Mental Models in Project Management Coaching," by M.E. Berg and J.T. Karlsen, 2007, *Engineering Management Journal*, 19(3), p. 8.

Jackson's (2004) process model is similar to Natale and Diamente's (2005) coaching model in that it is predicated on gaining awareness and taking action based on skills learned through coaching. He describes coaching as a reflective process that engages active reflecting, reframing, and questioning to encourage review of how coachees feel, think, and behave. As a constructivist, Jackson proposes that reflective learning occurs through interaction between the environment and the individual, and that

learning is active and relative, meaning that people experience different results. Coaches can employ critical reflection as a tool to help coachees change behavior and monitor their emotions. However, Grant (2003a) warns that philosophical self-reflection is not productive, and that reflection should focus on goal attainment.

To explain critical reflection in relationship to coaching and learning, Jackson (2004) created a four-cornered model. Drawing upon the theories of Kolb, Lewin, Dewey, and Piaget, he describes the first stage as a balancing process where critical reflection helps coachees consciously learn about themselves while decreasing less preferred learning styles. As they progress and enter a state of objectivity, coachees are able to distance themselves from emotionally responding to environmental stimuli, which allows them to make more conscious choices and decisions and gain a greater perspective on events. They can also examine them in context to their goals and relationships. As their confidence and decision making skills improve, they can rehearse responses and manage their immediate reactions. Jackson says his model allows coaches to “respond more positively and constructively to circumstances” (2004, p. 63). The four-cornered model illustrates the constructivists’ view that critical reflection is a necessary process in which coachees assimilate information and apply it contextually to changing environments, stimuli, and circumstances. It is germane to positive psychology coaching because Jackson demonstrates self-reflection is important in managing emotions and behavior and describes how coachees may change their perceptions by reframing the language they use to describe events and behavior.

Theories that Inform Human Development Coaching Models

Like the multitude of coaching models that exist in the literature, there is no shortage of theories posited as the foundation for coaching. In determining which theories to include, the researcher evaluated their alignment with the purpose of the study and the variables being investigated. Adult learning, constructivism, and humanism were chosen as they most closely align and support the models selected and the overall goal of the study, which was to understand how positive psychology coaching helps people transform and thrive.

Before coachees can thrive, they must first understand how to monitor their emotional states. This process occurs through critical reflection and learning. Although scholars disagree on the definition of learning, they agree that learning personifies change through gaining knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005). Knowles, Holton, and Swanson state, “Learning is a process by which behavior is changed, shaped, and controlled” (2005, p. 13). Since coaching involves learning and changing behavior, adult learning theory is prominently displayed in the literature.

According to Gray (2006), adult learning theories support coaching outcomes because they facilitate self-determination, self-transformation, and self-actualization. As adult learners, Gray found that coachees are responsible for directing their attention and learning, and coachees learn best when coaches incorporate experiences and life-centered activities that focus on problem-solving. The coach must also value and understand the coachee’s need to know, self-concept, experience, readiness level, learning orientation, and internal motivation. Extending Schön’s (1987) work, Gray discovered that coachees

engage in joint experimentation, hypothesis testing to confirm or disconfirm results of an action, and move-testing, a process where they initiate change. Therefore, coaches must know how to present problems that engage adult learners and allow them to apply and reflect on the information they have assimilated through coaching. Failure to understand the needs of adult learners may result in frustration and disappointing coaching results. Positive psychology coaches understand how to engage adult learners and they provide opportunities for coachees to practice their new skills during sessions before trying them outside of sessions. This helps coachees feel more confident and successful.

Mezirow's (1994) transformative learning theory is another theoretical position supporting human development coaching models. Mezirow built his theory by extending Knowles' adult learning hypotheses. Transformative learning is a process of constructing knowledge based on new or revised interpretations of personal experience that serve as a guide for action (Imel, 1998). Mezirow advanced transformational learning theory by claiming that adult learners need to transform the way they perceive themselves, also known as perspective transformation (Imel, 1998). This occurs through reflection, a practice coaches engage in with their coachees where they encourage them to view themselves through others' perspectives. Only when coachees are aware of diverse perspectives, can they consciously make decisions and act. When not reflective, coachees risk relying upon hidden or erroneous assumptions that may interfere with accurate decision-making and informed choice. Transformational learning is important to positive psychology coaching because coaches create environments for coachees to engage in

critical reflection and to learn new skills, including reframing experiences and personal assumptions.

Mezirow argues that analyzing assumptions is important because they form the meaning we ascribe to our everyday activities (Imel, 1998). An important role coaches play then is to help coachees extrapolate their assumptions in an effort to make decisions that are accurate and free from bias or judgment. By considering alternative perspectives and examining their worldviews, values, beliefs, and behavior, coachees are able to transform and reinterpret life experiences while learning in the process.

Like Mezirow, Kolb (1984) believes in transformational learning. He contends, “Knowledge is created through transformation of experience” (as cited in Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005, p. 197). Kolb’s theory is built upon the interaction of experience and content where each element informs and supports the other’s transformation. Kolb’s learning cycle has four steps. As applied to coaching, coachees use concrete experiences that involve present moment experiences, observe and reflect on experiences, formulate abstract concepts and generalize into theories, and test the implications of new concepts by making decisions and solving problems. Together with critical reflection, positive psychology coachees transform and gain new skills by reacting less to previous learning styles, retaining objectivity in their emotional responses, reframing information into strategies, achieving results through rehearsing, and reflecting on the new skill or behavior (Jackson, 2004).

As coachees change, so do their experiences and interpretations of events. This paves the way for constructivists to posit that knowledge is contextually based and

dependent upon the meanings people ascribe to particular situations or experiences. In this way, learning is cumulative and cannot be “separated from the context in which it is used” (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005, p. 192). Positive psychology coaches can utilize a constructivist view and help coachees learn to reframe experiences, thereby changing the meaning they assign to them. They can also draw upon coachees’ experiences and prior knowledge and help coachees apply new information by relating it to other information they already possess. Griffiths (2005) believes the “repeated links made between coaching and experiential learning accentuates the constructivist nature of coaching” (p. 58). To solidify learning, coaches can utilize Savery and Duffy’s (1996) constructivist principles in their work with coachees (as outlined in Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005).

Positive psychology coaches can use Savery and Duffy’s (1996) constructivist principles to help coachees change. They begin by helping coachees anchor their learning moments to other problems they have encountered in their lives. This helps them cement the concepts. Coaches can then support coachees in using that information to take ownership of the problem or task and create the change they want. Next, coaches create coaching environments that are conducive and supportive of learning, and they give coachees ownership while encouraging them to test new ideas against old worldviews. Finally, positive psychology coaches create opportunities for their coachees to engage in critical reflection of both the learning content and the process. Although not originally intended as a constructivist theory for coaching, Savery and Duffy’s constructivist

principles lend further theoretical evidence to the importance of providing supportive, reflective opportunities where coachees can transform, develop, and possibly even thrive.

Humanism also underpins many coaching models. According to Gray (2006), humanism takes a “constructive view, stressing people’s independent dignity, worth, and capacity to develop personal competence and self-respect” (p. 481). Gray believes that coaches offer unconditional positive regard, listen empathetically, and provide personal congruence to their coachees. In this way, “coaching is both a process and a tool, which represents a *style of approach* and a values set that fundamentally believe in the power of human potential” (Richards, 2003, p. 14). Grant (2008a) concurs stating that the human potential movement enabled the emergence of the coaching industry.

Spence (2007) believes that coaching is “primarily concerned with human growth and change, based on the philosophical assumption that individuals have vast reservoirs of untapped potential within them and are naturally inclined towards developing that potential” (p. 256). The need to improve and develop originates from Maslow’s (1962) self-actualization theory, which states that lower-order needs must be satisfied before an individual can attain higher-order needs (as cited in Spence, 2007). Rogers, a founding father of humanism, agrees with Maslow’s theory that individuals have an innate desire to develop and grow; however, he also contends that society will thwart that effort as individuals strive to adopt societal norms and values (Spence, 2007). As a human development tool, positive psychology coaches can help their coachees achieve higher-order needs, foster a desire to learn, and use their strengths to achieve goals.

Applying Roger's view of therapy to coaching, coaches provide coachees with a warm, supportive environment that encourages them to disclose their stories to empathetic, non-judgmental coaches that accept them where they are while echoing back their feelings (Kirschenbaum, 2004). Many of the processes Rogers created for therapists are found in coaching practices today. Specifically, the use of non-directive practice and the client-centered approach, which claims that the therapists' attitude is important as are their abilities to accept, understand, empathize, and be congruent (authentic) in relationships with their clients. Humanism is integrated into the approaches positive psychology coaches employ with their clients.

Extending the role of therapist to coach, Stober (2006) believes that humanism and coaching are intricately linked because change is motivated through self-actualization (as cited in Spence, 2007). Rogers (1979) would have agreed, evidenced by his belief that a person-centered approach can be used in any practice where a person's development is the goal. As applied to positive psychology coaching, coaches maintain unconditional positive regard, authenticity, and empathetic understanding, which facilitate coachees' learning through reflection of their interaction with the environment (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005). As they continue to learn and develop, coachees transform their emotions and behavior, which leads to a marked sense of energy, vitality, and emotional well-being—key components in the definition of thriving.

Research on human development coaching models. Coaching has been linked to development of emotional intelligence in individuals. In a small survey of coachees who had previously participated in a coach program lasting approximately 9-12 months,

Wasylyshyn, Gronsky, and Haas (2006) found that 52% of the individuals increased their emotional competence. Thelwell, Lane, Weston, and Greenlee's (2008) correlation study also substantiated the relationship between coaching and emotional intelligence. Thelwell et al. asked 99 coachees to complete an emotional intelligence and a coaching efficacy scale, and concluded that coaching behaviors and emotional intelligence are significantly related. Regression analysis depicted a significant association between regulation of emotions and motivation efficacy. Grant and Cavanagh (2007b) also confirmed a significant association between emotional intelligence and coaching in their exploratory study, which provided initial validation of their self-report questionnaire assessing goal-focused coaching skills. Understanding the relationship between coaching and emotional intelligence provides another application for using coaching as a professional development tool and helping coachees transform professionally and relate more positively with others. The ability to develop meaningful relationships is a key element in the construct of thriving; therefore, it is important to understand how coaching enhances emotional intelligence.

Change Models as Applied to Coaching

The process of transformation implies change. Whether it is organizational or personal change, coaching can facilitate positive outcomes since its primary purposes are to help individuals grow and change behavior, skills, or attitudes. Before they can grow, coachees must undergo a change process.

While there are many change models available for coaches to choose from, Prochaska and DiClemente's (1994) transtheoretical model of change (TTM) is a "well

supported model” (Stober, 2008, p. 74). The TMM model “describes how people prepare to change and how successful change is maintained” (Passmore, 2007, p. 266). It delineates the six steps coachees must go through to change successfully. In the pre-contemplation stage, coachees are not yet aware of the need to change; however, once they reach the contemplation stage, they are thinking about the potential for change but have not yet committed to doing so. As their commitment to change increases, coachees enter the preparation phase and begin taking steps to solidify the change. In the action phase, they engage in new behaviors and understand that change takes time. As coachees are able to maintain the change in behavior, skills, or attitude, they enter into a maintenance phase; however, they must always guard against the final phase, or relapse, since old behavior patterns arise when individuals are under stress. Positive psychology coaches utilize the TMM model by building upon their coachees’ strengths and using appreciative and reflective processes to facilitate change.

Coaches can also utilize cognitive-behavioral coaching models to create change. Neenan and Palmer (2001) suggest that cognitive-behavioral models of coaching demonstrate that how we view events is often times more important than the actual events themselves. Personal reflection on the language we use to describe events is an important element in reframing one’s perception and subsequently changing behavior. Through personal reflection and guided discovery, positive psychology coachees learn to answer their own questions rather than relying upon the coach for the answers. By increasing self-awareness, coachees can develop action plans that are goal directed. Positive psychology coaches can then utilize increased self-awareness and cognitive-behavioral

techniques, in conjunction with other positive methods, to enable coaches' transformation.

Appreciative inquiry (AI) is another coaching model that enables personal growth through change. Liston-Smith (2008) describes it as a process that engages individuals holistically, and Lord (2005) describes it as a change method for helping to see what is not visible. It is about unleashing potential and overcoming self-imposed limits or unconscious restrictions. Through its use of appreciative language built to strengthen capacities, appreciative inquiry seeks to discover the generative, life-giving forces that lead to excellence (Cooperider & Whitney, n.d.). A central tenet of appreciative inquiry is the assumption that organizations and people are dynamic, untapped resources of enormous potential. When tapped affirmatively, extraordinary outcomes are possible (Cooperider & Whitney, n.d.).

Positive psychology coaches help their coachees maximize potential and change by utilizing techniques based upon appreciative inquiry. According to Boyd and Bright (2007), appreciative inquiry is a change that is widely received by practitioners and scholars because it is built on framing questions and actions positively. Using Orem, Binkert, and Clancy's (2007) appreciative coaching model as an example, coachees participate in four stages. In the first stage of discovery, coachees select a topic, and the coach begins positively framing questions to help the coachee discover information pertinent to acting on that topic. In the dream stage, the coach and coachee begin applying the information they learned during the first stage. Orem et al. (2007) describes it this way: "When we are in the Dream Stage, we are using the clients' proudest

accomplishments, core skills and strengths, and deepest values to create something with which we can explore and experiment” (p. 18). As the dream begins to take shape, coachees enter the design phase, which focuses on developing an action plan for bringing the dream into fruition. As their action plan begins, coachees enter the destiny stage. This is the final phase of their journey and affords coachees with an opportunity to celebrate accomplishments and decide whether to conclude their dream or begin the process anew.

Positive psychology coaches can also use appreciative coaching models to encourage learning and development. Locander and Luechauer (2007) contend coaches accomplish this goal by helping coachees recall past successes, reflect on why those successes occurred, and understand the elements that enabled the success. Appreciative inquiry works by helping coachees gain insight into their past behavior, attitudes, and performance thereby enabling the coach to engage in a strengths-based dialogue that focuses on the coachee’s success. Skinner and Kelley (2006) argue that appreciative inquiry is a successful intervention tool because it helps individuals evoke “positive images of individuals, organizations, and the environment, in an effort to discover the best practices of an organization” (p. 80). Appreciative coaching models are effective change tools because they empower coachees to learn by using their previous successes as a foundation to extend their development. The models promote self-reflection, which together with dialogue that encourages discovery, can be used to help coachees thrive.

Theories that Inform Change Models of Coaching

Cognitive and behavioral psychology are the two primary theories informing cognitive-behavioral coaching models. Cognitive psychology became popular because

psychologists were frustrated with behaviorists who did not take perceptions, thoughts, and memory seriously (Nemade, Reiss, & Dombeck, 2007). It gained momentum as Piaget, Beck, and Ellis began using it to help individuals identify and solve their problems. Cognitive psychologists help people change distorted thinking and perception, and they believe individuals have internal desires and beliefs that guide their actions. They also encourage people to think more optimistically (Berg & Karlsen, 2007), since perceptions influence emotions and subsequent behavior (Beck, 2008). To change behavior, positive psychology coaches help coachees modify their thoughts and feelings.

Behavioral psychologists believe that behavior is shaped through environmental interaction, as opposed to changing cognitions. They work with clients to teach them how to respond differently (Berg & Karlsen, 2007). Positive psychology coaches can help coachees change their behavior by reframing the language they use to define or explain an event. They can also learn to reframe their own self-talk and image. By changing the language they use, coachees will create different outcomes and behavior.

Appreciative inquiry is also founded on individuals changing their thoughts and behavior. It is based on five theoretical principles (Orem, Binkert, & Clancy, 2007). The constructionist principle interweaves knowing and becoming by positing that past actions and beliefs guide present actions and feelings while the positive principle asserts that positive change is more likely to occur when both coach and coachee are engaged in a positive, collaborative relationship that facilitates the accomplishment of a dream. The simultaneity principle proposes that change and inquiry are concurrent and that the questions and language coachees use today affect the outcomes they experience

tomorrow. The language coaches use to frame their questions is important in predicting positive outcomes. The fourth principle is poetic and also honors the language and stories coachees use to describe themselves. Coaches need to help coachees reinterpret past events and their life stories so they may recreate new experiences in the present and future. The anticipatory principle is the fifth tool coaches use to change behavior, as coachees can guide their current behavior by focusing on a future dream or goal.

Research on coaching change models. Researchers investigating the changes in behavior which result from coaching have taken an interest in understanding how this change occurs as well as the types of change possible. In a phenomenological study investigating transformational change through the co-active coaching model, Longhurst (2006) had 12 coaches and 20 of their coachees journal their thoughts on what happened when coachees had a moment of insight during a coaching session. The results suggest that aha moments occur somatically, emotionally, and cognitively, and that the greater the change in understanding, the greater the degree of behavioral change possible. Bigger aha moments lead to greater change.

In order to evaluate the effect of coaching on goals and behavior change, Green, Grant, and Rynsaardt (2007) asked 10 high-school teachers to undergo a coach training program. Upon completion of the training, the coaches were paired with high school students. Over the course of two school terms, they conducted 10 individual coaching sessions and asked participants to establish school and personal goals. Green et al. confirmed that coaching increases coachees' levels of cognitive hardiness and hope while decreasing levels of depression. This is achieved by engaging in discussion on goals and

action plans, and by using cognitive-behavioral techniques to increase positive self-talk. The results are significant to positive psychology coaches who help coachees change their behavior through managing their emotions, reframing negative language, and building upon strengths to overcome challenges.

Grant (2008b) also wanted to know whether coaching facilitates goal attainment and emotional well-being. He asked 29 participants to take part in a 10-12 week coaching program where each one of them was simultaneously both a coach and a coachee. Using Landsberg's (1997) GROW model to aid in self-reflection, the results of this study showed that participants experienced changes in cognitive hardiness, goal attainment, and insight and decreases in anxiety. There was no change in the level of depression participants experienced. Goal setting is an important element in the coaching process and aids in coachees' development. Orenstein (2006) confirmed that coachees change behaviors most closely related to coaching objectives. They are also less likely to modify behaviors that are indirectly related to coaching goals and not very likely at all to make changes in behaviors that are not addressed during coaching sessions. The results of these studies demonstrate that it is important for positive psychology coaches to address emotions when developing goals and outcomes.

The use of cognitive and behavioral techniques is a foundation of many coaching programs and models. Green, Oades, and Grant (2006) studied a ten week life-coaching, solutions-focused, cognitive-behavioral coaching program during which participants were separated into a control and experimental group. Participants completed self-reports that were designed to elicit their levels of depression, anxiety, and stress. While all were

found to be within a normal range, only participants that received coaching experienced gains in well-being, hope, and goal striving. In a later study investigating the efficacy of cognitive-behavioral coaching programs, Beddoes-Jones and Miller (2007) confirmed that short-term cognitive-behavioral coaching interventions are successful, thereby providing additional support that coaching is an effective development and emotional management tool even when individuals cannot commit to an extended coaching agreement. The results of this study corroborate the importance of positive psychology coaches addressing emotional well-being during coaching sessions, and for coachees to learn how to identify and manage their emotions. Coaching enhances people's development as well as their emotional state, which has positive implications for organizations since positive employees are more productive (Clifton & Harter, 2003).

Positive Psychology Coaching Models

Positive psychology coaching may play an instrumental role in employee thriving by helping individuals identify when they are experiencing a marked sense of energy, vitality, and connection to others. Coaches who utilize positive psychology models also operate by trying to change behavior; however, their approaches are based on changing behavior through appreciative dialogue and building upon their coachees' strengths. According to Linley, Woolston, and Biswas-Diener, positive psychology coaches are "abundance-based, solution-focused" and driven by assumptions that people are naturally motivated to develop their potential (2009, p. 37). They also suggest that people thrive when maximum potential and environmental support coalesce. A primary goal of positive

psychology coaching is to help people identify their strengths and the environmental supports that encourage development of their full potential.

The Centre for Applied Positive Psychology has developed a positive psychology model that helps coachees identify their strengths and differentiate their realized and unrealized strengths, regular and infrequent behaviors, and exposed and unexposed weaknesses by using a model they refer to as Realise2 (Linley, Woolston, & Biswas-Diener, 2009). Realized strengths are those that are recognized and used frequently whilst unrealized strengths are strengths that are dormant and waiting discovery. Regular learned behaviors are activities people do but do not receive positive energy from doing. In contrast, infrequent learned behaviors are behaviors that are done infrequently, and as long as they stay infrequent, pose no real threat to well-being or energy. Exposed weaknesses are those that are openly acknowledged whilst unexposed weaknesses lie dormant but could become problematic if the situation or context changed. The Realise2 coaching model provides a holistic framework for identification, assessment, development, and management of behaviors, strengths, and weaknesses.

Another popular framework positive psychology coaches utilize to promote positive movement and change is the co-active coaching model developed by Whitworth, Kimsey-House, and Sandahl (1998). Longhurst (2006) claims the framework encompasses the principles of positive psychology. The co-active coaching model is predicated on four cornerstones that form the foundation for the coaching relationship. First, coaches view their coachees as creative, resourceful, and whole, so they adopt a strengths-based perspective that assumes only the coachee has the correct answers. The

coach is simply a facilitator that asks coachees questions. The second cornerstone states that the agenda comes from the coachee, and the third cornerstone stems from a belief that the coach must be responsive to the coachee's agenda and able to shift themes and the direction of the questions as necessary. Finally, the coach tailors the approach to meet the coachee's needs and creates a space for change that encourages a life of fulfillment and balance. Co-active coaches empower coachees to make the changes they want to see in their lives (Posner, 2004).

The co-active coaching model emphasizes learning rather than goal attainment, so positive psychology coaches spend considerable time helping coachees generate possibilities. They do so through active listening, paying attention to intuition, remaining curious, engaging in action learning, and honing self-management skills (Marshall, 2006). They also engage in fulfillment coaching, which helps coachees learn about their purpose and values, balance coaching, where different perspectives are employed to understand presenting challenges, and process coaching, which involves integrating the mind and body to experience memories stored in different parts of the body (Longhurst, 2006). The co-active coaching model encourages thriving in the workplace because it emphasizes learning—a key component in the construct of thriving.

Linley and Harrington's (2006) strength-based coaching model is another coaching intervention that builds on coachees' strengths. Although not conceptualized as a coaching model, strengths-based coaching was founded on appreciative principles from positive psychology and constructivist theories and "allows people to engage with themselves in what they do best, and to begin to discover the power within them that

coaching so often sets about to release” (Linley & Harrington, 2006, p. 41). Strengths-Based Coaching embodies humanistic assumptions that coachees strive to grow and develop to their fullest potential and activate their strengths in the process. This occurs through an appreciative dialogue where coachees identify their strengths. They allow for the possibility that some strengths are contextual and only happen outside the coaching session, so they propose that coaches incorporate strengths-based assessments into their work to identify all the coachees’ strengths rather than just those that would arise through conversation. They recommend the Clifton StrengthsFinder and the Values-In-Action Strengths questionnaire since both assessments provide a comprehensive analysis of the individuals’ strengths. By incorporating assessment results, coaches are better equipped to view the coachee from a holistic perspective and tailor their approach respectively.

Theories That Inform Positive Psychology Coaching Models

“One cannot build on weaknesses. To achieve results, one has to use all the available strengths” (Drucker, 2007, p. 67).

Many of the theories supporting positive psychology coaching models are founded on a strengths-based philosophy, which has gained in popularity (Harris, Thorensen, & Lopez, 2007). “A strength is a natural capacity for behaving, thinking, or feeling in a way that allows optimal functioning and performance in the pursuit of valued outcomes” (Linley & Harrington, 2006, p. 41). Clifton and Anderson (2002) proclaim that strengths occur “through refinement of talent with knowledge and skill” (as cited in Linley & Harrington, 2006, p. 38) whereas Peterson and Seligman extend the definition by stating that strengths “are distinguishable routes to displaying one or another of the virtues” (as cited in Linley & Harrington, 2006, p. 38). All individuals have strengths, yet

they may not be aware of what they are. Coaching can help people discover and strengthen them.

Park, Peterson, and Seligman (2004) believe that when coaches encourage coachees to utilize their strengths, they are unleashing their coachees' potential and enhancing their well-being. Appreciative or positive psychology coaches recognize that strengths are opportunities from which to build a foundation. They concentrate their time on expanding and refining their coachees' strengths rather than developing action plans to address performance gaps (Linley & Harrington, 2006). This empowers coachees to accept and use their strengths to accomplish goals, which when successfully attained, can enhance self-efficacy and empower further action. As they achieve success, coachees may become more confident in their skills and approach, which can then lead to a willingness to establish new goals and begin the process anew.

Strengths-based theories are rooted in positive psychology. Positive psychology originated in 1998 when the President of the American Psychological Association, Martin Seligman, teamed up with Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi to “move the focus of psychology from what is wrong with people to what is right with people” (Linley & Carter, 2007, p. 31). Together, they encouraged psychologists to shift from examining the negative effects of everyday life to examining positive aspects that include human strengths, virtues, well-being, hope, gratitude, happiness, and resilience, among others (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Their focus was to restore the balance to psychological research to include not just the negative aspects of people and conditions but also the positive ones as well (Gable & Haidt, 2005). To accomplish their goals, they proposed that scholars

and practitioners focus on what is right and then address problems rather than looking at problems and identifying gaps in performance (Foster & Lloyd, 2007).

Although positive psychology provides an umbrella term to investigate positive conditions and phenomena, researchers have been investigating positive processes for more than a hundred years. William James wrote on *healthy mindedness* in 1902, Jung investigated individualization in 1933, Allport explored positive human characteristics in 1958, and Maslow advocated for “the study of healthy people in lieu of sick people in 1968” (Gable & Haidt, 2005, p.104). Roger and Maslow were early pioneers with their humanistic views of fully functioning people and self-actualization (Coetzee & Viviers, 2007). While social scientists have always been interested in studying positive processes, it was only recently that scholars developed a classification system for categorizing the information and providing a framework to investigate it.

Positive psychology coaching is an accepted coaching philosophy. Mackie states, “Positive psychology is a natural ally to coaching” (2007, p. 316). Kauffman (2006) concurs citing that both positive psychologists and coaches believe that individuals can develop and grow. The Australian Psychological Society Interest Group on Coaching Psychology (2003) recognizes the interconnectivity of positive psychology and coaching. As cited in Grant and Cavanagh (2007a), they define coaching psychology as:

an applied positive psychology [which] draws on and develops established psychological approaches, and can be understood as being the systematic application of behavioural science, which is focused on the enhancement of life experience, work performance and well-being for individuals, groups, and

organizations with no clinically significant mental health issues or abnormal levels of distress. (p.24)

Positive psychology coaches interweave the principles of positive psychology to enable their coachees to learn and build upon their strengths to fulfill their potential and accomplish their goals (Linley & Harrington, 2006). Positive psychology coaching can engender individual thriving.

Thriving

As described in chapter 1, thriving is a psychological construct that has come to the fore in the realm of positive psychology. The researcher synthesized the literature on thriving to arrive at a definition in which it is marked by an individual's increased sense of energy, learning, vitality, and connection to others. In contrast to languishing where people are unmotivated and unable to move forward in their work, thriving represents progress, a feeling of being alive and having greater understanding and knowledge (Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein, & Grant, 2005). An individual's sense of thriving fluctuates and falls along a continuum, and is susceptible to change and can be influenced positively or negatively. It is for this reason, that investigating the relationship between positive psychology coaching and thriving is important. By understanding how thriving can be changed, and under what circumstances, organizations could develop more effective human resource processes, including utilization of coaching as a professional development tool to attain individual and organizational goals.

Fredrickson's (2001) broaden and build theory also helps explain how positive emotions help individuals thrive. Fredrickson states that she developed the model because

she felt traditional frameworks did not adequately capture positive emotions and their unique qualities. She found, “Positive emotions appear to *broaden* people’s momentary thought-action repertoires and *build* their enduring personal resources” (Fredrickson, 2008, p.123). Positive emotions enlarge the possible actions and thoughts of individuals by providing new thought-action chains that widen the emotions and responses people have. They provide resources to draw upon during future negative states (Fredrickson, 2001). Positive emotions also build people’s resource reserves and provide adaptive benefits that are enduring. Fredrickson states that “by consequence then, the often incidental effect of experiencing a positive emotion is an increase on one’s personal resources” (2003, p. 167). Coaches have the capacity to help broaden and build their coachees’ repertoires and enable them to experience positive emotions that have enduring positive benefits to both themselves and their organizations. Such affirmative benefits may include a sense of vitality, learning, energy, and connection to others.

Positive emotions are aimed at personal development and not concerned with immediate survival, so they create emotional states that produce optimal performance (Fredrickson, 2003). These emotions generate *upward spirals* by broadening cognitive capacity and creating enduring resources that engender positive emotions such as resilience, relationships, and self-efficacy (Fredrickson, 2001). This concept is of interest to positive psychology coaching because it helps describe how positive emotions can be a strength coachees utilize to enhance their well-being and performance. As coachees begin to experience positive emotions and development, they can transform themselves and

move toward optimal development by managing their emotions. Fredrickson explains, “Positive emotions provide the fuel, creating a self-sustaining system” (2004, p. 153).

By breaking dysfunctional habits of thinking and action, positive emotions are able to loosen the effects of negative emotions while simultaneously helping individuals become more resilient. Fredrickson has also found that positive emotions have a cumulative effect that enables positive feelings in the present and further and that, “positive emotions help people thrive” (Fredrickson, 2004, p. 157). Positive psychology coaches help coachees identify where their emotions and lives are less than positive and then help them shift their emotional states by paying attention to their feelings, attitudes, and behavior.

The broaden and build theory demonstrates that positive emotions have a lasting impression on individual well-being because of the positive states they create and because they lessen the effects of negative emotions (Fredrickson, 2004). The positive resources that result from increased positive affect are durable and accumulate over time thereby providing people with additional resources to draw upon to manage stressful or negative events (Fredrickson, 2005). Positive emotions also help people rebound more effectively from adverse situations, a concept called resilience.

Resilience

The psychological construct of resilience is characterized by two key components: the ability to rebound quickly from adverse situations and the ability to adapt to changing, stressful situations (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004). Resilient individuals appear to share many of the same emotional components as individuals that thrive. Resilient

people are optimistic, zestful, and energetic (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004). Their sense of humor and ability to utilize positive emotions to lessen negative emotional experiences provides them with a strategy not shared by non-resilient individuals. Positive psychology coaches may be able to help their coachees cultivate an awareness of how important emotions are to well-being. Through self-reflection and dialogue aimed at identifying and managing emotions, positive psychology coaches may be instrumental in helping coachees become more resilient, and in doing so, set the stage for them to thrive.

Initial research indicated that the psychological construct of resilience is trait-dependent, yet scholars have since demonstrated that resilience is “also state-like and open to development” (Luthans, Vogelgesang, & Lester, 2006, p. 26). Norman, Luthans, and Luthans (2005) have proposed that people can identify, implement, and nurture resilient behavior. Developing resilience is not just relegated to people. It has also been found to grow within organizations. Organizational resilience develops “from processes that help organizations retain resources in a form sufficiently flexible, storable, convertible, and malleable to avert maladaptive tendencies and cope positively with the unexpected” (Gittell, Cameron, Lim, & Rivas, 2006, p. 303). In order to effectively develop organizational resilience, there must be a strong relational reserve, or presence of positive work relationships (Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein, & Grant, 2005). Coaching, with its reflective nature and focus on transformation, is a strategy individuals and organizations can utilize to nurture the development of resilience. Individuals can learn how to recognize emotional states, identify challenges and opportunities, and

develop action plans to bring goals into fruition while organizations can encourage processes that build and strengthen relationships.

Research on positive psychology and coaching. Positive psychology theories and research have only existed for the past decade, yet they have made significant progress in explaining the life-giving, generative factors of human interaction. Seligman et al. (2005) state, “Positive psychologists have enhanced our understanding of how, why, and under what conditions positive emotions, positive character, and the institutions that enable them flourish” (p. 410). Since 2000, numerous positive psychology books have entered the market, highlighting topics such as happiness, flourishing, positive assessments, methods, and human strengths and virtues.

Positive psychology research is flourishing as well. Seligman et al. (2005) concluded that participants’ happiness levels increased and their depressive symptoms decreased for six months after completing a series of happiness exercises. Park et al. (2004) discovered that hope, zest, gratitude, love, and curiosity were positively associated with life satisfaction while modesty, creativity, judgment, and love of learning were only weakly associated. In 2002, the Corporate Leadership Council conducted a quasi-experimental study using over 19,000 employees and found that focusing on performance deficits decreased performance by 26.8% whereas focusing on strengths increased performance by 21.3% (Linley & Carter, 2007). Focusing on organizational and individuals’ strengths also increases employee engagement, which can lead to higher retention, profitability, and customer satisfaction rates (Gallup, 2008). Govindji and Linley’s (2007) analysis of strengths found a positive association between well-being and

vitality among people who know what their strengths are and utilize them in their workplace. By building on the strengths of their workforce, employees are “more productive, have higher customer loyalty, and have lower turnover” (Clifton & Harter, 2003, p.1). Leaders can build a competitive advantage by developing the strengths of their employees, and coaching can be a catalyst to helping them thrive and develop professionally.

In an 18-month study on positive emotions and job outcomes, Staw, Sutton, and Pellod (1994) found that positive emotions positively predicted pay rates, improvements in supervisor evaluations, and emotional connections at work (as cited in Fredrickson, 2003). Longitudinal research by Staw, Sutton, and Pellod (1999) also confirmed the importance of positive emotions at work by demonstrating that energy levels were not predictive of future emotional states. These findings are significant since they provide evidence that positive emotions and optimal work outcomes are not restricted to high-energy emotions. Subsequent analysis (Fleming, 2000; Harter, 2000) has also shown favorable results. Positive emotions at work have been linked to lower turnover and higher customer service, loyalty, net sales, and financial outcomes (as cited in Fredrickson, 2004).

These research results are important because they show how positive emotions can transform employee behavior and demonstrate that positive emotions not only broaden and build individuals’ repertoires but organizations’ as well. This is possible because organizations are built on the strengths and skills of its staff, and when employees’ positive emotions reverberate throughout the organization, employees and

organizations alike are positively affected (Fredrickson, 2003). Positive emotions can help individuals and organizations thrive and positive psychology coaching is one strategy people can use to learn to identify and manage their emotions.

Fredrickson and Losada (2005) conducted a quantitative investigation to understand the importance and magnitude of emotions and how positive emotions contribute to mental health. By asking 188 participants to take part in a survey designed to elicit flourishing mental health, and then provide a month's worth of daily reports identifying positive and negative emotions, the scholars found that the mean ratio of positive to negative affect for individuals who were flourishing was above 2.9 while those that were not considered to be flourishing were significantly lower. They also found initial evidence corroborating the existence of a critical positivity ratio that depicts flourishing at the individual, business, and marriage levels. The results are consistent across differences in measures of positivity, negativity, flourishing, time scales, and levels of analysis. Flourishing begins to disintegrate at higher levels on the scale; therefore, flourishing must be tempered with a balance of positive and negative emotions. Organizations should not be too quick to squelch respectful disagreement or conflict, and they should be mindful of creating processes that generate positive emotions, such as employee wellness programs. Positive psychology coaches can also be helpful by encouraging coachees to learn to regulate their own emotional well-being.

Research has also demonstrated positive results for the construct of thriving. Thriving was found to be an important internal self-regulation tool that allows individuals to gauge their performance and effectiveness at work (Porath, Spreitzer, Gibson, &

Stevens, manuscript in preparation). Self-regulation enables individuals to set goals and monitor different feedback sources to assess the discrepancy between goal attainment and current performance, which is important since goal attainment leads to increased self-efficacy (Porath, Spreitzer, Gibson, & Stevens, manuscript in preparation). Goal setting and self-regulation are essential to effective coaching (Green, Oades, & Grant, 2006) since self-regulation helps individuals determine if they are on track to meet their goals.

Porath, Spreitzer, Gibson, and Stevens (manuscript in preparation) believe that when individuals are able to monitor their goals, learning, and vitality, they are able to effectively respond, which allows them to better regulate their well-being and performance and reduce the potential for burnout. The ability to teach coachees to respond to internal feedback and monitor performance provides an enormous opportunity for organizations to increase performance while minimizing the costs associated with burnout; however, Porath et al. warn that learning and vitality must be balanced. Continuous improvement and learning without a feeling of vitality is counter-productive and eventually results in decreased performance and well-being. Coachees need to monitor their emotions and ensure optimal levels of both learning and vitality. Spreitzer et al. (2008) describe it this way: “thriving reflects a continuum of the key cognitive and affective components of human growth” (p. 6). Coaches, including positive psychology coaches, are in a unique position to be able to assist coachees in learning to monitor their sense of thriving and using it as a tool to gauge their own sense of well-being and development.

No published research exists examining the relationship between coaching and thriving, and because research on thriving is in a nascent state, research outcomes are often identified in working papers. Scholars have found a connection between thriving, creativity, and innovative behavior (Carmeli & Spreitzer, in press) as well as in organizational citizenship behaviors (Porath, Spreitzer, & Gibson, 2008). The construct of thriving continues to be investigated. Current research is also underway to examine the relationship between thriving and job crafting (Grant & Ashford, 2008) and thriving and resilience (Porath, Spreitzer, Gibson, & Stevens, in press). While the future of research possibilities for thriving is infinite, current results are scarce. Much of the literature is speculation rather than outcome-based research and thereby represents an opportunity for further exploration and research.

Social scientists have seized opportunities to investigate positive states, and science is demonstrating the importance of positive emotions. Fredrickson (2001) cites Isen and colleagues' (1984, 1985, 1987; 1993) research as initial evidence for her broaden and build theory. Positive emotions were linked to flexibility, efficiency, creativity, and acceptance of variable perspectives. Fredrickson's (2002) own work has demonstrated that positive emotions broaden people's self-conception, joy, and amusement. More importantly, positive emotions can counterbalance the physiological effects of negative emotions such as fear, anger, sadness, and anxiety as well as help individuals recover quicker from negative feelings (Fredrickson, 2001). Management of positive emotions could play a key role in helping coachees thrive.

In another study, researchers sampled 185 undergraduate students to determine whether positive affect, broad minded coping, interpersonal trust, and social support positively predicted upward spirals and whether they were based on dopaminergic functioning levels (Burns et al., 2008). Results confirmed that positive affect positively built on each of the variables with the exception of social support. There were no significant findings related to dopaminergic functioning; however, the authors felt further research was warranted since the value approached significance ($p=.096$). The study replicated another earlier study conducted by Fredrickson and Joiner (2002) and found additional support for the importance of upward spirals and positive emotions. These studies are significant to positive psychology coaching because the results could be used to demonstrate to coachees how changes in thoughts and attitudes can have a significant, positive effect on other emotions and their health. Development of positive emotions has been linked to creative thinking, broader scopes of cognition, and reduced stress, (Fredrickson, 2004). Feeling good about themselves may help coachees make positive impressions at work and experience better work outcomes, such as positive work relationships, energy, and resilience.

As discussed earlier in the chapter, resilience is the ability to respond to changes and bounce back from adversity (Fredrickson and Losada, 2005). In their multi-method, three study investigation into resilience and positive emotions, Tugade and Fredrickson (2004) found that positive emotions contributed to people's ability to regulate their emotions and find positive meaning in otherwise negative experiences. Although they used a small, undergraduate sample ($N=57$), the study provided initial support of the

theoretical relationship between positive emotions and resilience, and they did so using physiological data.

Tugade and Fredrickson (2004) conducted two studies to assess whether resilient individuals are able to utilize positive emotions to rebound from negative emotional arousal and whether positive emotional granularity effects coping. They defined granularity as an ability to precisely and specifically define positive emotional states. Tugade et al. discovered that resilient individuals have less physiological symptoms and are able to recover faster after negative arousal. Positive emotions serve as a mediator for reducing the physiological effects of stress. These results are significant to coaching because they demonstrate that positive emotions create a broaden and build effect that helps individuals create upward spirals of optimal functioning. Positive psychology coaching is a tool people can use to buffer the effects of negative events while simultaneously developing a resource reserve that supports positive emotional development and optimal functioning at work.

Judge, Thoreson, Bono, and Patton (2001) conducted a meta-analysis on the effect of happiness on productivity, and found that happy employees are more productive (Judge, Thoreson, Bono, & Patton, 2001). Earlier results verified that happy employees receive more favorable performance evaluations (Wright & Shaw, 1999) while later investigation demonstrated that happy employees are more engaged in their work (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002). Helping coachees feel happiness could provide significant positive benefits to organizations. Seligman et al. (2005) discovered that “strengths-based interventions are finding significant effects using increased positive affect as an outcome

measure” (as cited in Mackie, 2007, p. 316). Positive psychology coaches may be able to utilize assessments in their interventions with coachees to facilitate positive outcomes, including happiness and a sense of vitality or learning. However, they need to assure that assessments are behavior-based and domain-specific (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). Coaching can be an intervention tool that enables coachees to understand their emotions, and change their cognitions and behavior, which could result in happier and more effective employees. Positive psychology coaching may be one way coachees learn to identify when they are learning and experiencing a sense of energy, vitality, and connectivity to others, which may help them manage their emotions and thrive.

Summary of Coaching and Positive Psychology Literature

The literature review revealed that the coaching industry has made great strides in understanding the five *Ws* of coaching: *who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, and *why*. Research on coaching indicates that coaches have a variety of educational and theoretical backgrounds, they provide interventions tailored to meet coachees’ needs, and they conduct their sessions through face-to-face meetings as well as through electronic means. Coachees enter into coaching relationships to enhance their skills and knowledge, prepare for transitions and promotions, learn new skills or strategies to avoid old behaviors, and reach their full potential.

An analysis of the literature revealed how coaches accomplish their work with coachees. Whether they utilize human development, change, or appreciative models that build on strengths, individualization is a key factor in successful coaching. The literature

is replete with scholars eagerly touting their individual coaching models as the standard while others encourage evidence-based models built on sound empirical evidence and a wide theoretical foundation. Many scholars argued for empirically controlled studies, increased reliance on validated assessments, and agreement around central theoretical constructs and definitions, yet only Spence summarized the magnitude of the change needed. He states, “The longevity of the coaching industry will be dependent upon the degree to which it embraces the evidence-based practice ethos” (Spence, 2007, p. 255). The coaching community needs additional research to demonstrate how coaching methodologies work and their expected outcomes.

Additional research is necessary to understand how coaching enables positive outcomes, its relationship to other constructs, and which assessments best measure its results. Understanding the return on investment, from both a quantitative and qualitative perspective is also important. The coaching industry needs to gain consensus on the definition of coaching, clearly delineate coaching criteria and certification standards, and erect barriers to the profession that would discourage non-qualified individuals from setting up shop and identifying themselves as professional coaches. This might enable coaching to be viewed as a more viable profession. Peter Hawkins (2008) contends that the coaching industry must develop further theoretical understanding of the practices that makes coaching effective. This is one reason why this study is important. It examines a new methodology of coaching while also illuminating the methodologies positive psychology coaches use to achieve optimal outcomes.

Evidence in the positive psychology literature confirms that using appreciative, strengths-based coaching methodologies generate positive outcomes including enhanced productivity, relationships, communication, learning, and self-reflection. Additionally, research substantiates that coaching has a positive effect on well-being, hope, and hardiness while also being able to decrease negative emotions, such as depression, stress, and anxiety. Positive psychology coaching is a strategy that people can utilize to enhance their well-being, vitality, energy, and development. It is possible that positive psychology coaching may even facilitate thriving since coachees learn to reframe their thinking and subsequent actions.

However, *how* positive psychology coaching facilitates thriving remains unclear. For example, do coaches employ elements of Fredrickson's broaden and build theory (2001) to generate upward spirals that manifest in individual thriving? If so, are there specific activities of the coaching process that are more essential or are they all equally important? What about positive emotional states—are they contagious or do they require mindful attention and cultivation?

Positive emotional well-being has also been linked to positive individual and organizational outcomes; however, little is known about whether positive psychology coaching can generate it, and if so, under what circumstances. Researchers should ask: how long do coaching results last and are they specific to certain personality traits or dispositions? Since resilience and thriving share many commonalities, are resilient individuals more likely to thrive than non-resilient people under the same situations? Can thriving be cultivated by awareness and regulation of positive emotions, such as well-

being and vitality, and if so, how long does it take to break dysfunctional habits and thoughts and transcend to a state of thriving? What about positive relationships at work, how does positive psychology coaching contribute to them, if at all?

These are just a few of the questions that remain unexplored and in need of further investigation. This grounded theory study was positioned at the junction of positive psychology and coaching in an effort to some of those research questions. It was equally informed by appreciative, strengths based coaching processes and four positive psychology principles, including broaden and build theory, upward spirals, psychological resilience, and thriving.

Conceptual Model of Coaching

As demonstrated throughout the chapter, there are many coaching models available. However, none of them clearly depicts how the coaching process facilitates human development or its relationship to thriving. In contrast, they show how the process of coaching works, the developmental stages or knowledge domain involved, and how different professionals support coachees in their goals. What is missing is a description of the way in which coachees transform through the coaching process and how this process manifests in their ability to thrive. The following conceptual model (see Figure 3) provides a visual portrayal of that process while simultaneously providing scholars with a model that enables testable propositions. Stewart, O’Riordan, and Palmer (2008) state, “It is only when we have some way to capture the coaching process that we can really evaluate how well we are doing” (p. 131). Based on a synthesis of the coaching and

positive psychology literature, the researcher developed a conceptual model to illustrate the developmental path involved in positive psychology coaching and thriving.

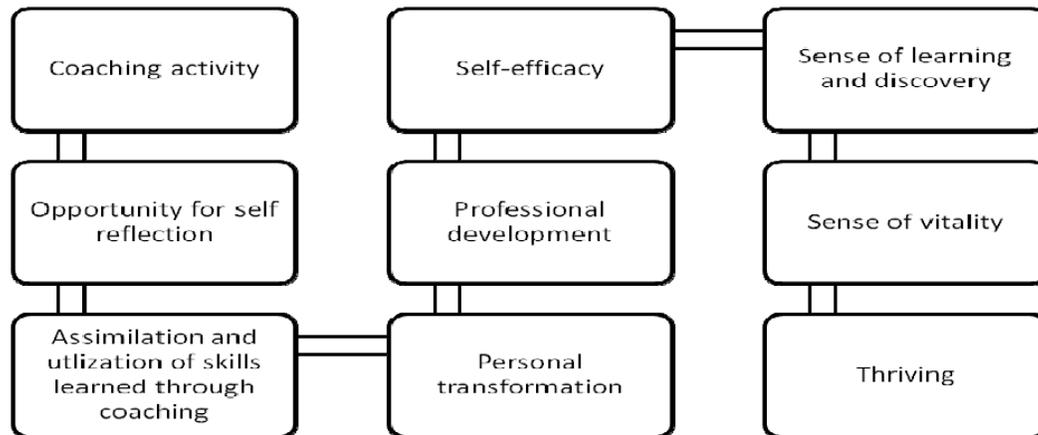


Figure 3. K. Seitz's (2009) Conceptual model of the coaching process and its relationship to thriving.

Adult learning theories were used as a foundation in creating the conceptual model. Coaching is about more than just learning. By infusing principles from positive psychology and human development, coaching becomes a professional development tool that enables individuals to reach their full potential by capitalizing on their strengths. Guiding that process are principles from change management, constructivism, and humanism. Together, this integrated approach engendered a holistic framework that illustrates the developmental path coachees take as they progress in coaching.

According to Peel (2005), adopting an integrated theoretical approach to coaching, based upon solid empirical evidence, is a prerequisite to legitimizing the coaching industry. Grant and Cavanagh (2004) offer a different approach, claiming that

scholars do not need to reach consensus on the theoretical underpinnings of coaching. They believe it is “the scientific and conceptual rigour associated with the approach used that is the key issue” (Grant & Cavanagh, 2004, p. 11). Gaining consensus may not be possible, nor is it as important as ensuring a sound, scientific study ensues. This study was designed in accordance with scientific principles and uses a grounded theory approach to include theories germane to the population and variables being studied. It drew from Stober, Wildflower, and Drake’s (2006) suggestion that coaching should interweave principles from psychology, communication, and adult learning as well as Spreitzer’s (2005/2008) theory of thriving by incorporating tenets from positive psychology. It extends the literature on coaching and thriving and gave voice to positive psychology coachees, a population that is rarely heard. This framework was built from the existing literature on positive psychology and coaching. It provides an integrated process model to illustrate the relationship between positive psychology coaching and thriving.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides the methodological framework for the study's design, the sample approach, procedures for collecting and analyzing data, and the ethical considerations inherent in conducting research on human participants. This grounded theory study investigated the effect of positive psychology coaching on thriving, which is a psychological construct embodying an individual's sense of energy, vitality, learning, and connection to others and the work one does professionally. The purposes of the study were to develop a theoretical framework that both describes and explains the relationship between positive psychology coaching and thriving and to understand whether coaching contributes to people thriving at work. The following research questions guided the investigation:

1. What is the relationship between positive psychology coaching and thriving?
 - a. Are there key elements or activities specific to positive psychology coaching that contribute to thriving at work?
 - b. How does thriving contribute to emotional well-being and vitality at work?
 - c. What are the individual outcomes of thriving at work?

Research Design

This qualitative study sought to describe and explain the relationship between positive psychology coaching and the construct of thriving by utilizing a grounded theory design originally developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and later modified by Corbin and Strauss (2008). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2008), grounded theory is a compromise between deductive and inductive logic in that it values experiences and discovery yet transcends data collection and observation by facilitating generalization and theory development. It is important to develop theories explaining relationships because “theory based on data can usually not be completely refuted by more data or replaced by another theory. Since it is so intimately linked to data, it is destined to last despite its inevitable, modification and reformulation” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 4). Another strength of grounded theory is that it describes *what is* actually occurring rather than what *should be* occurring (McCallin, 2003). Since the coaching community lacks consensus on the theoretical underpinnings of coaching, and little is known about the psychological state of thriving, a grounded theory design was the most appropriate approach for creating scientific knowledge. Grounded theory enables the researcher to describe what is occurring by developing interrelated categories that depict relationships that can later be used to create a framework to explain the phenomena (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Abnor and Bjerke (1997) believe that scientific knowledge begins with ontological assumptions about the nature of reality, and that these must be articulated prior to exploring a phenomenon. Those assumptions then dictate the type of questions researchers ask and the concepts they use to formulate the research questions, which

eventually inform the study's methodology. This research affirms Locke and Golden-Biddle's (1997) ontological assertion:

A socially constructed view of science suggests that knowledge cannot be known separately from the knower, because the content of knowledge is influenced by social practices and interactions, and because the determination of what ideas count as knowledge is a meaning-making activity "enacted" in particular communities. (p. 1025)

Qualitative researchers seek to understand the meaning participants ascribe to their experiences and to learn how "individuals or members of society apprehend, understand, and make sense of social events and settings" (Gephart, 1999, p. 5). Their focus is aimed at interpreting, discovering, and allowing for the emergence of data and themes by interacting with subjective phenomena that enables rich descriptions that would not be possible with quantitative analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Qualitatively exploring participants' experiences, beliefs, and behavior enables theory generation in contrast to quantifying impact or assessing directionality of variables.

Berg (2007) contends that qualitative methodologies are gaining conceptual and theoretical popularity, and that there are many acceptable methods to choose from when conducting research. A narrative inquiry was initially considered for this study's design because of its ability to describe how coachees make sense of their multi-layered, personal experiences (Josselson & Lieblich, 2003). However, narrative inquiry was later rejected in favor of a grounded theory study since there was little scientific knowledge

related to positive psychology coaching and thriving, and adopting a grounded theory approach would facilitate the development of theory.

Grounded Theory Design

Researchers employ grounded theory methodology when they are interested in developing theories around social phenomena without commitment to an *a priori*, or preordained theory (Creswell, 2007). Originated in 1967 by Glaser and Strauss, grounded theory derives its theoretical underpinnings from pragmatism and symbolic interactionism (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Born from pragmatism, symbolic interactionism is “pragmatism in sociological attire” (Crotty, 2003, p. 62). Symbolic interactionists and pragmatics view the world holistically and observe participants’ behavior to understand how they interpret their social interactions and experiences.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) recognized the complexity of reality and social interactions. They suggested that grounded theorists assume data are based on reality, participants’ actions are guided by meaning, social interaction informs meaning or sense-making and meaning is dynamic and fluid. Swanson and Holton add that a grounded study’s research question must be problematic and focused, there are no predetermined hypotheses, the group is the unit of analysis, meaning is shared collectively, and “the findings and their theoretical implications are unique to a given social unit and given time period” (2005, p. 268). Grounded theory results are exclusive to the group under investigation; therefore, changes in participants, environments, or experiences can alter the results.

Flexibility was a key component of this research because coachees and environments are constantly changing; however, the primary focus remained on preserving the integrity of the research. As changes were identified, they were evaluated in context with the research process to ensure they did not negatively impact the study or the results. For example, interview questions were modified when the initial pilot interview suggested additional questions would be helpful to the study, but only after considering how changes may affect the data collection process. At the onset of the study, it was also necessary to heed Corbin and Strauss' (1990) suggestion to remain aware of the interplay between participants' responses to changing conditions and their associated consequences; however, there were no changes in coachees' conditions.

Corbin and Strauss (1990) suggest grounded theorists should collect and analyze data while simultaneously recognizing that the data informs the development of codes and categories and that middle-range theories explain behavior and phenomena. They should employ memo-making as an analytic tool, conduct theoretical sampling to represent populations, and delay the literature review. Those recommendations were followed with the exception of delaying the literature review since dissertation committees require doctoral students to conduct literature reviews as part of a standard protocol—a process Glaser (1998) acknowledges as acceptable. As the theory began to emerge, it was necessary to review the literature on *flow* to better understand how the data related to previous research results.

In contrast to other research methodologies that utilize a literature review to develop research questions and deductively test grand hypotheses or theories, grounded

theorists defer the literature review in order to generate theories that are grounded in data conducted in the field and “set in the context of existing theory” (McGhee, Marland, & Atkinson, 2007, p. 335). They do not develop theories and then gather evidence to verify them, but instead gather evidence and devise the theory from the data (Walker & Myrick, 2006). In that way, “theory cannot be divorced from the process in which it is created” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 5). Since delaying a literature review was not possible at a doctoral level, feelings and beliefs were bracketed to ensure objectivity and bias from existing literature or theory. Data was collected by using interviews and allowing themes to emerge, which was later confirmed or disconfirmed through subsequent data collection and analysis (McGhee, Marland, & Atkinson, 2007).

The data were concurrently collected, analyzed, and conceptually theorized until all variations were explained. Glaser and Strauss (1967) refer to this process as *constant comparison*, which they describe as a process where core categories subsume major categories and themes are grounded in data rather than preconceived ideas or theories. It is for this reason that the researcher remained reflexive and open-minded.

Robson (2002) defines reflexivity as the awareness that the social identity and background of the researcher influence the research process (as cited in McGhee, Marland, & Atkinson, 2007). Social scientists engage in reflexivity by documenting when the research influences them emotionally, and by acknowledging their impact on the study (Cutcliffe, 2003; Charmaz, 2000). It is important that they maintain objectivity and do not force the data into themes or categories, a tension Glaser (1992) refers to as emergence versus forcing. Maintaining a balance between reflexivity and creativity is

critical least grounded theorists simply describe the data without generating theory. The researcher utilized memos to document thoughts, feelings, and changes during the data collection process.

Sample

To answer research questions, grounded theorists employ a theoretical sampling approach that allows discovery of relevant concepts and in-depth exploration of the problem and population (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Theoretical sampling is “the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyzes his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 45). Corbin and Strauss (2008) posit that theoretical sampling enables discovery, which is especially useful when conducting research on new constructs. They emphasize that theoretical sampling permits researchers to “take advantage of fortuitist events” and allow sampling to evolve (p.145). The purpose of which is the collection of “data from places, people, and events that will maximize opportunities to develop concepts in terms of their properties and dimensions, uncover variations, and identify relationships between concepts” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 143). Theoretical sampling allows for flexibility, which enabled the researcher to adjust subsequent interviews based on data collection and analysis of previous data.

Grounded theorists continue to collect and analyze data until data saturation is reached, which is why an exact sample size could not be predetermined. However, Creswell (2007) recommends that grounded theorists consider an initial sample of 20-30

people; therefore, the target population was 20 coachees who had received professional coaching services from positive psychology coaches. Although 20 coachees were initially chosen and scheduled for interviews, data saturation occurred by the 18th interview. However, the two remaining interviews were already scheduled, so they were conducted.

It was important to utilize coaches familiar with positive psychology language and principles since thriving is a positive psychology construct. Defining positive psychology coaching was challenging for the researcher since there is very little written in the literature clearly describing it or illustrating its application. For this study, positive psychology coaches are individuals who have received training in positive psychology principles that enabled them to focus on enhancing work performance and well-being while building upon their coachees' strengths. Their educational levels and training varied; however, they all had exposure to and training in positive principles. Such approaches included using appreciative inquiry, motivational interviewing, personal reflection, asset and strength building strategies, and coaching from an appreciative or co-active coaching model. Typical coaching services focused on professional development, career choice, relationships, finance, health, education, and emotional well-being.

Recruitment for coachees occurred, in part, through positive psychology coaches who had already committed their support. Professional coaches and coaching associations were contacted by e-mail asking if they would agree to support an investigation into coaching and thriving. Coaching associations contacted include the Foundation for Coaching, ICF, Mentor Coach, Executive Coaches.com, Coaching Commons, Association for Coaching, Penn State Positive Psychology list-serve, and the Society for

Coaching. Individual coaches were identified through reviewing the directories of Positive Psychology Daily News, Society of Coaching, journal articles, and researching Google using the phrase *positive psychology coach*.

The ideal population would have been positive psychology coaching alumni from Penn State since they had successfully completed a master's degree in positive psychology and many are experienced coaches. Although many of them were contacted and agreed to provide their support, it was not possible to draw a large enough sample using this exclusive population. Additional coachees were located by reviewing membership lists of appreciative inquiry and co-active coaching organizations and contacting them individually.

Coaches that agreed to support the research were contacted and asked to forward a study invitation to their coachees. The invitation delineated the purpose of the study and included a copy of the informed consent letter. It provided information on confidentiality, anonymity, and data storage and security as well as contact information for both the Dissertation Committee Chair and the researcher. Coachees were also encouraged to contact the researcher via a collect call or through email if they had questions, which few did. Those that contacted the researcher were interested in understanding the study from a larger perspective, meaning the methodology that was going to be used and how the results would help the coaching industry. As a condition of their participation, coachees provided their phone number and email address.

The Researcher's Roles and Values

After gaining access to participants, a qualitative researcher must remain open-minded and flexible throughout the study (McCallin, 2003). Unlike quantitative studies that utilize standardized instruments, qualitative investigators are considered the primary instrument (Swanson & Holton, 2005). Therefore, I will state my roles and values to increase transparency and allow others to evaluate my influence on the study's outcomes.

I became interested in coaching after having participated in a short-term coach training program facilitated by a consultant who later conducted his doctoral research on women managers who worked in the same federal social service program (Drake, 2003). As a new manager of a non-profit business, the initial coaching skills I learned were instrumental in helping me to become a better manager. I was able to learn techniques that allowed me to unpack language and behavior in a manner that helped me become a more effective communicator with my staff. As I began my doctoral studies, I sought opportunities to study coaching and positive processes myself.

As a professional in the human service field with over fifteen years experience in non-profit organizations, I am familiar with employing strengths-based and appreciative inquiry approaches in my work with staff and consumers. I have intimate knowledge and experience of how important it is to close performance gaps by focusing on an individual's strengths, and I have seen that people are more willing to recognize what they are already doing well and will work toward further development of those skills if shown how. However, when one utilizes a deficit-model and therefore focuses on

performance problems, people are more inclined to disregard the help, become resentful, or avoid trying to improve.

I have limited coaching experience; however, I have received extensive reflective supervision, and I have a strong background in utilizing a strengths-based model to improve the performance of others. This includes the use of appreciative processes to encourage staff professional development as well as using motivational interviewing techniques and strengths-based models for consumer development. As a result of these experiences, my natural inclination is to examine what is working well within organizations and to facilitate processes that encourage people to thrive.

I have an appreciation for inquiry into human experiences because I have witnessed positive transformation when individuals seek to understand others. I have seen how understanding a mother's childhood positively influences her ability to parent her own children when she is able to learn from her childhood experiences and apply that knowledge in raising her own children. I also share many of the commonalities of qualitative researchers as described by Moustakas (1994). I evaluate phenomena and situations by describing the whole rather than its parts, strive to understand others' experiences and meanings rather than objectively measuring variables, seek data through personal interviews and first-hand knowledge of the participants, and appreciate the interconnectedness of experience, behavior, beliefs, and personal interactions.

Data Collection

Interviews were conducted with coachees over the phone, and these were recorded, with each lasting approximately 30-40 minutes. In order to test the relevance of the interview questions, a pilot study was conducted using a semi-structured interview protocol on a coachee who has experienced positive psychology coaching (see Appendix A). Based on the outcome of that one interview, the protocol was adjusted for future coachees. As subsequent interviews occurred, no other adjustments to the protocol were necessary. Since allowing for emergent information is a central tenet of grounded theory studies, modification of allotted interview time was necessary. One coachee had two interviews lasting approximately 40-45 minutes each because she had additional information she wanted to share. It was not necessary to conduct follow up interviews for other coachees.

Prior to the interviews, coachees were e-mailed an informed consent form. They were asked to review the information and to reply to the email if they agreed to provide their consent and participate in the study. Before the phone interview began, they were asked for permission to quote them in publications. They were also asked to provide verbal consent. To increase interview effectiveness, the following procedures were employed:

1. Coachees were given a request to participate letter by their coaches and told to contact the researcher directly if they were interested in learning more or participating in the study.

2. Coachees who were interested in participating in the research contacted the researcher directly and provided their telephone numbers and e-mail addresses so they could receive the informed consent form and written confirmation indicating their interview date and time.
3. Interviews were recording using Audio Acrobat.

Coachees took part in a 30-40 minute recorded, semi-structured telephone interview designed to elicit their feelings and beliefs about their coaching experiences and to learn whether they believed coaching facilitated a sense of energy, learning, and vitality. To ensure they retained their rigor and originality, interviews were transcribed verbatim. For confidentiality, transcripts were coded with a number that corresponded to the date of coachees' telephone interviews plus their initials (i.e., Jane Doe March 18, 2009 would be coded March1809JD).

Once the transcripts were generated, coachees were e-mailed with their individual transcript and asked to review it for accuracy, a process Miles and Huberman (1994) refer to as *member-checking*. Swanson and Holton (2005) encourage qualitative researchers to engage in member-checking because it increases construct validity. All 20 coachees checked their data and provided necessary clarification or correction. They were also given the opportunity to offer any additional insights they had since the original interview; however, none of the coachees elaborated further.

Data Storage and Protection

Coachees' individual audiotapes and subsequent transcripts were coded with a number that corresponded to the date of their interviews. All raw materials were stored in

a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home office. This ensured the information was not lost or stolen. Only the researcher had access to the records. She utilized password protection software on her computer and changed the password code every 30 days. All raw data and records will be maintained for seven years post-dissertation and then shredded to protect coachees' confidentiality.

Data Analysis

Grounded theorists conduct data collection and analysis concurrently. In this way, it is both a process and a product since the resulting theory originates from grounding data in reality (Swanson & Holton, 2005). The analytic process revolves around "immersion in the data and repeated sortings, codings, and comparisons" of concepts (Creswell, 2007, p. 289). The purpose of the analytic process is to seek "similarities, differences, correspondences, categories, themes, concepts and ideas" (Mertens, 2005, p. 421) that will eventually facilitate theory development. When no new ideas or themes arise, the data has reached saturation and the researcher can cease data collection and analysis.

After coachees were interviewed, their data was coded, a process Corbin and Strauss refer to as taking raw data and raising "it to a conceptual level" (2008, p. 66). In open-coding, constant comparison was utilized to break the data into smaller parts by identifying their properties and dimensions. A property is "a conceptual aspect or element of a category" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 36). Those concepts were then categorized, assigned codes, and delineated as the core phenomena. Next, axial coding occurred,

which is the process of looking for relationships between the core concepts to arrive at higher and more abstract concepts called categories. Corbin and Strauss (1990) suggest there are four types of categories that surround core phenomena: casual conditions that affect the core phenomena, strategies or responsive action taken toward the phenomena, intervening conditions that influence the core phenomena, and outcomes of the phenomena known as consequences (as cited in Creswell, 2007). Through axial coding and pinpointing relationships, interconnection of categories into larger conceptual themes that describe the phenomena was possible. For example, the researcher labeled a category “professional development” to describe various activities employees use to increase their professional knowledge (webinars, conferences, training, etc.). Throughout the coding phases, the researcher recorded personal memos that enabled her to “tap the initial freshness of their theoretical notations” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 107).

Axial coding eventually gave way to selective coding, or the final process of integrating the categories. The final report was then generated. Creswell (2007) contends that researchers portray their results through narratives, visual models, propositions, or hypotheses. The researcher chose to depict the results visually and in narrative format. Grounded theory data collection and analysis was a “zigzag process: out to the field to gather information, into the office to analyze the data, back to the field to gather more information, into the office, and so forth” (Creswell, 2007, p. 64). Data collection and analysis continued until saturation had occurred.

Data Trustworthiness

The results of a grounded theory study are grounded in time and logic specific to a situation, time, or group, and they cannot be generalized across settings, periods, or people (Swanson & Holton, 2005). Qualitative researchers are less concerned with external validity and more concerned with credibility, dependability, and confirmability. Trochim (2006) postulates that credibility relates to ensuring the results are believable from participant's perspectives while dependability is concerned with the changes that occur during the research and whether other investigators would experience the same results. Member-checking was used to increase credibility, accuracy, and confirmability. An audit trail also described changes that were made throughout the study, which enables other researchers to follow the study's procedures and progression (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

To Trochim's (2006) three criteria, Corbin and Strauss (2008) add the condition of quality. Quality was enhanced through methodological consistency, which meant that only procedures relevant to grounded theory were used (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Quality was increased because the study had a clear purpose, and the researcher had strengthened her understanding of qualitative methodologies, remained sensitive to the topic, and respected coachees as co-researchers.

To enhance the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and quality of the data, multiple validation strategies were built into the study. Personal values and ontological assumptions were disclosed, thereby allowing readers to understand how data was interpreted (Swanson & Holton, 2005). The study's limitations were identified, and the

researcher's observations served as a memoing strategy that would enable other researchers to reconstruct and understand the research process (Swanson & Holton, 2005). Coachees member-checked the accuracy of their transcripts, assuring that data quality and the study's validity was higher (Swanson & Holton, 2005). Dependability of the study was increased by identifying changes that occurred during the investigation. The quality criteria outlined by Corbin and Strauss (2008) was also respected by including rich, thick descriptions that illustrated examples of the phenomena by utilizing quotes from coachees. Following the data through saturation and not prematurely drawing conclusions helped assure accurate results and reduced the likelihood of finishing with a descriptive study that lacked theoretical merit.

Ethical Considerations

Increasing the confidence and quality of the study are important steps in assuring that the research is ethical because it protects the integrity of the project and respects the coachees' time. In addition to data validation, the researcher engaged in ethical validation, which means that she "questioned their underlying moral assumptions, their political and ethical implications, and the equitable treatment of diverse voices" (Creswell, 2007, p. 205). The ethical validation requirements were satisfied by ensuring the study's purpose was worthy of investigation, that the researcher had the prerequisite skills to conduct the study, and that her assumptions and those of a grounded theory study were congruent.

Coachees were clearly informed of their rights and voluntary status, and careful analysis of the benefits, costs, and reciprocity of the study ensured that no harm was done. This ensured compliance with the beneficence and justice principle (Capella University, 2008). Coachees' anonymity and confidentiality were maintained thereby ensuring compliance with the respect principle, as identified in the Belmont Report.

Multiple steps were taken to ensure the study had integrity, including adding validation strategies, reviewing the worthiness of the study, and ensuring the researcher had the knowledge needed to conduct the research. The beneficence, justice, and respect principles were also reviewed and strategies were implemented to ensure compliance. Coachees' anonymity were maintained by using a coding system instead of their names on transcripts and audiotapes, and all raw data and records will be stored for seven years post-dissertation and then shredded to protect coachees' confidentiality.

CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

There were two purposes in conducting this grounded theory study. The primary research question sought to understand the relationship between positive psychology coaching and thriving. The goal was to understand what happens in the context of positive psychology coaching that facilitates individual thriving, which is defined as a marked increase in learning, vitality, energy, and connectivity to others. The second purpose was to learn how positive psychology coaching enables thriving in the workplace. Three supporting research questions asked: are there key activities specific to positive psychology coaching that contribute to thriving, how does thriving contribute to emotional well-being and vitality, and what are the individual outcomes of thriving at work? This chapter presents the research process used to investigate those questions, the data collected from 20 positive psychology coachees, the coding process used, and thematic analysis of the interview questions. Chapter 5 presents a theoretical model depicting the findings of the research and discusses implications, recommendations for future research, and conclusions.

Overview of the Research Process

Coachees had to meet three criteria to be included in the study. First, they had to have received positive psychology coaching. As noted in chapter 1, this type of coaching is conducted by individuals who are imbued in the principles of positive psychology,

focus on well-being, and build upon coachees' strengths and values to help them achieve their goals. The second criteria required coachees to have entered into coaching to transform some aspect of their work behavior, skill, attitude, or career. The third criteria required coachees to have attended at least three coaching sessions over a three-month period. The time constraint helped ensure that coachees had adequate time to get acquainted with their coach and begin working on their goals.

Recruitment of Coachees

A purposeful sampling approach was used to recruit coachees. Individualized email invitations were sent to 367 coaches to achieve a sample size of 20 coachees. Of those requests, two were not qualified because the individuals were consultants and not coaches. Although the intention was to secure 20 coachees who were clients of positive psychology coaches, the result was that many coaches were interested in participating. After careful consideration as to how their inclusion might affect the study, the researcher agreed to use one of the coaches in a pilot interview. This particular person had been a co-active coach for awhile and had also received positive psychology coaching, so it was conceivable that he could answer the interview questions and provide additional insight into the interview process itself, including feedback on the questions, relevancy, time commitment, and the interview flow. Based on the success of that interview, the recruitment strategy was revised with a goal of recruiting 10 coachees who were not coaches and 10 coachees who were positive psychology coaches.

Data Collection

Coachees participated in a 30-40 minute phone interview and were called directly to eliminate any expense to participate on their part. Coachees were asked whether they gave permission to be recorded and to participate in the study at the beginning of their interviews. After consent was obtained, they were asked their initial reason for entering into a coaching relationship and whether they had received at least three coaching sessions over a three-month period. All coachees met the initial qualifying criteria, and most of the calls were completed within the original time frame. However, one coachee agreed to be interviewed twice because the recording software did not work properly, as did a second coachee when the first call took longer than expected due to her exuberance in sharing examples and willingness to elaborate on the questions asked. The interview process took approximately two months to complete. The pilot interview occurred on May 29, 2009, and the last interview was completed on July 31, 2009. Memoing was conducted throughout the data collection phase to facilitate development of ideas and to capture initial impressions and changes to the data collection and interview processes.

As coachees concluded their interviews, their audio files were assigned a code corresponding to the date of their interview plus their initials. Then the audio files were saved to both a CD and a flash drive to assure the data was protected in the event of a computer failure. The audio files were then sent to a transcriber. To assure the accuracy of the transcription, the first 11 (55%) transcripts were validated by listening to the audio file and reading along with the corresponding transcript. There were mistakes in typing, but the researcher felt comfortable with the content and overall accuracy of the

transcripts. Therefore, the researcher stopped validating the remaining transcripts; however, she continued to review each transcript for accuracy before forwarding it to the coachee for final review and approval, a process Miles and Huberman (1994) describe as member-checking. Coachees were instructed to make any necessary changes directly on the transcript itself and to elaborate on their answers if desired.

Coding Process

Grounded theory research data collection and analysis occur in tandem (Creswell, 2007), so the researcher scheduled and conducted interviews while also waiting for coachees to review and return their transcripts. In-between phone interviews, inductive coding was completed following Charmaz's (2006) suggestions. As transcripts were returned by the coachee, they were quickly read and coded line-by-line using action codes. According to Charmaz, "Working quickly can spark your thinking and spawn a fresh view of the data" (2006, p. 48). The initial coding phase required the researcher to be open and flexible to the data and not prescribe any preconceived ideas, theories, or codes. Instead, codes were created from the data.

Charmaz (2006) also suggests rewording codes as necessary during initial coding. This occurred when the code *happiness* was replaced with the code *fulfillment*. The researcher also asked coachees to define nvivo codes they used during the conversation. Twenty individually coded transcripts were created using Microsoft Word 2008.

Coding across incidents allowed for further scrutiny of the data and occurred after initial coding was complete. Transcripts were compared for incident similarity and

dissimilarity. Charmaz (2006) posits that comparing responses across incidents helps define the properties of the data while also helping the researcher to conceptualize the codes. This process enabled the researcher to quickly see that one coachee held an opposing view of learning since all but one of the coachees believe learning is an outcome of coaching, and he believes its not an outcome but an essential part of the process of positive psychology coaching (Coachee 2). Incident coding culminated in a Microsoft Excel matrix where data were summarized according to codes.

After completing the initial coding process, grounded theory researchers return to the data a second time to conduct focused coding. Citing Glaser (1978), Charmaz describes focused codes as “more directed, selective, and conceptual than word-by-word, line-by-line, and incident-by-incident coding” (2006, p. 57). Focused coding helped the researcher synthesize large amounts of text and ground the data. It was important to ensure that the initial codes were appropriate and clearly explained the data. Coding is a cyclical process in that codes gave way to new questions, which were followed up upon resulting in new data. This process happened during the interviews when the researcher realized that the code *vitality* did not adequately capture the experiences coachees were sharing. This resulted in the researcher asking more pointed questions about the idea of energy and whether coachees were aware of changes in their energy levels. Had the researcher not been collecting and analyzing data concurrently, this distinction may have gone unnoticed. Coding also helped the researcher realize that coachees viewed vitality and energy as similar concepts, which had a profound impact on the research findings since the two concepts were separate states in the definition of thriving.

The second analysis phase was different from the first phase in that it did not yield an Excel matrix. Codes were written on Post-it-Notes® and placed on large poster boards according to 12 emergent categories. This allowed the researcher to physically manipulate the data as necessary until she could discern four themes (connectivity, physical transformation, emotional transformation, and learning). The poster board data were then translated into Free Mind® mind-maps, which created another visual tool for the researcher to see the data more clearly. Line-by-line initial coding and incident-by-incident focused coding helped assure that the data fulfilled grounded theory's two criteria of fit and relevance. Fit was achieved by developing codes that illuminated coachees' experiences and relevance occurred through interpreting events and making relationships visible.

Coachees (Participants)

Twenty coachees participated in the research. Although the goal was to achieve a balance of coachees who were and were not positive psychology coaches, the actual percentages were 75% and 25% respectively, or a 3:1 ratio. Having a majority of the coachees work as positive psychology coaches may create the potential for bias due to their experience and insight as coaches and a vested interest in the results. This will be addressed in the limitations section. Repeated efforts were made to only recruit coachees who were not positive psychology coaches; however, their response rates remained dismal. It is not clear why they had such a small rate of return. Possible reasons may have been that they felt like their schedules were too busy to participate, they may have

questioned the confidentiality of their participation and responses, or they may have felt like their experiences were too personal or vulnerable to share with a stranger. They may have also not been interested or they may have had other situations in their life that demanded attention.

Several of the coachees who were positive psychology coaches mentioned that they were grateful for any research being conducted, with one coach in particular claiming that anything that helps the progression of the professionalism of the industry is also in his best interest (Coachee 2). They may have been more comfortable sharing personal stories, and had a greater appreciation as to why the research is beneficial to the industry and coachees. They may also have vested in the results and had a genuine interest in the process and the outcomes.

Despite the majority of coachees being positive psychology coaches, it was not possible to distinguish any difference in the research outcomes between coachees who were positive psychology coaches and those who were not. They all had different life circumstances, were at different stages of development, and had different experiences and interests. The only difference that occurred was the use of positive psychology terminology.

Coachees 2, 5, and 18 are positive psychology coaches who are familiar with flow and broaden and build theories, so they used that language in their description of events whereas others explained their results in more generic terms. Coachee 11 is also a positive psychology coach, and she is familiar with appreciative inquiry and spoke about it during her interviews. In contrast, Coachee 12 is not a positive psychology coach, yet

he is also very familiar with appreciative inquiry and shared repeated examples of how he uses it in his work. There were 4 positive psychology coaches and one coachee who used explicit positive psychology terms giving a ratio of 4:1. This ratio is only slightly higher than the percentage of coachees in the sample who are positive psychology coaches versus coachees who are not (3:1). Language differences did not influence the results as one might originally predict knowing that positive psychology coaches constituted the majority of the participants.

Another unexpected recruitment difference was the percentage of male versus female coachees. The initial projections estimated an equal percentage of both genders; however, males only accounted for 16% of the coachees ($N=3$) with the remaining 84% being female ($N=17$). Upon sharing her surprise regarding the low number of male coachees with a positive psychology coach, the researcher was informed that this particular coach's entire clientele were exclusively women (Coachee 18). A female coach also made a spontaneous comment about the number of female coachees. Her observation was that more women than men sought coaching because of the lack of available mentors for women (Coachee 15). She postulates that women lack strong mentors, yet they often achieve high-powered positions where such support is necessary. When this occurs, they may turn to coaches for assistance. This is purely speculation at this point; however, it remains an area for further research and will be discussed again in chapter 5.

All coachees were extremely candid in their responses. They willingly shared exceptionally personal stories that illustrated the power of coaching and in using one's strengths. One coachee spoke about challenges in social situations and how he gained the

confidence necessary to improve his relationships (Coachee 18) while another told of being held at gunpoint and having to rely upon her strengths to connect with the gunman and ultimately convince him to leave her jewelry and take less personal objects (Coachee 15). Coachees repeatedly shared examples of personal transformation and change that substantiates the efficacy of positive psychology coaching.

Coachees took their responsibility to share their positive psychology coaching stories seriously. They engaged in a high-level analysis of their experiences and they willingly reflected on their strengths and challenges. The most surprising and touching experience for the researcher, was their ability to reflect on the interview process itself. Many commented about how positive their interview was and how it left them feeling energized, happy, and even more committed to their coaching careers or work.

The interview questions asked were individualized based on coachees' responses to previous interview questions, so coachees did not answer every question on the interview protocol. This allowed them to concentrate on the questions that directly related to their experiences and avoid answering questions that were not relevant. Conversations were enriching for both coachee and researcher.

Due to the reflective nature and content of the interview questions, several coachees remarked that they had learned something while sharing their stories. Coachee 2 realized that it had been awhile since he had asked his coachees to evaluate their progress, and Coachee 14 was able to clearly articulate the reason why coaching results are sustainable. A brief summary of each of the coachees follows, and a visual depiction of their demographic data is located in the appendix (see Appendix B).

Coachees' Experiences with Positive Psychology Coaching

Coachee 1

Coachee 1 is a female coachee who entered into a coaching relationship because she felt empty and frustrated with life despite having “healthy kids, a wonderful husband, and everything someone could wish to have.” She was feeling sad and there was no joy in her life, so she sought the services of a positive psychology coach to help her determine her career path. She was uncertain as to whether to continue in her corporate position or transition into a new career. Coachee 1 paints a vivid picture of a woman who on the surface has everything, yet she felt unfulfilled, apathetic, and questioned her life purpose. As her coaching unfolded over the next year, she explored her strengths through conversation and formal assessments, identified aspects of her career she was passionate about, and set and achieved her career goals. She is a positive psychology coach who practices in both North and South America.

Coachee 2

Coachee 2 is a male positive psychology coach who received coaching services to assist him in making a transition from a corporate employee to an entrepreneur. He has an extensive human resource background, so making the transition to a coach entrepreneur was a natural extension of his skills. As a positive psychology coach, this coachee is deeply imbued in the coaching literature and has a strong understanding of positive psychology principles. He credits his coach with helping him gain clarity and identify his untapped potential and leverage it to create a successful business. He believes very

strongly in positive psychology training and would like to see a more consistent and structured approach to coach training and credentialing.

Coachee 3

Coachee 3 is a female positive psychology coach who left a career in banking to become a coach and consultant. As an executive in the banking industry, she has been coached, and she watched several of her colleagues progress in their careers as a result of receiving coaching services. She hired coaches for her junior and senior staff, and has a strong understanding of the value of coaching both personally and professionally. She believes coaches should seek professional training and certification from an accredited institute and her experience has taught her that accountability, mutual respect, and goal setting are essential elements of a successful coaching experience.

Coachee 4

Coachee 4 is also a female positive psychology coach who sought coaching as a transition service to a new career as a coach. Certification and training were identified as important criteria for coaches. She believes in the power of coaching for adults, and would also like to see every high school student attend one year of coaching as part of the curriculum before leaving school. She believes this would help students become more aware of their thoughts and strengths as well as learn new tools to constructively address challenges throughout life. Setting goals, being accountable to the coaching process, and envisioning a best future self were key activities Coachee 4 identified in a successful coaching relationship.

Coachee 5

Coachee 5 was the first coachee to be interviewed who was not a coach. She was one of Coachee 2's clients, and they had also previously worked for the same organization. Due to a negative employment situation with her supervisor, she sought coaching to help her address her present situation and learn how to handle her feelings constructively. Her coach had worked closely with her colleagues and she felt like he was able to "transform our team." She had a previous personal and professional relationship with him, so she was not concerned about whether her coach possessed any specific type of training or credential. However, she was aware that he had an advanced degree in positive psychology and was certified in coaching. She developed a trusting, mutually respectful relationship with her coach where she was able to address very personal situations and feelings, know that she would not be judged, and that her confidentiality would be maintained. She reports that using visualization, analogies, metaphors, and powerful questions were part of what made coaching so successful for her.

Coachee 6

Coachee 6 is a positive psychology coach who initiated coaching to get clarity around her career. She wanted to "make changes and move in a new direction." Upon hearing a coach give a presentation at a professional association for social workers, Coachee 6 felt an instant affinity with her, respected her professional training and background as a social worker, and subsequently sought her services as a coach. They began with weekly sessions, which eventually tapered off; however, she has returned to her coach at least one other time to address a new concern. Like all but one of the

coachees in the study, maintaining an ongoing relationship with the coach is a common characteristic. Also typical of many coaches, Coachee 6 was given homework to complete outside of the sessions, which extended the learning, as did completing different values clarification and reflection exercises within the sessions.

Coachee 7

Coachee 7 began coaching because she was dissatisfied with her work situation and was interested in changing careers to become a coach. She was less interested in ensuring her coach had any particular training or credential and was more concerned with verifying the coach had advanced training in an area relating to psychology. She remembered that she was initially unfamiliar with the different types of coaching training and accreditation programs offered and that she was more familiar with academic distinctions in educational levels, so she gravitated toward what she knew. She also recounted the value of feeling personally connected and supported by her coach, and she further commented about the importance of having a coach who respected her agenda and the need to have an organic approach that incorporated emergent topics.

Coachee 8

Coachee 8 entered into coaching as part of an on-boarding process sponsored by her employer. She was not familiar with coaching programs or credentials, and was uncertain as to whether her employer expected any type of training or credentials. Coaching sessions were conducted by telephone and typically began by following up on the previous session and any insights that might have arisen, as well as reviewing progress on her goals. Homework was given to facilitate learning between sessions and

she participated in formal assessments within the sessions. She credited the Emergentics Profile as an assessment that helped her identify how she thought and acted, so she was able to reflect and learn from previous situations. She also enjoyed learning about her strengths and discussing how to utilize them to overcome challenges.

Coachee 9

Coachee 9 entered coaching without understanding the different types of coach training or certification. She was referred to her coach by a human resource professional as part of a corporate down-size effort. She trusted her former colleague, so she accepted the coach as credible and approached coaching with an open mind and a goal of increasing her confidence and interviewing skills. Sessions were conducted weekly, and despite having concluded her coaching sessions, she maintains a close relationship with her coach by phone and email and knows that she can always return to coaching as needed. She described several tools her coach used in helping her attain her goals, including reflection, identification of the highs and lows of her career, visualization, diagramming her strengths in relationship to her career, and homework.

Coachee 10

Coachee 10 received coaching as part of an on-boarding process. Her background in human resources made her aware of the different types of training available as well as the myriad of credentials. She chose a coach with a similar technical background. Her coach ended up becoming the interim Vice President of the company she worked for while they sought a replacement. This enabled her coach to have a keen understanding of the processes she was going through in her new position, and in her mind, this was a

valuable piece of the on-boarding process. Sessions were initially scheduled weekly but tapered off over time. Techniques identified as critical to her coaching success were: visualizations, analogies, metaphors, strengths discussions, and the Emergentics profile.

Coachee 11

Coachee 11 entered into a coaching relationship to get help understanding relationships and in working with her new team. She describes a purposeful approach to coaching where she took a proactive approach in setting herself up for success. Sessions were held both in the office and in the community, varied in frequency and duration, and were most often focused on what was going well and how she could continue to use her strengths in her work and in relationships with others. She describes her coach as having an uncanny ability to ask “zinger questions” or those that were centered on a barrier that she perceived but was not answering or addressing. In addition to helping her not mask over situations or feelings, her coach created a reflective environment using analogies, metaphors, observations of animals and people, visualization, and strengths discussions.

Coachee 12

Coachee 12 is a coachee who has had extensive exposure to appreciative coaching and is familiar with positive psychology principles. As a senior Vice President, he was increasingly disenchanted regarding the types of conversations he was having with employees who were unhappy with their jobs, their equipment, furniture, and tasks. Upon over-hearing his frustration, he was approached by another employee within the company who was an appreciative coach. She offered to help him transform the conversations he was having and he accepted her offer without consideration of her training or credentials.

Over the course of the next few years, Coachee 12 had the opportunity to receive appreciative coaching individually and to learn how to use the skills in a variety of work situations as well as witness the approach being applied in a different organization. He was recruited and offered an executive position by a Fortune 500 company, in part, because of his talent in using appreciative inquiry in a variety of situations with successful results. Although his coaching has concluded, he believes in the power of appreciative inquiry and continues to practice it regularly.

Coachee 13

As a positive psychology coach, Coachee 13 is familiar with the various types of coach training and credentialing; therefore, she chose someone who would be both a coach and a mentor. She entered coaching to gain focus, get support, and accomplish specific goals, and although she selected her coach through a referral process, she had a previous relationship with her before she began seeing her as a client. Coachee 13's coaching sessions are different from the others in that there were no specific strengths or value assessments. There were also no formal accountability or check-in processes and most of the homework and reflection came from her volition rather than instruction from the coach. When asked to elaborate on her experience, Coachee 13 stated, "The coaching model was bad. At the very beginning it was definitely a mentor kind of new coach with really open dialogue. I haven't been coached by her for awhile because I think I outgrew her." She has not had her own coach for some time; however, during the conversation she did express interest in finding another coach.

Coachee 14

Coachee 14 is a positive psychology coach who was so invested in providing examples of the efficacy of coaching that it took two full-length interviews to capture all the data. She has strong feelings about the value of coaching and believes that her exposure to coaching in a professional development workshop was the catalyst to her interest in investigating the power of coaching further. Eventually, she made a career change to become a positive psychology coach. She enjoys working with someone who individualizes the approach to help her address her own needs, and she describes coaching as a powerful process that “reveals oneself to oneself.” Coaching helped her become “aware of something that I was unconscious about before.” Her coach helped her transform the way she viewed her life through a series of reflective exercises, understanding and accepting her strengths, and learning to live consciously in the present instead of focusing on material objects or living in the future.

Coachee 15

Coachee 15 is a positive psychology coach who sought coaching services to become more accountable to her own goals. She chose a woman who was a colleague for the past two years and was someone she felt has the necessary training and credentials. They trade coaching services; however, she says they maintain strong boundaries and accountability with one another. Sessions last approximately one hour and they occur over the telephone twice a month. In their earlier sessions, they worked on strengths assessments, but the majority of the sessions now involve a client-driven agenda, which includes a check-in process, discussion on goal progress and attainment, identification of

“gremlins, or inner critics,” and visualization tools. She is very in tune with her body’s messages, and uses them to regulate her energy. Coachee 15 credits coaching with helping her to become a better person, friend, and wife, claiming, “I really don’t think I would be with my husband still if I hadn’t had the benefit of understanding myself, my gaps and my strengths, and my ability to make shifts.”

Coachee 16

Coachee 16 is a positive psychology coach who entered into a coaching relationship as part of a requirement for becoming a professional coach. She wanted a coach with specific training, certification, and experience coaching other people through the process of coaching certification. She felt it was important to find a local woman who was accustomed to using both the logical and the creative side of her brain in her work. They met twice a month for approximately one hour, and have subsequently become friends. She describes the sessions as centering on her own agenda with homework, values clarification exercises, and reflective discussion. Coachee 16 considers herself a strong woman and role model and describes coaching as a “partnership with someone that helps you get out of your own way.” She used coaching to identify where she excels, and she now works in a position where she regularly uses her strengths.

Coachee 17

Coachee 17 is a positive psychology coach who entered into a coaching relationship as part of an on-boarding process at work. She believes that training and certification are important qualities in a coach; however, she did not select her particular coach. She also appreciates someone who has a similar technical background, as that

provides opportunity to get technical advice as well as coaching. The coach she was assigned to was her previous supervisor. Coachee 17 stated that her coach is familiar with her strengths and they have a long history of building from and incorporating them in her work. Strengths assessments and discussions were central activities of her coaching process, which she credits as helping her to “find her own voice.”

Coachee 18

Coachee 18, a positive psychology coach, is an experienced curriculum and design instructor who was exposed to coaching while taking classes for his master’s degree. While listening to an introductory session sponsored by the Coach Training Institute’s Leadership program, he heard his soon-to-be coach speak. He immediately felt inspired to contact him and begin receiving co-active coaching services. In addition to completing homework assignments outside the sessions, he is also engaged in deep reflective exercises both inside and outside of coaching. Coachee 18 believes that it is important to have mutual trust and respect, but it is equally important to know that your coach is non-judgmental and will create the safe space required for inner transformation.

Coachee 19

Coachee 19 is a positive psychology coach who believes in the importance of adequate training and certification for coaches. She identified the need to have a coach that is direct, safe, trustworthy, respectful, and flexible enough to “dance in the moment” with her agenda. Other key activities include checking-in on progress, establishing goals, completing homework assignments, working through values clarification profiles, and learning to stay present in the moment. Her coaching experiences have often centered on

visualizations, analogies, and completing the two exercises: Future Best Self and “My Life as an Eight” on a scale of 1-10 with 10 being optimal. She is very skilled at regulating her energy and she pays attention to her body’s cues.

Coachee 20

Coachee 20, a positive psychology coach, entered into coaching because she wanted clarity around her career and help transitioning from the theater into a coaching career. She was fortunate enough to have someone she knew volunteer to coach her, and she believes that both certification and training are important to have as a coach. She describes her sessions as flexible, client-driven, face-to-face meetings where she engages in a variety of activities, including goal setting, values clarification, creating a business model, and reflection. In her own work as a coach, she also incorporates video feedback as an observation tool for coachees. Coachee 20 is aware of her strengths and believes that well-timed, poignant questions can inspire people into action or toward change.

Thematic Analysis

Within the coaching literature, questions have been raised such as how do you know when to stop interviewing coachees and gathering data? In other words, how many coachees is enough and what criteria should be used to make that decision? According to Charmaz (2006) and Corbin and Strauss (2008), data collection and analysis should only cease when categories are saturated. Saturation occurs when all the categories are “well-developed in terms of properties, dimensions, and variations” and further collection and analysis yield interesting and varied results but without the addition of new information

(Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 263). The researcher's familiarity with the data determines when to begin integrating the categories and conducting thematic analysis.

After conducting 20 telephone interviews and scrutinizing the resulting data through repeated readings, cross-incident analysis, and development of matrixes, poster boards, and mind-maps, the researcher felt confident in asserting data saturation had been achieved. By categorizing and then carefully comparing the data for similarity and dissimilarity, 12 categories emerged. They were: reasons for coaching, outcomes of coaching, strengths found through coaching, coaching process, learning through coaching, thriving components, relationship changes as a result of coaching, ah-ha moments as a result of coaching, energy changes, recommendations from coachees, and certification and training importance. The categories were eventually distilled into three emergent themes illustrating the transformation that occurs as positive psychology coachees learn how to identify, use, and regulate their strengths. Connectivity to others, physical transformation, and emotional transformation were key themes that developed in understanding the relationship between positive psychology coaching and thriving.

Theoretical Model

Conducting line-by-line coding of the transcripts led to the development of 12 categories which were then broken down into smaller sub-categories. The coaching process included sub-categories such as session characteristics, qualities of the coach, and tools used. Learning consisted of sub-categories including tools used, learning processes, and learning about self and others. The strengths category consisted of three

subcategories, which were identification, use, and regulation, and the outcome, thriving, ah-ha moments, and relationship categories identified three themes: connectivity, physical, and emotional transformation. Reasons for entering coaching and the importance of training and certification provided contextual information in understanding coachees' motives and their knowledge of the industry, but did not produce sub-categories. After identifying the large and sub-categories, the researcher synthesized them to create a framework that illustrates coachees' transformation (see Figure 4). The model depicts the process of transformation, which is described in detail in the subsequent section. It also shows the elements involved, their sequence, and how learning to identify, use, and regulate strengths is the critical component in transformation.

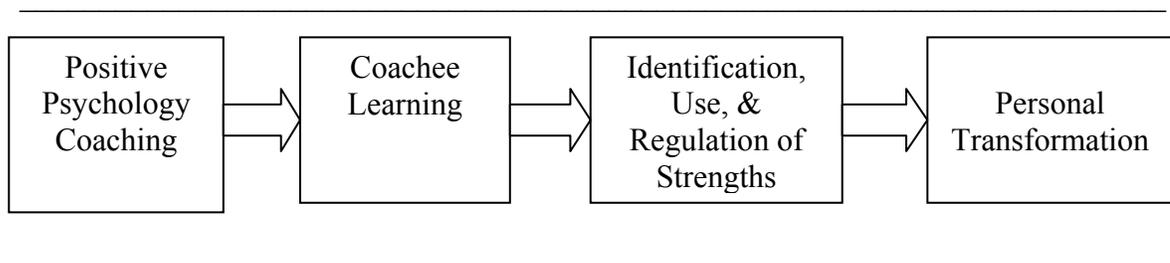


Figure 4. Positive psychology elements enabling transformation.

Positive Psychology Coaching

In order to understand the transformation that occurs via positive psychology coaching, it is necessary to learn the nuances of this coaching approach. This involves identifying the tools used to assist coachees in achieving their goals, understanding the coaching process, and knowing the key characteristics of positive psychology coaches.

Understanding these factors allowed the researcher to understand how coachees are able to learn to identify, use, and regulate their strengths—the results of which lead to connectivity, physical, and emotional transformation.

Coachees entered into positive psychology coaching for a specific reason, with some having over-lapping purposes. Coachee 2 wanted assistance accomplishing a goal, which also happened to be a career change. There were others who had overlapping reasons as well; however, only the primary reason is depicted in Table 1. Career change was the most frequently cited reason ($N=8$) followed by skill development ($N=5$), goal attainment ($N=4$), and on-boarding as part of the new-hire process ($N=3$). To help coachees achieve their goals, positive psychology coaches individualize their approach and rely upon a myriad of tools.

Table 1. Reasons for Entering Coaching

Coachee	Career Change	Skill Change	Goal Attainment	On-Boarding
C1	X			
C2	X			
C3	X			
C4	X			
C5		X		
C6	X			
C7	X			
C8				X
C9		X		
C10				X
C11		X		
C12		X		
C13			X	
C14		X		
C15			X	

Table 1. Reasons for Entering Coaching (*continued*)

Coachee	Career Change	Skill Change	Goal Attainment	On-Boarding
C16			X	
C17				X
C18			X	
C19	X			
C20	X			
Total	(8)	(5)	(4)	(3)

Tools

Commonly used tools include conducting strengths and values assessments, using appreciative inquiry to help coachees think and speak differently, assigning homework to extend learning outside the sessions, and invoking visualizations, metaphors, and analogies to help anchor new concepts. Most coachees also spent considerable time discussing or learning about their strengths and values. Even those familiar with their strengths prior to coaching mentioned the importance of understanding and using them.

Less commonly cited, but just as effective, are journaling assignments, learning portfolios or boards, observations, and respecting the power of silence after asking powerful questions. Powerful questions, as defined by Coachee 2, are those that

Take you to a place that you might not otherwise go. So a powerful question is a very thought-provoking question; it is usually short and to the point....Then where silence and space are so important is [*sic*] asking the question and being comfortable with the silence that follows.

Coaches often use silence as an indicator that something is resonating at a very deep level. Silence may very well be a “doorway,” that allows the coach to pursue a new or modified line of questions that takes the coachee to a different place (Coachee 16). The tools coaches use are multi-sensory, extend the learning outside the coaching sessions, and involve active work on behalf of the coachee to facilitate movement.

Coaching Process

The individualized nature in which coaches approach their sessions with coachees creates a flexible coaching structure. Coaches respond to emerging topics, questions, and needs instead of adhering to a preset structure or format. Although sessions are generally quite flexible, they often follow a similar pattern that begins with checking in with the coachee to see what is on his or her mind, following up on homework assignments (if applicable), and inquiring about the agenda for that particular session. Occasionally, agendas are established based on an observation the coachee has made (Coachee 20), and other times they are identified by discussing what has occurred in-between sessions or by asking what is going well for the coachee (Coachee 11).

Coaches and coachees have the opportunity to quickly establish priorities and develop a relationship, by following the coachee’s agenda, and increasing the number of appointments at the beginning of the relationship so that the bulk of sessions happen quickly before tapering off to a less frequent schedule. They each own part of the outcomes that occur (Coachee 2) because they are both accountable to the process and one another. They take time to celebrate milestones and successes (Coachees 1 & 11), and they measure progress not necessarily through a quantitative approach, but in terms

of how coachees gauge their goal attainment and progress (Coachees 4, 6, 11, 13, 16, & 20). They also evaluate it by assessing whether their colleagues or supervisors notice any difference in behavior or skill (Coachee 10), their ability to integrate the skills learned in coaching and apply them to other aspects of their lives (Coachees 3, 5, 6, 8, 10-12, 13-15, & 18), and their level of happiness or fulfillment (Coachees 7, 12, & 17).

Central to coachees' success, is a strong relationship with their coach that facilitates reflection and introspection. Coachee 11 stated, "coaching is about holding the mirror up for me and asking provocative questions that get me thinking about finding the answers from within." Coachee 2 also used a mirror analogy:

It is a mirror, but it is actually somebody holding that mirror up for the client and looking in the mirror with them...I could look at a mirror, right, and gain some insights but they are just not as powerful as if a coach is standing there with me.

Because then the coach can help me see things that I might miss.

Others state, "Coaching is about revealing oneself to oneself" (Coachee 14) and "helping you have a better relationship with yourself and others" (Coachee 17). Extending the metaphors, Coachee 18 suggests that "coaching is a microcosm of what happens in life." The importance of having a supportive coach is a central theme in the interviews.

Coach Characteristics

Having a supportive, accountable coach were two factors mentioned in discussing the characteristics of a positive psychology coach. A few coachees also took the time to distinguish between nurturing and supportive and weak or a push-over. They described their coach as a nurturing person who was supportive in helping them reach their goals;

however, they were not implying that their coach was weak or easily impressed. There was also a strong undercurrent of accountability that extended beyond that which they had with their coach: they were also describing an accountability they had with themselves and to the process of transformation.

As coachees continued to describe important coach characteristics, qualities such as creative, trusting, eloquent, optimistic, curious, confident, and well-read were highlighted. Additional traits included being able to inspire, provide constructive feedback, work from a place of abundance and strength, and “create space for inner reflection that’s outside of you” (Coachee 14). They also listed qualities that showed the humanity of coaching, such as saying it was acceptable for their coach to make mistakes and establish personal boundaries. Coachees painted a vivid picture of coaches who were active partners in their success, who asked questions that inspired them to find the answers from within, and who used a variety of techniques and tools to facilitate learning.

Learning

Like other forms of coaching, a central component in positive psychology coaching is the ability of the coach to create a safe environment where coachees can learn new information, practice new skills without fear of judgment or failure, and take the time necessary to integrate skills before practicing them outside the sessions. Each coachee describes the learning process differently; however, analysis revealed that the learning process occurs in one of two ways. Learning occurs as either a layered or spiral process where coachees discover new aspects of themselves, which allows them to then

approach the material differently than they had previous to the discovery. Coachee 14 describes it as a layering process that allows her to build upon previous knowledge, “So that’s what’s possible with coaching over time. All of these things layer and build upon each other. That builds me much more access than I could have had without that previous coaching.” Coachee 1 states:

Every session was different. Every time we worked on something specific, about values or success, or failure, I discovered positive things that really allowed me to bring more into the coaching sessions and gave me more clarity...like layers. Like trying to remove all of those layers, all of those saboteurs, all of those words that I carry around with me.

Extending the layering concept, Coachee 18 suggests transformation occurs along a spiral and needs time to develop:

A spiral has all these dimensions. If you picture a three-dimensional spiral—like you know, it’s going from the ceiling but is something that is spiraling down toward the floor. In coaching..., when you are at a certain point on the spirals, you’re hitting on certain things, but then you move away from those. And as you move around the spiral, you are hitting on other things, but then you are coming back to the same point in the spiral but you are at a different layer. You’re hitting on the same stuff. Things we talked about three months ago, but it’s a little different today because you’ve begun to integrate it. Then you move on through the spiral and again you are touching on some of the same things, but it is evolving and developing. And as you go through all the layers of the spiral and

circle around, you're finding new things and you're finding old things and they're evolving and integrating. I think that people don't give coaching time; they don't have the opportunity to feel the layering and the spiraling that happens.

According to Coachee 17, Coachees' transformation, and the learning that makes it possible, occurs through a layered, spiraling process where the coach and the coachee engage in a fundamental relationship that "calls forth magnificence."

To call forth magnificence, positive psychology coachees participate in an extensive learning process in which they learn both about themselves and others. Like the process of transformation, the learning process is also fluid, in that it is individualized according to the coachee's needs. Coachees engage in the aforementioned learning activities at their own rate, and if and when they are ready. Coaching itself is also a learning process. The coaching style utilized and coachees' interests and level of change readiness allow coachees to progress at their own level and in their own time.

The tools and processes positive psychology coaches use to facilitate learning are varied and personalized to meet the needs of the individual receiving services. Although there are a variety of learning methods available, none are as personal or as engaging as an ongoing dialogue with a professional committed to helping one grow and find tailored solutions. Coachee 19 summarizes it eloquently with her comment, "coaching is like having a witness to your own growth."

As coachees described their growth and experiences, many mentioned the idea that coaching "quickens the cycle time and increases the impact" (Coachee 13). Coachee 13 believes that it is the application specificity of coaching that accelerates learning,

while others mentioned its incident-specific, concrete, and individually focused manner as reasons for expedited learning (Coachees 2, 5, 11, & 14). Coachees described being aware of learning in the moment while also needing time to reflect in order to gain a deeper appreciation and understanding of the information they were learning. They stated that learning was both intentional and accidental (Coachees 5, 7, 10, 11, 13, & 14) and that it occurred both inside and outside of their coaching sessions (Coachees 13 & 18). Although coaching can expedite the learning process, it is important to remember that learning and transformation take time (Coachee 18).

Coachees were learning how to reframe their thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors, challenging their fears and self-limiting beliefs, and learning to trust themselves during the chaotic process of personal change. They were accessing and integrating new ideas and feelings and learning to look at life and people differently (Coachee 14). Coachee 14 states:

You have to be willing to look at things you don't like about yourself and to make changes. To look at the ugly and the dark aspects and learn through the coaching process to love, accept, nourish, and heal them.

Growth and learning were both a process and an outcome, which made it particularly challenging for the researcher to analyze.

Analysis revealed two categories: learning about self and learning about others. Learning about self involved a significant amount of introspection where coachees challenged their self-perceptions, reframed thoughts and attitudes that were no longer serving them, and brought their values and strengths into alignment with their careers.

This outcome is best described under the emotional transformation theme, so it will be discussed later. What follows is analysis of coachees' learning about others.

Each coachee's progress was unique. Some were very in tune with their own needs and had the emotional space and tensility to focus on understanding others' behavior while others were experiencing financial stressors that demanded focus and attention on themselves first. There were some common themes mentioned, which illustrate coachees' progression and desire to learn more about themselves through witnessing and understanding others' behavior.

Two coachees (2 & 14) were particularly interested in understanding the elements that make coaching results more sustainable than changes based on other types of professional development. In Coachee 14's opinion, coaching is more effective because it involves personal transformation from within. The process is not quick; often times it is challenging. It occurs at different rates and only when people are ready. As Coachee 14 describes, "there is a readiness, and if someone's not ready, it doesn't matter." Whether one is dealing with their kids, colleagues, or supervisees, it is important to appreciate that individual change happens at different rates, so demanding it will not yield the expected results. Also, it is an assumption that everyone wants to learn or change (Coachee 20). People may not be interested in achieving the same type of progress or results coachees attained. They can still share their enthusiasm, but they may not get the desired results they were hoping for, and they may need to adjust their expectations (Coachee 18).

As Coachees 12 and 9 discussed their experiences, they recalled stories about being surprised that not everyone was interested in learning about their strengths or

participating in appreciative conversations (Coachee 12), and they were stunned when they found out that others were not as confident or as well-managed as they seem (Coachee 9). They were trying to understand how to begin or continue to engage in behaviors that are fulfilling and intrinsically rewarding when others show little interest. They were also grappling with the knowledge that everyone has their own concerns and challenges despite portraying an image otherwise.

Many coachees were also undergoing a transformation where they were reconciling the world they thought they knew with the opportunities that were becoming available to them through making personal changes. Their desires to share those experiences were not always met with the same level of enthusiasm they experienced in sharing them, and they received resistance they had not previously considered. They were engaged in a cyclical process where they were learning about themselves by learning about others. Coachees were learning about themselves—discovering who they were, what they wanted, and what they would be willing to sacrifice, by learning about others' behavior (as seen in figure 5). Learning was a critical process throughout coachees' transformation, and through the process of discovering who they were and how they wanted to interact with others, coachees began or continued a journey where they learned how to identify, use, and regulate their strengths.

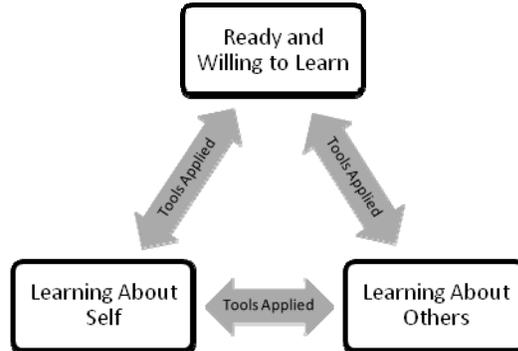


Figure 5. Cycle of learning.

Identification, Use, & Regulation of Strengths

For some coachees, the process of learning to identify their strengths began with the dual challenge of learning to accept them as well. While this may seem counterintuitive, several coachees recounted challenges integrating the idea that their strengths were unique and something to be honored rather than discounted or downplayed. When asked how he became aware of his strengths, Coachee 18 states:

Well, you know—strengths are tricky because what I—what others see as a strength in me, I just do. I mean I just do those things....So, you know there is that internal part that says that's not a big deal, why are you getting all excited about what I just did? So it's like that. It's like a dichotomy between what others see and what I see and how different they are. That takes time to be able to integrate.

Coachee 6 is also familiar with her strengths and helps others to recognize theirs as well. She stated that people are surprised when they learn their strengths are unique. She has heard comments such as, “Oh, these are things that are special that I do that I just thought were things that everybody did, and now I just took them for granted.” She concurs with their statements, remarking, “I think that our strengths are so much a part of us that we just take ‘em for granted.” Taking them for granted was typical for the coachees who had to initially overcome their habit of discounting them. It was not that they were deliberately denouncing their strengths. Rather, it was more of a conscious transition they had to make in shifting the way they perceived them.

Coachees began appreciating the individuality of their strengths and learning more about them through completing strengths assessments and values inventories, and they realized the importance of using them and seeing others’ strengths as well. Coachee 8 states:

When I set things up, even in my own projects, I’m much more likely to be using my own strengths and the strengths of the people around me. In as much as I know that this person can really be good at this and that sort of thing. Not that I didn’t have that insight before, but I think when you start looking at it from the perspective that I got out of coaching, you begin to understand how everybody is just not good at everything.

Coachee 10 also tries to see the strengths in others. She states that she focuses on others’ positive sides regardless of how they are acting or talking. She thinks it keeps her “motivated to perform.” Coachees are improving their work and their performance by

paying attention to their own strengths and looking for their colleagues' strengths as well. However, it is not just about coachees recognizing others' strengths. Coachee 13 found that, "When I am in the moment and using my strengths, people see it and acknowledge it." Some coachees were able to both see others' strengths while also having their own appreciated as well.

At coachees began incorporating and regularly using their strengths in their work, they made another shift; however, this time they went from consciously thinking about using them to naturally just applying them. When asked if she is applying her strengths outside of her coaching sessions, Coachee 5 describes it this way, "How do I say this? Not by thinking about it. I think because I've worked with 'em enough, so I might think about it every once in awhile." Coachee 12 also believes it becomes habitual, stating:

I don't want to say it's performance, but in a way, you learn how to perform it to such a degree that, that it's not performance anymore—it's really part of your language, it's really part of how you operate.

Others made a shift from recognizing they were using their strengths to actively regulating them by attending to the energy changes they experienced when their strengths are in use. Coachee 7 states:

If I'm talking about something that I really care about or value, a lot of the times that will lead to me kind of talking faster in a more kind of fluid, articulate way. Like she would, my coach, would point out that when I'm talking about things that I really care about, I can easily articulate and sometimes if I'm not so excited,

or they're not as important, I'll just kind of be less, I don't know, the words won't come as easily to me.

Coachee 20 believes that when she is using her strengths she is motivated, focused, and hopeful whereas Coachee 11 says when she is using her strengths she is “totally on the ball. I get totally juiced and energized and my staff says I'm very inspirational at that point in time, and yes, it's very hard to keep up with me.” Coachee 9 even learned to regulate and extend her energy beyond her body by applying somatic principles. As depicted in figure 6, coachees started by first identifying and accepting their strengths. Then they moved to using them and appreciating others' strengths, and eventually they progressed to regulating their strengths by paying attention to changes in their bodies and energy levels. As this process unfolded, coachees began a personal metamorphosis that manifested in connectivity, physical, and emotional transformation.

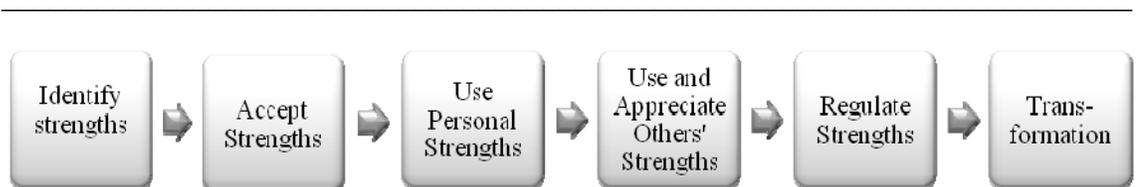


Figure 6. Strengths sequence.

Depicting strengths regulation is a challenging process, as there is some sequence of events that occur before regulation is possible; however, it is not a completely linear process. Some coachees began appreciating others' strengths as they learned to accept their own while others needed more time to understand their own strengths before they

could begin to see and appreciate the strengths of others. A few coachees talked about how they used their colleagues' strengths or tried to build upon them by sending them to leadership development courses; other coachees never mentioned it as important during their interviews. Coachees who appreciated others' strengths were aware that each person had unique talents that could also be used to achieve optimal outcomes, so they took measures to help them see and identify their own strengths. They felt that if everyone was using their strengths, their energy levels would increase significantly, and as a collective group the outcomes they could achieve would be significant. Coachees also wanted others to feel the power and energy they felt from using their strengths. Coachees reported many positive feelings, both emotionally and physically, from using their strengths and they wanted others to have that same experience.

Coachees' development and transformation were unique and influenced by their experiences. For some, their focus was on learning to use the strengths they had to improve their relationships at work while others' goals were to address depreciating self labels or improve a skill. Their transformations began with an internal change they were making in the way they viewed themselves, others, or their lives, and as they began to use their strengths more regularly the transformation was seen externally through changes in their energy levels, focus, attitudes, and behavior. Additionally, many coachees mentioned that they received feedback from their colleagues or supervisors about their changes, which provided validation that the changes they were making were meaningful and apparent to others.

Finally, strengths regulation led to three types of transformation. As coachees began using their strengths, they released old patterns that were ineffective or inhibiting stronger relationships. Coachees who made personal changes and changes in the way they interacted with others became more cooperative and trusting. They stopped viewing others as competition and some coachees began looking for others' strengths. Coachees began to identify with their colleagues differently, and they accepted personal accountability for their own feelings, attitudes, and behavior. As this process unfolded, they began to transform their relationships with others (connectivity). For other coachees, strengths regulation led to physical transformation. By paying attention to changes in their physical bodies and energy levels, coachees were able to regulate their sense of flow and energy. They became mindful of processes, tasks, and people that drained their energy and worked to decrease their exposure to them while simultaneously increasing the amount of time they spent doing activities and being with people that inspired them or created increased energy. For some coachees, strengths regulation led to changes in the way they viewed themselves. They stopped depreciating thoughts and replaced them with recognition of their strengths. They shifted their self-concept and identify from not good enough to a belief that they had unique talents and strengths that could help them achieve their goals. As they experienced success, their sense of resilience and self-efficacy increased and this empowered them to reframe situations and thoughts to stay in alignment with their strengths. Coachees experienced emotional transformation because they were willing to accept their unique strengths and learn how to incorporate them into their lives.

Personal Transformation

Coachees enter positive psychology coaching for many reasons, and they seek services from coaches who utilize a variety of tools, including creating an environment conducive to learning. As part of that process, they use different types of assessments and activities to help coachees learn how to identify, use, and regulate their strengths. As coachees start to regulate their strengths, they begin transforming the way they interact with others while also experiencing physical and emotional transformation.

Before discussing the three transformation themes, it is important to note that there was no specific order to the themes nor were they progressive. Coachees' experiences and transformation were unique. Some underwent multiple types of transformation while others' experiences were specific to one or two types of transformation. Coachees who experienced transformation under the connectivity theme accomplished significant changes in the way they interacted with others. They became more present in their daily lives as well as in their conversations with others. They also developed accountability to themselves and others and shifted from a competitive mindset to a collaborative one. This change had a profound impact on their personal and professional relationships.

Coachees who underwent physical transformation described characteristics of Csíkszentmihályi and Rathunde's (1993) flow theory. They lost track of time, became engrossed in their work, and forgot to eat and drink. They were intrinsically motivated to work, and they described changes in their bodies, such as vocalization and respiration

increases and more erect posture. Coachees also described a heightened sense of energy when they utilized their strengths as well as the ability to manage their energy levels.

Emotional transformation was the final type of transformation coachees experienced. It also had the most profound impact, as it changed the way coachees viewed themselves as well as how they viewed others and their surroundings. Changes that coachees made in labeling themselves led to their ability to reframe situations and experiences and not take things personally. This resulted in changes in their resilience levels and identities. As coachees made these changes, many realized that their current careers and professions were based on previous feelings they had about themselves, which were no longer accurate. As a result, many coachees felt compelled to make changes and bring their careers into alignment with their strengths and values.

A theoretical model was created from the data analysis, which illustrates the process coachees encounter as they transform. It is important to note that the actual process is quite fluid, and plotting it linearly does not adequately capture the essence of the transformation (see Figure 7).

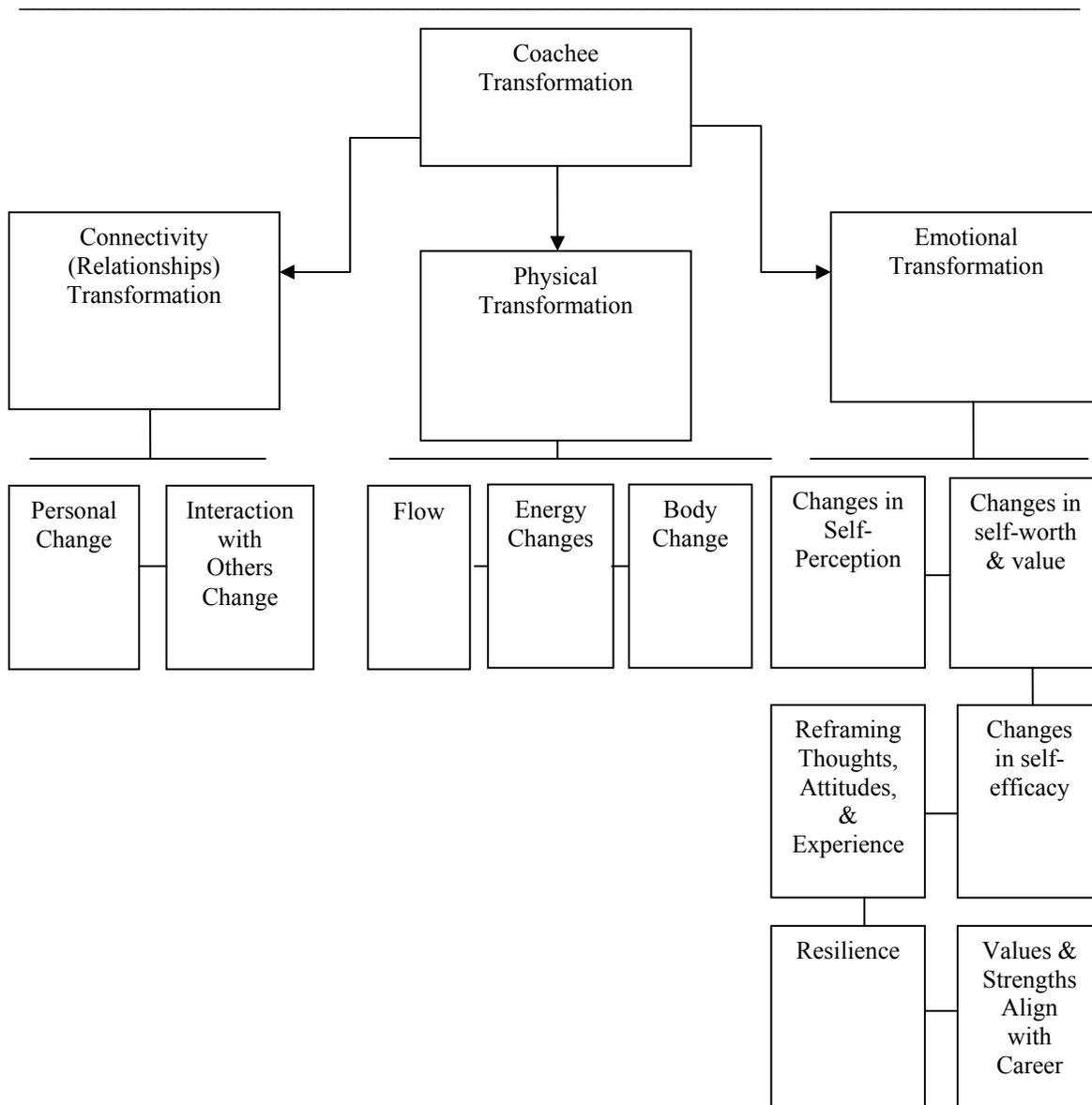


Figure 7. Process of personal transformation.

Figure 7 was created as a result of the data analysis process. After coachees verified the accuracy of their transcripts, the transcripts were coded line-by-line to

identify key words. As the coding process continued, key words were clustered together where they eventually formed a category. Categories gave rise to themes, which were then plotted on a poster board to help the researcher identify relationships between the themes.

As depicted in the diagram, coachees can experience any of the three different types of transformation; they are not dependent upon one another, nor do they occur in sequence. Coachees who achieve connectivity, transform personally in the way they view themselves. They also make changes in the way they interact with others. Those who achieve physical transformation encounter changes in their sense of flow as well as physical changes in their body and energy levels. Emotional transformation is the most complex of the three types of transformation because it involves making a series of changes in the way coachees view themselves, their lives, and others. The transformational processes will be discussed in more detail in the subsequent sections.

Researchers and practitioners can utilize this process model to understand the elements involved in each type of transformation. For example, researchers could break the processes down even further and investigate different elements of the transformation process. They might examine resilience more carefully to understand its antecedents or they could investigate how changes in the way coachees interact with others affects their emotional states or well-being. Practitioners could use the model as a benchmark. If they had coachees who were interested in making changes in their relationships, they could use the categories as milestones to help coachees identify progress.

Connectivity

Connectivity is best described as a relationship. Whether they are the relationships one has with their family, friends, spouse, or colleagues, or it is the relationship felt toward a career, connectivity to people and to the work evolved as the first theme in understanding people who are thriving. Connectivity had two sub categories that evolved: personal change and interaction with others (see Table 2).

Table 2. Outcomes of Connectivity Transformation

Personal Change	Interaction with Others Change
Present	Professional validation
Accountable to self	Networking
Accountable to others	Gaining others' trust
Collaboration	Strengths use and recognition of others'
	Appreciation for life
	Enhanced social networks

Coachees' stories demonstrated outcomes reflecting positive changes in both themselves and in relationships they had with others and their work. Personal outcomes mentioned include learning how to become present and accountable, and replacing competitive beliefs with a desire to be more collaborative. Receiving professional

validation, networking, recognizing strengths, gaining trust, enhancing social networks, and appreciating life were outcomes relating to interaction with others.

It was sometimes difficult for the researcher to ferret out the boundaries between coachees who were making personal changes that enhanced connectivity and those who were making changes that affected interactions with others because the two categories overlap. Being present for others is a personal change that one makes in deliberately deciding to pay attention during a conversation, to not let the mind wander elsewhere, and to actively listen. Being present also has a positive influence on relationships and on one's interaction with another because it shows interest in another person and demonstrates respect. The same is true regarding collaboration. Individuals must first desire to collaborate before they actually engage in those types of activities with others. There is some overlap between the categories.

Becoming Present

A central component in enhancing conversations is the desire to be present, yet it extended far beyond the skill of mindful listening. Becoming present, for many coachees, was more of an existential process. It involved acknowledging untapped potential (Coachee 2), and believing "that I had the power to make choices in my life" (Coachee 1). It also entailed letting go of personal motivations (Coachee 18), assumptions (Coachee 11), egos (Coachees 1 & 20), and judgment (Coachee 13).

Accountability to Self and Others

The skill changes that coachees described under the connectivity theme demonstrated they were willing to make personal changes that resulted in positive

relationship outcomes. Coachee 4 believes that the intentional decisions to become present, aware of her feelings and to acknowledge when she was struggling have had a profound impact on her relationships. Taking responsibility for herself, accepting her limitations, and acknowledging when she “screwed up” were positively met by colleagues who were amazed that she was willing to let herself be so vulnerable and to admit that she was not perfect.

Understanding others’ needs and feelings (Coachees 12, 14, & 18) and accepting personal accountability through maintaining professional boundaries (Coachees 7 & 10) were also important outcomes. Coachee 17 described what happens when she honors herself and is accountable to others: “I am just able to be more clear about my side of the relationship and invite other people to be more real themselves.” Personal accountability and authenticity to accept one’s strengths and challenges were common threads throughout this theme and manifested repeatedly in coachees’ desires to create deeper relationships and have more meaningful conversations (Coachees 1, 2, 7, 13, 19, & 20).

Collaboration

Building relationships enabled coachees to become more comfortable trusting others. By purposefully acknowledging others’ strengths and being mindful of how they were interacting with and relating to others, coachees were able to redirect negative or unhealthy relationship patterns. This resulted in fewer power struggles (Coachee 14) and encouraged collaboration and communication rather than stifling it (Coachee 11).

Coachee 18 summarized the idea of collaboration:

I might get stuck with an idea or stuck in an idea and I can't get out of it. And if I am collaborating with someone, I now have someone else's ideas and energy to expand what's possible, to open something up, or to point us in a different direction. You know, playing off each other's strengths is really, really powerful and incredible.

Coachees who became less defensive and responded less to external drama in relationships were able to collaborate and focus on the issue or topic rather than reacting to emotional triggers. Not reacting allowed coachees to have time to reflect on what they wanted to say, to consider how they wanted to portray themselves, and to purposefully address conflict (Coachees 3 & 13). Coachee 15 said:

One of the biggest helps in terms of my growth was getting comfortable and understanding how to have courageous conversations, difficult conversations—things that were important to me and how to talk about them rather than just running away from them.

Learning how to work through conflict and address it constructively, enabled coachees to develop strong connections with others and foster effective communication. This change engendered positive feelings and enhanced relationships rather than creating a sense of competition or distrust (Coachee 14). Coachees who became aware of their personal motivations in engaging with others, and actively worked to become present, authentic, and collaborative gained a higher sense of themselves in their relationships and gained the tools necessary to experience deeper and more positive connections with others.

Professional Validation and Networking

As coachees transformed personally, they experienced many positive outcomes in their relationships with others and in their work. Coachee 11 recalled an example of when she had to down-size her team and the subsequent discussion six months later when her team recognized that she had to make a difficult decision but it resulted in a “tighter team afterward.” She was given additional credibility in her role, and the team began affectionately referring to her as “their leader.”

Professional validation (Coachees 11 & 2), expanding professional networks (Coachees 10 & 19), and being willing to learn from mistakes (Coachees 4 & 8) were all identified outcomes under this theme. Coachees developed stronger connections to others because they took the time and interest in getting to understand their colleagues. They were respectful and willing to make the personal investment in changing themselves rather than expecting their colleagues to change.

Strengths Use

Examining coachees’ willingness to change in order to enhance their relationships demonstrates that they were willing to engage with others differently. Rather than assuming, criticizing, or projecting their feelings on to others, they looked inward and examined their own motivations and feelings. Through assessments and observation exercises, they learned to identify their strengths as well as see those of others.

Using strengths based assessments enabled the majority of coachees to learn about the importance of feeling connected to their work, and how values and strengths alignment were critical factors in feeling engaged and fulfilled in their careers (Coachees

1, 2, 6-11, 13, & 15-20). Coachee 1 states, “I got the beautiful idea that my future self was to realize that I was to build, to own, or to create my own private practice of coaching.” Coachee 2 also aligned his strengths with his work, claiming, “I was able to take capacity and skills that I had but get very clear about them and then apply them so the end result was I was able to launch my own business.” Coachee 6 stated, “I was empowered to start thinking about different ways and different directions that my career could go in.” Coachee 7 also made a career change and credited her coach with a happier life. She said:

I’m definitely on a very different path now than I was when I started, and I am really fulfilled and I’m happy with what I’m doing and I feel really confident...and I’m putting myself out there in ways that I definitely did not think of myself as being capable of.

Coachees also described the importance of developing or enhancing relationship and communication skills that would enable them to more effectively work with others while also explaining the personal transformation that was necessary to feel at peace with their careers and their loved ones. Coachee 4 said, “It’s with coaching that I’ve definitely changed my style of communication, and I’m going easier on myself as well.” Coachee 8 also communicates better now, stating “It has helped me communicate better...it’s been a valuable tool for me to use to get my thoughts in order.” Several coachees also realized they were not only more fulfilled but also better mothers, role models, colleagues, and marriage partners (Coachees 3, & 14-16).

Positive psychology coaching had a profound impact on the coachee and those around them. Coachees began using their strengths, which shifted how they viewed themselves. Replacing negative self-talk and criticism with acceptance of limitations and self-efficacy were key outcomes of this process and will be discussed more thoroughly in the emotional transformation section. The significance of the emotional shift is a key reason coachees felt more connected to others.

Gaining Trust

Additional relationship outcomes experienced by coachees were trust, social connectedness, and appreciation. Being accountable and following through on tasks and projects despite their difficulty engenders trust (Coachee 11). Being seen as trustworthy also facilitates stronger relationships since coachees are more comfortable sharing their experiences, discussing their needs and feelings, resolving conflict, and working together (Coachees 14, 15, 18, & 19).

Enhancing Social Networks

Coachees in the study mentioned a desire or increased need to make new friends or reconnect with former friends and colleagues (Coachees 3, 7, 13, 15, & 20). Some are also in the process of re-creating their social networks as well. Coachee 3 has spent Friday nights socializing with her friends at a local pub; however, recently she has felt an increased urge to engage in more educationally stimulating conversations. She has disengaged from the usual Friday night activities and has found that some of her friends are requesting some of her time, as they too want to engage in more meaningful social activities.

Coachees are intent on developing relationships that extend beyond the “cocktail chatter” and into more heart-felt subjects (Coachees 15 & 20). They take the time to reach out to others and support them in attaining their goals or personal best (Coachee 19). Coachees repeatedly demonstrated that they improved their relationships by first improving themselves. They assisted others only after taking responsibility for their own needs and actions.

Appreciation for Life

A significant number of coachees mentioned that they felt an increased sense of appreciation for life, which extended to their relationships and work (Coachees 1, 5-6, 12 & 16-18). By slowing their minds down and trying to be present in the moment rather than rushing through life and projects, they were mindfully creating the emotional space to reflect on who they were, who they were becoming, and what was important in their lives. This allowed them to appreciate where they were in life instead of always looking to the future and what they may accomplish.

Coachees were also shifting their construct of *rich* from an objective, material possession description to a more subjective, enriching life description, a process that is described later in the chapter. This set the foundation for further reflection on what was already present in their lives and allowed them to examine those properties rather than seeking external fulfillment through accumulating more assets. Through appreciative inquiry, their coaches taught them how to move from examining life, work, and relationships from a deficit approach to using an abundance approach and examining what is already working or providing energy. Coachees were then able to extend those

ideas into all aspects of their lives, including their relationships and connectivity to others and their work.

Physical Transformation

The personal transformation coachees experienced when using their strengths stretched beyond how they approached their work and relationships. Most noticeable were the connections to flow and the physical changes that manifested when coachees had opportunities to utilize their strengths. They also described how they recognized and regulated their strengths by attending to changes in their bodies and in corresponding shifts in energy levels (see Figure 8).

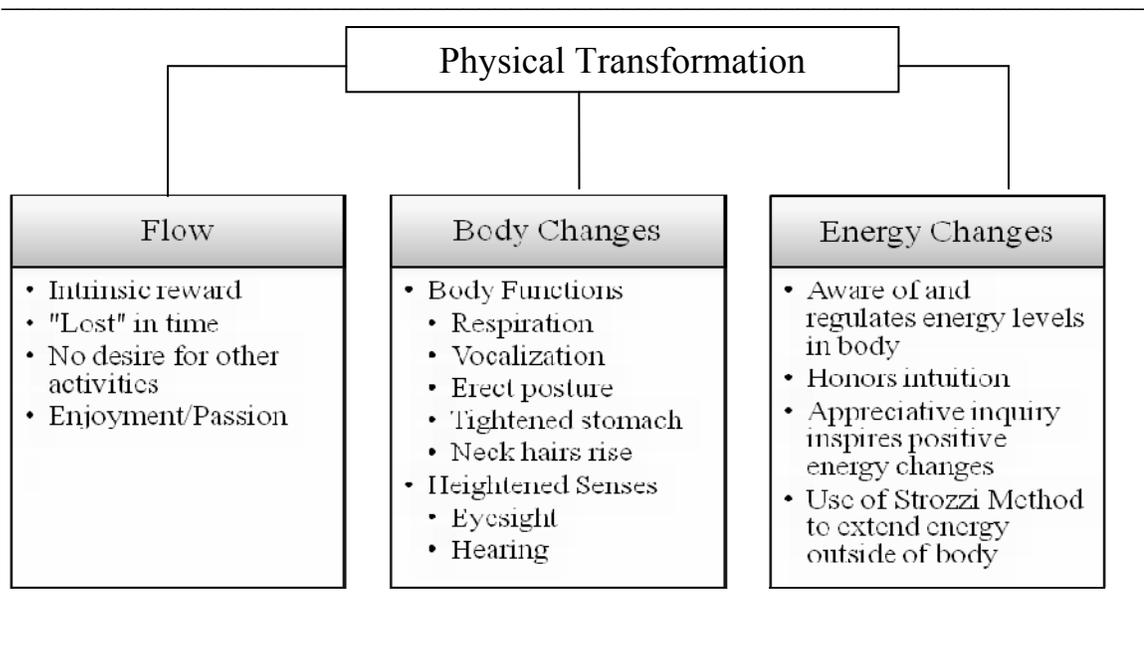


Figure 8. Physical transformation from using and regulating strengths.

Flow Theory

Coachees spoke at length about losing themselves in their activities, forgetting to attend to their basic needs, such as eating and drinking, and feeling energized and intrinsically motivated when using their strengths—all components of Csikszentmihályi and Rathunde (1993)'s flow theory. The relationship between strengths use and flow is unparallel. Coachee 18 describes what it is like to use his strengths and be in flow:

I lose sense of time. I love being in that place. When I am in a place of deep creativity, oh, I feel so good, it's so satisfying. I don't care if I have eaten; I don't care what else is going on. It's intrinsically, unbelievably, intrinsically rewarding.

In contrast, when asked if he notices when he is not in flow, Coachee 18 says:

All the clocks are moving slowly. I had this blank white—this blank piece of paper in front of me. It's been there for three hours. I can't think of anything. Oh, it's just painful and I am like, oh, I don't ever want to be involved in whatever this is again.

Coachee 17 also states that being in flow makes everything easier and being out of flow is more demanding. She recalls her experiences with being in flow:

So to say that I am aware of it—it's actually the opposite. I think when I am in my strengths, things are just—I just—it's more an intuitive pull rather than anything forceful I have to think through. That's what happens when I am out of my strengths. That's when I have to really consciously touch every detail because I am not comfortable and sure about it.

Coachees constantly touched on many of the outcomes of being in flow and in using their strengths in their work. This was evident in Coachee 19's decision to leave her career and become a professional coach. She described how she receives a constant reminder that she is on the "right path." She states:

It's as though the universe is supporting me in just about anything that I'm doing in the moment. In fact, when I made this decision to take these courses, everything just fell into place like magic, even in terms of financial support for it, time to do it, logistics. And that continues to happen. It's like there's a lot of work involved and yet it's so easy like flowing downstream with the current.

Coachee 7 has also experienced being in flow through using her strengths; however, she described it as not having to "meta-think." She further confirms that she is not even necessarily aware of it. "It just happens." Coachee 6 believes that being in flow means she is using her strengths and doing what she does best. She states:

I feel like I—it's kind of effortless for me to be able to make a contribution that really makes a difference. And so, you know it happens sometimes when I'm teaching, I'm like Wow! Somebody will ask me a question or something—and I'll be like— this answer comes out of me, I'm like Wow! Where did that come from? It just kind of all comes together and it's just so effortless.

Body Changes

As the interviews continued, coachees began discussing physical changes that occurred in their bodies when they were using their strengths. This recognition eventually enabled some of the coachees to begin regulating their strengths through managing the

changes. Two coachees described experiencing a state of heightened senses when they were using their strengths. Coachee 1 stated that when she was learning something new, her energy was so strong that others detected a change in her eyes. She noticed it too because everything is “brighter.” Coachee 13 also confirmed a sense difference; however, she experiences acute hearing when using her strengths and connecting with others. Some coachees were especially sensitive to changes in their senses, and they were able to regulate their energy levels and strengths by staying attuned to those experiences.

Coachees also mentioned other physical changes. Their examples can be classified into changes that increased bodily functions and changes that produced shifts in energy levels. Most coachees were aware of the alterations within their bodies at the time they experienced them, and they used their body’s signals as messages—an additional source of input to be considered when making a decision.

Coachees have become accustomed to noticing and regulating bodily changes. The most common signs mentioned were an increased sense of respiration and vocalization. Other physical signs included tightening of the stomach, having the hairs on the back of one’s neck rise, getting a lump in the throat, experiencing more erect body posture (Coachee 15), feeling a deep resonance within the body (Coachee 17), and tingling along the spine (Coachee 18). They used words such as “juiced” (Coachee 3) and “buzzed” (Coachee 8) to describe the feelings they get in their bodies when using their strengths. Coachee 8 stated, “It’s exciting. It’s something that feels powerful, it feels strong. It’s not even comfortable—it’s almost like a buzz.”

When the physical changes first began appearing, many were not sure what they meant or how to regulate them. One was even concerned. Coachee 18 recalls:

I know that if my spine is tingling—that it’s actually one of my strengths. For most of my life, I thought when my spine was tingling that something was wrong with me. Like there was a nerve problem. So what I discovered, at least the way I frame it now is, it is as if positive energy is moving through my body...when I feel that movement of energy through my spine, that’s information. One of my strengths that is becoming, is evolving, is listening to the information my body gives me. When my spine is tingling, I can speak with more certainty and passion because it’s what is true for me.

Coachee 18 mentions that speaking from a place of certainty and passion has noticeable effects on his communication because others “see my exuberance, they’ll see my certainty. And it makes it much easier for them to get it.” Coachee 17 paints another vivid picture of being more clearly understood by others when using her strengths. She states, “What comes out is a lot more clear for people when I am in my strength of being a big picture, conceptual, creative person. So I am able to get across my message better.”

Many coachees also spoke of accelerations or changes in their voice. Coachee 7 stated, “Sometimes my coach would make references to changes in my tone of voice.” She goes on to state that her fluidity changes, she talks faster, and she is more articulate when she is speaking about her strengths or passions. Coachee 2 agrees and said, “When you are dealing with strengths, there is a lot of energy that accompanies that.” His statement helped to illuminate the processes underneath the vocal changes. Engaging

strengths creates a space that is immediately filled with energy and enthusiasm, which often manifested physically through rushed dialogue, fluidity, or language choice. One coachee noticed that even the words she used to describe her experiences change when she is regulating her strengths and feeling energized and in flow (Coachee 7).

With regard to voice and mannerism changes, Coachee 13 feels that she also gets a very strong physical reaction when she is not using her strengths. Her vocal agitation and mannerism changes alert her to reflect on what is being triggered within her that is outside of her comfort zone and strengths. Pairing her body's physical cues and her understanding of her emotional triggers gives her the ability to quickly consider what is changing within her environment, so that she can purposely respond and regulate it. She concludes by stating, "I intentionally seek balance. I am always seeking."

Coachee 17 is also familiar with vocal changes; however, her experience has been more about using strengths to "find her voice." She describes being required to develop the logical side of her brain during her career; however, she believes she is naturally a more creative, right-side of the brain person. Her tenacity helped her to learn to use and strengthen the analytical side of her brain; however, that was never her strength, nor did it ever resolve in being in flow. In contrast, when she was able to "own, claim, articulate, and communicate" that her strengths were different from others, she felt liberated. Coachee 17 states, "I could find my voice better and my strengths than I could when I was forcing a non-strength." She says that that by using her strengths, "I am able to live my life purpose more fully when I choose the flow." This experience has led her to feel more authentic, present, and clear about her life purpose.

Coachee 15 is another coachee who became clear about her life purpose. Despite considerable resistance from the community, she has been fervently creating a business that provides leadership development for non-profit leaders. During the past six years, she experienced significant adversity and obstacles, which in her words, were only possible to overcome because she was able to come at it “from a place of strength.” To assist in staying focused on her mission she envisions, and physically feels within her body, a steel rod that helps keep her erect. This steel rod gives her tremendous strength in achieving her personal goals, and most likely helped save her life. She was attacked by a gunman who demanded all her material possessions and her car. By staying focused and using her strengths, she was able to have a 5-7 minute conversation with him while he decided what to take and do. She recalls:

I negotiated with him. Ultimately, he only took a few things; left me with my purse and my jewelry. I remind myself of how strong I was at that moment, looking him in the eyes, being respectful, but being clear that I was not going to wither and you know faint or whatever in front of him. And so, that is the image I conjure up to remind me of my great strength.

Being aware of and actively regulating one’s strengths can have enormous benefit on the way coachees interact with others and in how they view themselves. Equally as effective is the use of appreciative inquiry. By invoking conversations that examine the appreciative elements of people, projects, and life, coachees were able to move beyond negative or depreciating conversations into those that created energy and allowed them to regulate their strengths.

Frustrated by the conversations he was having with his staff, Coachee 12 learned how to use appreciative inquiry to transform conversations and energy levels. He was able to utilize appreciative inquiry to address a very serious human resource issue, to redesign staff meetings to create more positive outcomes, and to identify problems and solutions more effectively. He described an event where a particular staff person entered his office and began complaining. After listening to his unhappiness, Coachee 12 stated that they have a very different picture in mind and asked if they could discuss their different ideals. Additionally, rather than taking meeting time to address work-place challenges, he began each meeting by asking, “What’s working best?” This deliberate, but simple change redirected negative energy and forced people to focus on the appreciative processes that allowed them to celebrate their successes and feel energized by their work.

Energy Changes

Being aware of the energy that stems from using appreciative processes or one’s strengths gives coachees another tool to utilize in making decisions. It increases their energy levels (Coachee 5), which makes them approach life more enthusiastically, and it gives them a sense of power. Recognizing the importance of understanding their body’s connection with energy, many coachees consciously begin regulating it through the use of visualizations and purposefully monitoring changes in it. Coachee 6 mentioned that she notices when she is not using her strengths because her “energy has dipped a little.” There were other examples as well.

Coachee 19 regulates her strengths and being in flow by developing an analogy and visualization of herself as a water tank. She strives to keep her tank replenished and full, and she remains vigilant against water leaks. She does this by consciously reflecting on what drains and contributes to her energy levels. Exercising, getting enough sleep, and reducing her activity load are all examples of how she consciously regulates her energy and takes charge of her own life.

Coachee 2 is also very aware of changes in energy for both himself and his coachees. He is able to purposefully watch for them during a session and comment on them as necessary. He is also attuned to when he has been working too long in a particular area or needs a break. The awareness he has cultivated allows him to more purposefully regulate his energy and attend to both his coachees' and his own personal needs.

Coachee 18 believes that the flow and energy that comes from regulating one's strengths is so important that it might even change one's neurochemistry, although this was not tested and remains a personal belief. He gives an analogy by saying it is "sort of like a drug." Creating positive flow and energy through regulating strengths creates pleasurable experiences and feelings. It may also reduce negative feelings and stress, as suggested by Coachees 10 and 19. Coachee 10 says it feels like there is an "air to her daily work," and she feels emotionally uplifted by the energy she receives. Coachee 20 also feels less lethargic and more motivated.

Another interesting outcome of the strengths and energy discussion was the comment made by Coachee 7. She pinpointed the importance of distinguishing between strengths that give you energy and strengths that do not give you energy at all. She says:

I have strengths in some areas...that I'm not that interested in. I used to think that my kind of talent should dictate what I do as opposed to what I'm passionate about. I mean, I do think strengths are important certainly, but I feel like strengths can be applied within almost any setting, within almost any career, within any path that you take....Being able to align my values and apply my strengths now in an area where I felt passionate about or interested in, I think that's what made the change for me.

Her point is important, as it is possible to have a talent or strength in organizing and synthesizing large volumes of data; however, that does not necessarily mean that working as a librarian, for example, energizes everyone who possesses that strength.

Many coachees stated that they have become more in tune with their intuition and readily use it as a tool in making decisions. Coachee 19 made the decision to enter a particular coaching school based on instinct rather than conducting extensive research. She has since felt very comfortable and happy with the outcome. Coachee 13 also honors her intuition in working with her team and in making decisions. Coachee 11 pays attention to her "gut feeling" when deciding what to do. Even when there are no particular physical expressions in their bodies, coachees are still keyed into the feelings they are receiving and use them as an additional input in determining what choice to make. One Coachee (9) has even taken a course in the Strozzi method, a program that teaches individuals how to extend their power and personality beyond their physical body and live in wholeness (Strozzi-Heckler, 2009). She feels more confident, powerful, present, and alert. Many coachees have gone to great lengths to understand how their

bodies can be used as an additional tool in gathering input and making decisions. They pay attention to and regulate their strengths by noticing changes in their body and energy levels, and as a result, they have also experienced significant physical transformation. All coachees made reference to strengths or energy levels during the interviews; however, it is important to note that not all coachees have learned to regulate their energy levels.

Emotional Transformation

The final transformational theme is the most complex since it addresses the emotional or psychological changes that occur when people are identifying and using their strengths. This was also the most challenging to analyze, as the complexities and outcomes coachees experienced were quite varied. After careful scrutiny, three phases of this process emerged.

The first phase addresses changes coachees experienced in self-perception, in other words—who they are. Once they started to shift their self-identities, they moved into the second phase, which concerns changing the way they perceived what is happening around and to them. In this phase, they learned to reframe thoughts, attitudes, and experiences, a process which ultimately helped them become more resilient. As a result of gaining a better understanding of who they are and what is happening around them, they entered the final emotional phase, which focuses on bringing their careers and life into balance. For most coachees in the sample, this meant a career change where they were able to align their values and strengths with their work. Their emotional transformation is visually depicted in Figure 9 and in the subsequent textual description.

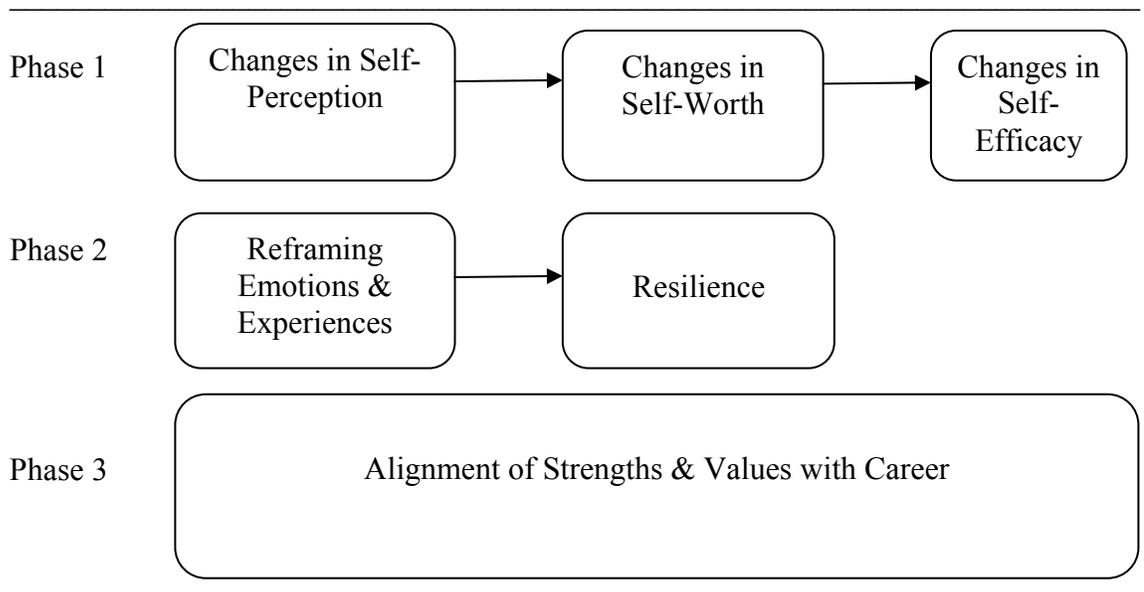


Figure 9. Emotional transformation from using and regulating strengths.

Phase 1: Self Changes

Changes in Self-Perception

During the interviews, coachees commonly referenced changes in self-perception, which encompassed all aspects of their lives. They questioned whether they were strong enough role models for their children, whether their families would feel differently toward them if they could not provide all the material trappings of a successful life, and whether they were smart enough or had the technical competencies to perform their jobs well. Several coachees also described feeling continuous self-doubt or self-criticism that permeated their lives. Coachee 9 clearly articulates the struggle they experienced:

I had a negative voice telling me I wasn't good enough to do that job or that job.

And I had another side of my personality that was very excited to go try new

challenges, and that negative voice would just beat me down. On the way to an interview I would think, who do you think you are? You know, and I needed to remove that voice. I needed to only focus on what I was going in to do—to a get a job and to make a good impression by focusing on the positive and what I could accomplish for the company.... We set goals in the class, but mine was to be of one mind. That meant removing that negative voice.

Removing the negative voice was imperative, as was expanding their limiting self-labels or saboteurs (Coachee 1). A saboteur, or gremlin, is an internal critic that gets in the way of thinking and acting (Coachees 4 & 15). When the negative voice was silenced, it was a transformation so significant that Coachee 1 described it using a butterfly analogy:

My transformation came when I moved from a dark space to find the light. Even though I had a wonderful life, I was so frustrated. I wanted to value the beautiful things I had in life. I wanted to be grateful, have fun as a mother, etc. I learned that it wasn't anybody's fault, you know. It wasn't really my environment or my family—it was me. What was missing was finding the purpose. That transformation came like a butterfly [*sic*]. That was me! That was the analogy of my life. I was there. I was totally scared. I wasn't ready to go out, so when it was time to come out, it was so bright. So colorful! So powerful! That was the butterfly. I came out of my cocoon and I created a life.

Coachee 19 also experienced a transformation, yet she describes hers as letting the “tamped down parts of me come forward.” She was not alone in describing her shift in perception. Coachee 2 also describes a significant change; however, he refers to it as

“unlocking potential.” When asked whether expanding his capabilities changed his confidence level, Coachee 2 describes his experience in changing careers and in shifting his self-perception. He says:

You know, I spent twenty something years within an organization doubting or totally discounting any capacity I might have had both as a sales person and as a broad business manager. Right, so I have viewed myself as a HR person that was good in this functional area but then would discount those other skills...I had a very successful career in human resources. I knew I was a good HR practitioner, a really good business partner, but my opportunities would have been limited if that is all I was. What I realize now is that I actually do know how to actually build a business model. I have capacity to sell and in client services, and so all of those things are much broader than what I knew I had prior to coaching.

Coachee 7 states:

I'm putting myself out there in ways that I definitely did not think of myself as being capable of before...That was probably the biggest change for me, which is just kind of how I viewed myself in terms of the impact that I could have in the world and the type of challenges that I could take on as an individual.

These types of examples were plentiful. They clearly depict the type of changes coachees experienced in self-perception as they expanded their belief systems about the types of capabilities they possessed and how they could leverage those to create new challenges and opportunities for themselves.

Changes in Self-Worth

Coachees began viewing themselves more positively and removing self-limiting labels and doubts, and they began experiencing a shift in self-worth or value, which also altered the way they took care of themselves. Coachee 9 states, “I am healthier because I think I am more committed to taking care of myself,” and Coachee 4 states, “I can look at it from a new perspective, a healthier mindset.” Coachee 19 describes, “I’m much easier on myself, and I find there’s way less inner chatter that’s negative. And on a physical level, I’m not self-medicating as much.” They began valuing themselves more, so they placed a higher premium on their health.

Some coachees initially valued objects over people. Coachee 14 recognized that she had become accustomed to valuing material objects over herself. She spent a significant amount of time and resources trying to ensure she gave her family everything they could want; however, when the banking industry began to collapse she was forced to reconcile her values. Over time, she redefined her self-worth and value. She shifted from thinking of herself as a producer and provider of materialistic items to that of being a loving mother and wife who was present and available to her family (Coachee 14).

Another example of a coachee shifting her self-worth and value is that of Coachee 8. This hard working woman has always been one to take on any new challenge or task when others do not want to, so it was natural for her to assume the role of secretary in her new Board role despite loathing that type of activity. She eventually realized that she was struggling immensely and that “everything I did was wrong. Everything was awful.”

Then she realized that she was operating outside of her strengths and working in an area that was draining her energy. In her words:

It was amazing. It was just amazing! Before I had that perspective, I would have thought I'm just terrible. I should never serve on another Board. I don't know what I was thinking. I can't even take notes. That was really when the door opened to a bunch of other things. Because that was so black and white, that was really pretty easy for me to see.

Coachee 9 also described an incident where she recognized that she was about to personalize an activity as her own failure. After having difficulty finding a new job, she began to get down on herself and began the familiar pattern of questioning her self-worth and value. Unlike previous episodes, this time she was able to not personalize the event and to recognize that finding employment during a recession was difficult for everyone. She was able to normalize the experience instead of devaluing her own self-worth.

Coachee 17 just started a new business when the recession began. Despite having lofty goals for her first year of business, she was able to come to terms with the fact that this was going to be a financially challenging year for many and had nothing to do with her own value or self-worth. She states:

I had huge goals and expectations for this year. It's a rough year for a lot of people. And what's coming to me—the value—is not the same value that I thought I was going to get out of this year. So there is not a monetary income that is supporting me right now. The income that is coming to me is more in terms of self-growth and development, and so I am trying to be ok with that. I absolutely

think that what I am doing right now is going to set me up for the rest of my life to live the way I want to do with purpose. I will be able to support myself better this way. But for right now, I am living within and looking in the eyeballs of the failure of my business....So yah, I am absolutely thrilled, delighted, couldn't be happier with my decision, and I am getting better with failure and just starting—just moving forward anyway.

Coachees repeatedly gave these types of examples as they discussed how coaching helped them not to personalize events (Coachees 4 & 8). In making this shift, their self-worth changed. Rather than taking things personally, they began to see the opportunities present and to normalize the experience.

Changes in Self-Efficacy

Coachees also shifted from blaming themselves and devaluing their self-worth to accepting outside influence and change, and their levels of self-efficacy improved. They became more powerful and confident. Their self-esteem rose and they were “inspired to action” (Coachee 4). Some coachees also made shifts in their confidence.

It was not uncommon to hear examples of how coachees' sense of power and confidence changed. Coachee 14 was able to redefine the boundaries of an existing mentorship, which included transforming from mentee into collaborating partner. After gaining a sense of increased power and confidence, Coachee 9 was able to consider relocating to New York, a city she had always feared because she was concerned that she could not survive there. Coachee 10 became more confident in her technical expertise and

still another was able to finally accept the love and proposal of a man she has been dating for several years (Coachee 14).

Escalating confidence levels gave rise to higher self-esteems, and several coachees mentioned they were feeling more confident living their lives. Coachee 8 states, “I felt like I was living who I was” while Coachee 10 claimed coaching helped me to “shake off all the burdens on my heart and feel more light hearted to move on.” Stretching their personal assumptions about their capabilities and removing self-limiting thoughts helped coachees take action.

After leaving the theater to become a professional coach, Coachee 20 posits, “I am not spinning in circles as much.” Coachee 20 is starting a career and using an innovative technology to create a niche in the coaching market by offering video feedback to coachees who are interested in seeing how others perceive them.

Coachee 2 was also able to use the skills gained in coaching and his change in self-efficacy to positively impact his career. Rather than taking a traditional approach in hiring a business partner, he purposefully interviewed potential partners based on their strengths and how they could compliment and round out his own. He was motivated to act in a purposeful manner that would positively affect his business and financial success.

Coachee 11 decided to impact her career and future travel plans by obtaining her PhD. She specifically chose a program that would afford her the greatest flexibility, so that she could enjoy traveling the world with her husband. She was able to put her goals into action and attain her dreams because she believed in herself and in her own value.

For two coachees, believing in themselves, gaining a sense of confidence and power, and taking action led to a significant shift in their identities. Coachee 13 describes this journey as she discusses the impact coaching has had on her personally:

It helps me to be a more calm and open person, less defensive. I grew up in a really male-dominated industry. I worked in aerospace, like I said, my undergraduate is in engineering. Very few women were in the room when I was in the room; lots of old military. So being smart and making sure people understood that was always more important than feeling energy in the room or connecting with people. So now, I am ok with them to eventually figure out I am smart but also manage those factors in a room also.

When asked what that emotional shift was like for her, Coachee 13 explains:

It's fun and freeing. There was a home grooming process of letting go of [me] the engineer versus who I was growing to be. So I just think that any time there is learning and insight there is just a natural letting go process. And I think that's probably an important part of coaching that sometimes coaches forget—that even though growth is exciting, if you outgrow you come out of your shell or your cocoon, there is still a little bit of ego, a battled image.

Letting go of one's ego was also mentioned by Coachee 20, as she described the experience of using her strengths. "I think that in many ways I become less of [myself] as an ego person." Coachee 15 states:

My coach helped me to make the shift to say that strength: You know, I am a strong, tough, broad. That's sort of my mantra, and so I say it regularly....And so,

one of the things I've started doing is, I say that affirmation each evening. And so, you know I say I am a strong, tough broad and I am grateful for blah, blah, whatever it is, so that has given me the strength to move forward.

Coachees were learning to accept themselves holistically by honoring their experiences, knowledge, and natural talents. They believed in themselves; therefore, they were able to make a shift from externally validating themselves through others' perceptions to internally valuing themselves regardless of others' perceptions. As coachees became more confident in using their strengths and in viewing themselves more positively, they were able to let go of their egos and become more natural and observant. As Coachees 2 and 7 describe, they were able to develop themselves from the inside out, and they are on different paths now than when they first started coaching.

Phase 2: Perception Changes

Changes in self-perception, self-worth, and self-efficacy were not the only emotional changes coachees described during their interviews. They also mentioned skills in learning how to reframe emotions and experiences to create more optimal outcomes. Coachees reframed how they viewed themselves and their capabilities, and now they describe how they were able to transcend negative emotions and experiences.

Reframing Negative Emotions

Many people experience fear, and as a result, feel blocked from moving forward. This thread ran through the phone interviews as well. Coachee 14 describes it:

Instead of coming from a place of fear or resentment, or whatever, and letting that power or motivate my actions [*sic*], I was able to clear that up and allow living from a space...A lot of what motivated me was either fear—it all went down to fear actually. What came over the top of that was resentment, or anger, or power struggles—stuff like that was more obvious; the fear underneath it wasn't. As we went down in those layers and I became more present to where I was abandoning myself, as I became more aligned with myself and more present, the conversations that needed to happen would happen in a moment rather than not at all or months later...I'm moving from this place of contraction out of fear to a place of softness, openness, inner peace, and the peace came as I began to act in alignment with myself.

Coachee 5 also believes that it is important to acknowledge the power of fear. She states, "I believe that fear creates reality." It is essential that coachees are able to counteract it by acknowledging and addressing it rather than hiding from it or pretending it does not exist. This was also evident in Coachee 9's example as she describes the importance of not being a victim. She states:

I think that it's just instead of whining and complaining and feeling like a victim, you begin to focus on what do I want, how do I get there, what do I do if I don't get there, how do I regroup and start again, how do I keep a positive support system around me, how do I still have fun some of the time.

Others shared similar experiences, but instead of talking about fear specifically they mentioned letting go of stress or worry (Coachee 10) and not whining (Coachee 3) or crying as much (Coachee 5). Coachee 3 describes:

If I turn the clock back 18 months ago and happened to have a challenge, and I hadn't had exposure to coaching or being a coach, I might have spent far too much time worrying about whatever it was or whining about it, or just being down about it...but now, I can look at it from a new perspective, a healthier mindset, a more positive learning opportunity.

Another coachee shared that rather than trying to regulate her emotions, she now consciously works to experience the full range of emotions (Coachee 13). She does this because she believes that all emotions bring opportunity to learn and should be expressed freely. As coachees learned to reframe their emotions as part of the experience instead of something to fear or avoid, they were able to have different outcomes than would be possible if they were contracted in fear and unable to take action. Instead of viewing fear as a paralyzing emotion or one that should be avoided, they made a conscious shift to view it as one of many emotions that could be felt and released. This was an important shift since fear can be the impetus to change.

Change as Opportunity

Fear of change is an emotion that can be paralyzing or stifling if not brought into perspective. Rather than yielding to fear or avoiding it, some coachees consciously viewed change as opportunity and utilized it to catapult them to optimal outcomes.

Coachee 18 was challenged by his coach to embrace his love of singing and invite all his

friends over to hear him perform. While he was initially terrified of the idea, he agreed to give a recital to his closest friends as part of his 50th birthday present to himself. With pride he recalled the experience and how he inspired his friends to also confront their fears. He also created a benchmark of success to use as a measuring tool when he felt fearful or worried about an outcome.

Coachee 2 believes that learning how to reframe situations is a critical factor in the day-to-day experiences of running his own business. Instead of worrying about whether he possesses a certain skill set, he has challenged his capabilities by stretching his skills and engaging in activities that he would have previously considered outside his comfort zone. He no longer restricts himself by labeling his skill set. He now embraces opportunities to try new tasks.

The language coachees use has a profound impact on their ability to achieve their goals. Coachee 3 describes an experience she had with her coach where she was asked to consider the potential road blocks she might experience in reaching her goals. Recognizing that the idea of a road block was limiting and conjured images that were insurmountable, she quickly reframed the language and used the term hurdle. In her opinion, “a hurdle you could jump over, knock down, or run around where a road block might be a complete block.” It is important that coachees use language that allows for expansion of ideas and not restriction of them.

One method for expanding opportunities is the use of appreciative inquiry language. Appreciative inquiry can be successfully used to change conversations and staff meetings (Coachee 12). It can also be used effectively in reaching one’s goals.

Coachee 11 is well-versed in the use of appreciative inquiry and in creating opportunities by providing many pathways to the same goal. She describes it:

One of the things in the appreciative model is that we start with discovery, which is all the questions, but then the next phase is to dream. And in dream, you create the ideas and future. And out of those stories, you create that idea of future that you work from in your design, so you design, in the third phase, the structures and the supports that need to be in place to work from that dream. And so if you haven't done the dream piece, what we are doing is going back to the action planning towards what--and that's the big question, right? And we action map versus action plan. So we create the map and the map allows us to have many different paths that will still work toward or still work from the vision, but it allows us to get there in a couple of different ways knowing that there are contingency paths.

Appreciative inquiry is one of many skills positive psychology coachees utilized as they worked to overcome their fearful emotions and embrace opportunity as change.

Resilience

Resilience is another outcome coachees experienced in their emotional transformation. According to Fredrickson and Losada (2005), resilience is the ability to bounce back from adversity, and resilient people are better able to deal with negative or stressful events. Coachees have given numerous examples of their resilience, including their ability to transform their self-perceptions and sense of self-worth to obtain new, fulfilling careers, to release the financial burdens that inhibited their ability to be present

and enjoy their families, and to successfully overcome being held at gunpoint. They have resisted their fears and willingly explored both their positive and negative emotions as well as the dark and light areas of their lives. They learned to use “feelings as a compass or guide in whether to act or make decisions” (Coachee 7), and they incorporated their body’s messages into their decision making processes. Coachee 9 says it best in her claim that she is “surviving and feeling good about it.” Coachees have been able to bounce back from adversity because they viewed challenges as opportunities rather than restrictive or prohibiting outcomes.

Phase 3: Career Changes

Values, Strengths, and Career Alignment

One challenge that coachees mentioned during their interviews was the need to align their careers with their strengths and values. Even when they did not specifically speak of aligning their careers and values, the stories they provided illuminated that belief and demonstrated the actions. For some, the interviews occurred at a time where they had just completed that transition while others were either in the process of changing their careers or they were already established in them. Regardless of where they were in that process, the importance of getting congruence between their work and values was unmistakable and many were also committed to helping others to do the same.

Coachee 18 is committed to helping others align their careers. He discovered that positive psychology coaching helped him undergo personal transformation with regard to his relationships with people, his ability to uncover patterns that come up in his life, and

in “what I do and how I think in my life.” He learned to help both himself and the coachees he works with “discover their values and their strengths and to live from those places.” He was not alone in his discoveries.

Several coachees discussed changes they made in careers as a result of learning that what they did for a living and their values were not congruent. Coachee 14 learned that she was living a life full of all the materialistic items of success, but she was unfulfilled and missed spending time with her family. Coaching helped her “change the quality of my life completely.” Coachee 19 also changed the quality of her life when she made the decision to become a professional coach. She states, “I feel like I have a clearer purpose in my life.” She attributed this change to noticing and honoring her values.

Not everyone in the study made a career change. Coachee 13 was able to change the way she thought about herself and her strengths by learning more about how the brain functions. She learned about emotional intelligence as well as the importance of incorporating both sides of her brain in her work. She integrated the creative strengths she possessed with the logical, systematic left side of her brain to create optimal outcomes. She honored her values and strengths and found a way to express them. Coachee 16 also learned how to incorporate both sides of her brain in her work. Both Coachees 13 and 16 embraced a holistic approach to their work rather than feeling restricted and bound to using only half their natural strengths.

Coachees who spoke of purposefully aligning their strengths and careers mentioned the joy and positive emotions they experienced regularly in their work. Coachee 1 states that she is personally energized each time her coachees have a

breakthrough. She expresses feeling “very energetic, very positive.” She describes the interaction with them as the “geography and soul of the work and the power of everything.”

Multiple coachees mentioned the joy of having work that corresponded to their natural strengths and values (Coachees 1-2, 5-7, 9-10, 12-15, 17-20). What was most striking to the researcher, was the overwhelming sense of satisfaction and joy coachees derived from doing the work they loved and that naturally inspired and energized them. Coachee 3 posits, “My energy is a higher energy with the coaching experience than before and it’s a real enthusiasm. It’s more of an enthusiasm for life in general.” Their energy and voice levels rose significantly during the interviews when they were asked questions about their strengths and when they had the opportunity to discuss their work and what they enjoyed most about it.

Coachees experienced emotional transformation that significantly altered their lives. They are living healthier lifestyles, expanding belief systems, and reducing negative thoughts, limiting beliefs, and self-defeating labels. They experienced changes that brought them closer to their families and loved ones, and they learned how to normalize experiences and reframe challenges and fears. They mustered all their courage and new-found skills and brought their careers into alignment with their strengths and values. They transformed their lives by learning how to have better relationships, use their strengths and energy levels as a source of information, and value themselves in a manner which fuels action and facilitates goal attainment. But were they thriving?

Thriving

The definition of thriving was developed by synthesizing the literature on positive psychology and individual thriving and well-being, as scholars have not yet established a consensus on the elements that define individual thriving. Some incorporate connectivity and zest while using another definition such as high-quality work relationships (Dutton, 2007; Baker & Quinn, 2007) whereas others utilize the term thriving but narrow the scope to only include individuals who are simultaneously learning and experiencing a sense of vitality (Spreitzer, Fu Lam, & Fritz, 2008). Commonly, they included the concept of energy (e.g. zest or vitality), which led to Csikszentmihályi and Rathunde (1993) work on flow. Flow theory encompasses the idea of high-quality work relationships; however, it still does not fully capture the essence of thriving.

This researcher adopted what was initially believed to be a more expansive definition of thriving and used central tenets of all the theories to develop a definition that included cognitive and affective components. The literature also suggests that thriving is more than a state of energy or vitality, and that it encompasses a desire to learn as well as to connect with others and the work one does professionally, so a definition was created that synthesized all four elements. Thriving was defined by this researcher as a psychological construct manifested through a marked sense of learning, vitality, energy, and connectivity to others and the work one does professionally, and all four components had to be present for an individual to be considered as thriving (see Figure 10).

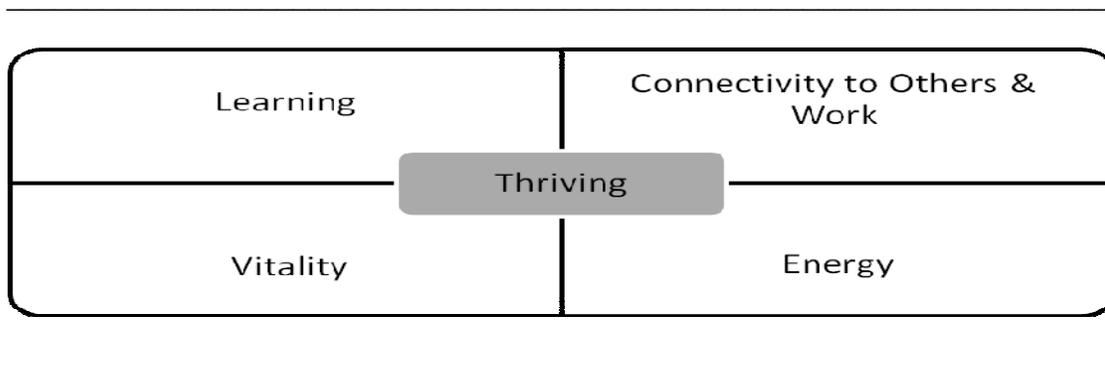


Figure 10. Elements of thriving.

Having all four components present for a coachee to be considered thriving created an analytical challenge since thriving is condition-dependent and more temporal and elusive than originally predicted. Coachees can be in a state of thriving one day and unexpectedly get laid off from work or experience a health crisis that resulted in losing their connectivity to others and their sense of vitality. This unexpected result created difficulty in determining whether an individual was thriving as did failing to consider how to treat data that the coachee is still processing and has not fully integrated. Questions arose for the researcher such as: how long must coachees have all four criteria present to be thriving and how do you treat an epiphany someone is currently experiencing? There were a few coachees who discussed vitality; however, the majority considered vitality and energy the same concept. Vitality as its own theme never really materialized, which makes it difficult to proclaim that coachees were thriving since the initial definition proposed that vitality and energy were different states and both had to be present for the coachee to meet the definition of thriving.

Using the definition of thriving guiding the study, it was not possible to state explicitly that a coachee was thriving. Evidence showed that many coachees had experiences of thriving, even if they were fleeting or non-inclusive of all four criteria. The following examples demonstrate connectivity to work and others, learning, and feeling energized.

Coachee 5 credits her coaching experience with getting a better job, “Through the coaching, it’s very much tangible; I have really pretty much got my dream job.” Others noted that their colleagues identified changes and gave them feedback. Coachee 6 states, “I remember getting feedback from people that I worked with, that they noticed a difference in me. They were aware that I was engaged in this coaching relationship, and they noticed things about me that they felt were different” (Coachee 6). Coachee 9 also received feedback about the changes she had made as a result of coaching; however, she received them from two employment recruiters she had met with prior to beginning her coaching. When she met with them again several months later, they noticed such a change in her that they sent her “on bigger jobs” (Coachee 9). One coachee received validation that her career choices have been purposeful even if she was not always aware of them. Coachee 6 states:

I was always very strongly motivated by a sense of social justice. And my career had been dedicated to helping people that were disempowered, and trying to empower children and people. And so I think when I worked with my coach, and we did some vision work, that it helped me to see that this wasn’t just something that I had fallen into. Which is kind of how I felt about it, like I just kind of fell

into this work after college and then I just ended up staying in it...It helped me to see that it was really connected to a larger vision that I had and purpose and the values and belief system that I had. And that you know, I was working in something that I was very deeply committed to.

Connectivity was not just found in coachees' feelings about their work. It was also discovered in the way they interacted with others. Coachee 13 states:

In relationship to others, I am really being able to integrate and see where those connections happen and not worrying about competition or judgmental mindsets, but really being open to what these new relationships mean—not even necessarily knowing what they meant to begin with. Being open and able to just play with them and see what happens.

Coachee19 also experienced changes in the way she worked with others. She says, “I’m more open to other people’s input and ideas, and I’m more willing to say, Oh there’s another way of looking at it, or to say oh, I spoke too soon, or I was wrong you’re right.”

Coachees demonstrated their willingness to learn. Coachee 5 summarizes best in her statement, “I love to learn.” Coachee 14 gives a more elaborate answer in her recollection of an important learning moment she experienced as a result of coaching:

I was really surprised at the recognition that I held that rule for myself [always doing what she says she will do regardless of changes in circumstances] and that it would cost me energetically. So the space opened up initially in a coaching session and then afterward when I really thought, I mean the decision became so easy to actually negotiate attending the session at another time or cancelling it,

right? So I called them directly and made the changes and it released so much energy for me that I could actually be present and take care of the things that I needed to take care of. And I wouldn't have allowed myself that space had I not had that coaching session and that understanding and reflection.

Reflection is part of the coaching process, and some coachees realized that participating in a coaching session was also energizing. Coachee 3 states:

When we get into the brainstorming mode, like here is the challenge, here is the opportunity, let's slice and dice from a bunch of different perspectives. I get really religious because I'm chanting down a million notes and then there's just so many angles, like whatever it was, it's so small now because there's so many huge opportunities in which to explore it. So that's when I get all charged up.

Coachee 5 recalls, "Before the coaching, I can honestly say I was dragging." Coaching has taught Coachee 4 tools to use when she is feeling low or like she needs more energy. She learned to journal a fantasy life for herself where she writes as if the events have already happened. This leaves her feeling more positive and inspired. Coachee 12 also learned skills that had an energizing effect. His use of appreciative inquiry at work and with others often leaves him feeling more uplifted. Coachee 12 states, "When I realize I am in AI mode, I am much more excited than when I'm doing other things." These are just a few of the examples coachees gave illustrating elements of thriving and transformation.

Researcher's Transformation

The coachees were not alone in their transformation. The researcher also experienced transformation as a result of having conducted the study. I considered the coachees as co-researchers. It was their generosity and stories that made the research possible, and I was simply a vehicle in which to share their experiences. As the interviews progressed, I came to realize what a gift it was to have been entrusted with such private information. Their personal stories contributed positively to the research and also became learning opportunities from which I have benefited enormously.

Whether it was a story about a shift in confidence, acceptance and ownership of one's strengths, or what it was like to live your dream, their examples taught me something new about myself. I learned that while I have identified my strengths and I am conscious of the energy using them creates, I need to attend to the items that drain my energy and learn to regulate my energy better. Doing so would help me to live more in balance and work more effectively. As I completed the interviews and felt a renewed sense of excitement and intrinsic reward in my work, I was reminded again of the importance of doing what you love. Speaking with people who love to learn and have an affinity for tapping into processes that leverage their strengths is something I deeply enjoy and find rewarding. It is important to my own ongoing development to continue to engage with people and processes that energize me and elicit my natural strengths and curiosity.

Summary of the Results

The focus of this grounded theory research was positive psychology coaching and its relationship to thriving. To determine whether individuals were thriving, it was necessary to explore the process of positive psychology coaching. The goal was to understand the nuances of this genre of coaching in order to theorize about how it leads to individual transformation. This required investigating positive psychology coaching by learning about the process, key coach characteristics, the tools used to enable learning, and the role of strengths. Thriving was defined as a marked sense of learning, vitality, energy, and connectivity to others and the work one does professionally. In order to understand how coaching and thriving were related, the primary research question asked, what is the relationship between positive psychology coaching and thriving. Supporting the investigation were three supplementary research questions asking: are there key elements or activities specific to positive psychology coaching that contribute to thriving at work, how does thriving contribute to emotional well-being and vitality, and what are the individual outcomes of thriving at work? Asking these supplemental questions focused the researcher on the process of coaching as well as the outcomes.

Twenty coachees, who had received positive psychology coaching, helped answer those questions by participating in telephone interviews where they answered questions about their coaching experiences. Questions elicited information regarding the coaching process, the elements that facilitated learning, and coachees' knowledge of their strengths. They also elicited outcomes relating to changes in relationships, development,

energy, and vitality levels. Coachees' individual interviews were recorded and their audio files were then sent to a transcriber.

As transcripts returned and were validated by coachees, the researcher engaged in initial and focused coding procedures. Analysis revealed the importance of identifying, using, and regulating strengths. Strengths management is the key factor leading to three types of individual transformation: connectivity to others and the work one does professionally and physical and emotional transformation. Coachees learned to regulate their strengths, which allowed them to change personally and in the way they interacted with others. They replaced competitive attitudes with a desire to collaborate. Coachees also began appreciating the unique strengths of others and realized that each person had something to contribute to an effective outcome. They became more trusting and willing to explore new ideas and relationships, and they put aside their egos and personal agendas. They connected with one another in more meaningful ways, and as a result they experienced better relationships. Coachees in the study who regulated their strengths also learned to identify shifts in their physical bodies and energy levels, and then use that information to make decisions. Instead of just going through life passively, they began to pay attention to the way their bodies were responding to situations, activities, and people. They recognized when they were energized as well as when they were depleted and they took action to engage in processes that energized them and brought them into a state of flow and to reduce or eliminate those processes and activities that drained their energy. Coachees who experienced emotional transformation learned to replace negative thought patterns. Instead of focusing on what they were doing wrong or worrying that they were

not doing enough, they reframed their thinking and began identifying what was working well, what they excelled at, and what type of outcomes they experienced when they used their strengths. As they became more confident, they recognized that they were in charge of the outcomes they created. They also became more willing to make changes that supported their strengths and values, such as changing careers or accepting the love of another person.

Positive psychology coaching provides the forum and tools for coachees in this study to learn new skills, behaviors, and attitudes that enable transformation. It serves as a change methodology coachees can use to make lasting changes in their lives that can have a positive and profound effect on their relationships, careers, and emotional well-being. Positive psychology coaches are effective in their work because they use appreciate processes that build on the strengths of their coachees. They empower coachees to seek solutions within themselves and they give them the skills to use in making those changes long after the relationships and sessions end. At its core, positive psychology coaching is a human development tool that helps coachees harnesses their strengths to expand their capabilities and attain their goals. It gives them a foundation and the tools necessary to transform their relationships as well as make physical and emotional transformations.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purposes of this study were to understand the relationship between positive psychology coaching and thriving and to learn how the process of thriving unfolds. The study was predicated on an idea that positive psychology coaches utilize strengths-based activities to facilitate optimal outcomes for coachees. The goals were to understand what those activities entailed and how coachees transformed and entered into a state of thriving. Analysis of the data presented in chapter 4 showed that positive psychology coaches help coachees in this study learn to identify, use, and regulate their strengths, the results of which lead to three types of transformation: connectivity, physical, and emotional transformation. This chapter provides a synopsis of the research findings and conclusions and presents a discussion of their implications and limitations. It concludes with recommendations for future research.

Research Findings

The results of the data analysis indicate that positive psychology coaching serves as a tool for coachees to learn how to identify, use, and regulate their strengths. Strengths management is the catalyst to three distinct types of transformation: connectivity, physical, and emotional transformation—none of which are dependent upon the other or occur in a linear order.

Coachees enter into relationships with positive psychology coaches that are built on trust and an appreciation for learning. They engage in a multitude of strengths-based activities, including values and strengths assessments, reflective journaling, positive portfolio development, and observation of others. Coachees learn about themselves and how to interact with others successfully through this process. Their participation in strengths and values assessments provides them with the tools they need to leverage their strengths to enhance their capabilities and outcomes. Overtime, coachees learn how to identify and use their strengths and more importantly how to regulate them. By regulating their strengths, coachees experience personal transformation in connectivity to others as well as their own physical and emotional transformation (see Figure 11).

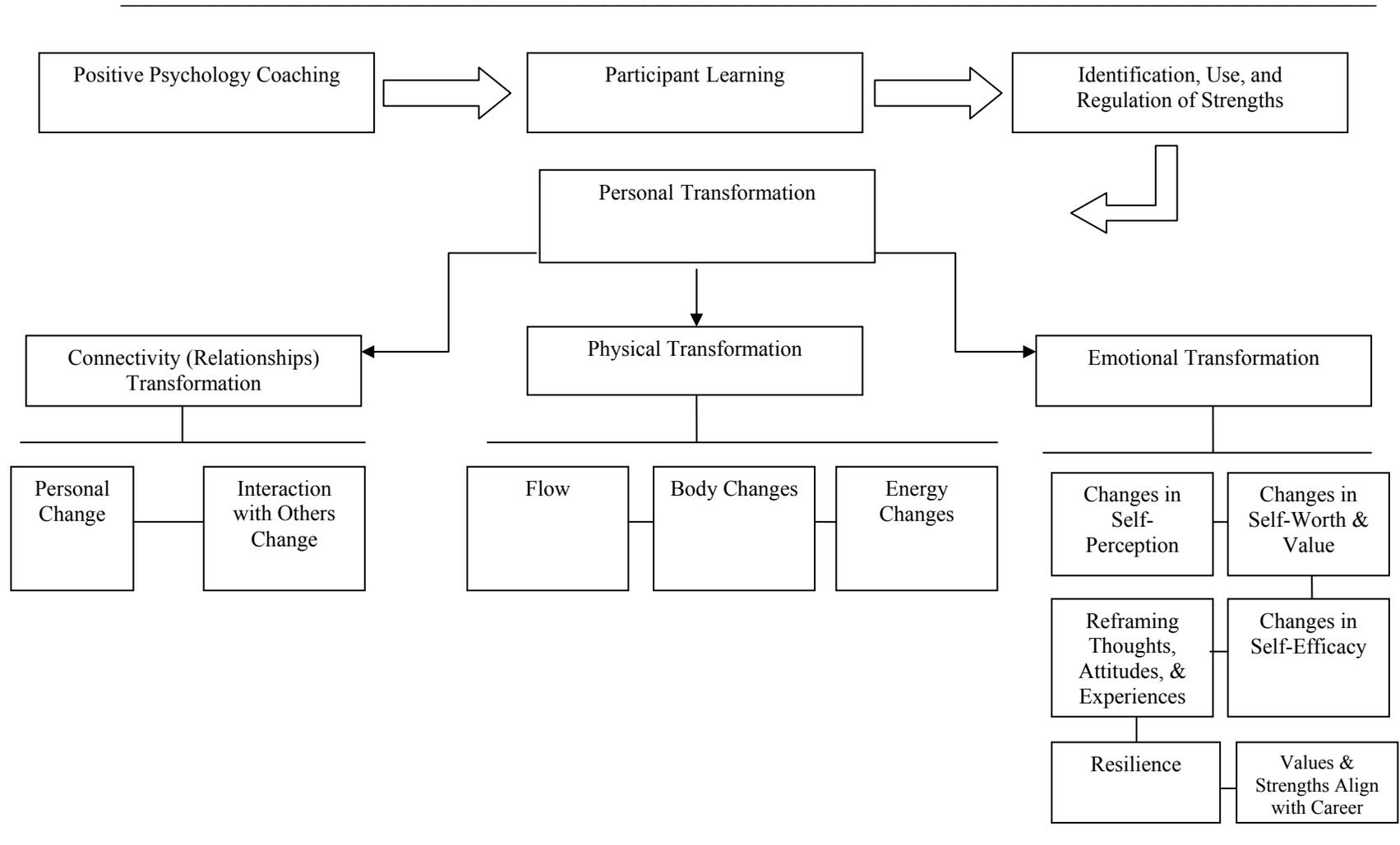


Figure 11. K. Seitz's (2009) Process model of coachees' transformation.

Figure 11 is a conglomerate model developed by merging figures 4 and 11 together. As described earlier in the chapter, figure 4 depicts the elements that enable transformation to occur and figure 7 describes the transformation that is possible. Briefly, figure 4 shows how positive psychology coaching serves as a tool which enables coachees to learn about their strengths. After learning to identify their strengths, coachees begin using them. Eventually through practice and awareness, they learn to regulate their strengths, which results in transformation. Figure 7 illustrates the transformation, including changes in coachees' relationships as well as physical and emotional transformation. It also identifies the components under each type of transformation that coachees experience, such as personal changes and changes in the way they interact with others in the connectivity theme or changes in their physical bodies, energy levels, and state of flow during physical transformation. Components under the emotional transformation include changes in self-perception, self-worth, and self-efficacy as well as reframing thoughts and attitudes, resilience, and alignment of strengths and values with careers.

Like the two models it is built from, this compilation process model can provide practitioners with a benchmark to use in measuring coachees' progress on their transformational goals. It gives them a map to use in understanding the key elements that will be involved in each type of transformation, which will help them prepare coachees for the process. Researchers can also use the model to explore the components or transformation themes in more detail. They can analyze the individual processes or compare the themes against one another for similarity and dissimilarity. They can also

investigate the individual pieces to understand the antecedents and outcomes as well as the timeframe for achieving the results. Lastly, this model adds to the scientific knowledge base by demonstrating the process of transformation that occurs through positive psychology coaching as well as the elements and outcomes that are possible.

As seen in figure 11, coachees are able to enhance their connectivity to others and their work by making personal changes and learning how to interact with others more successfully. They learn to become present, accountable to themselves and others, and to collaborate instead of compete. As they begin interacting with others more effectively, they gain their colleagues' trust. They also receive professional validation, enhance their social networks, learn to recognize and support others' strengths, and appreciate life.

Coachees experience physical transformation by learning to regulate their strengths, which creates a sense of flow. Flow manifests as feeling an intrinsic reward from the work, losing track of time, forgetting to attend to basic needs, and feeling a deep passion and sense of enjoyment in one's work. Coachees who manage their strengths recognize changes in their physical bodies including increases in bodily functions, such as respiration, vocalizations, and heightened senses. They also learn to pay attention to and honor their body's messages as another source of information to use in decision-making.

By managing their body's cues and regulating their strengths, coachees can also experience emotional transformation. This particular type of transformation has the most profound impact on coachees since it involves changes in self-perception, self-worth, and self-efficacy, the results of which help coachees learn to reframe their experiences and

become more resilient. Some coachees also realized that their strengths and values were not in alignment with their career choice, so they took action to make them congruent. For many of the coachees in this sample, this meant leaving corporate positions and becoming entrepreneurs.

Research Questions and Results

The primary research question guiding this study is ‘What is the relationship between positive psychology coaching and thriving?’ Supporting it are three supplemental questions designed to understand how coachees enter into a state of thriving and the outcomes they experience as a result:

1. Are there key elements or activities specific to positive psychology coaching that contribute to thriving at work?
2. How does thriving contribute to emotional well-being and vitality at work?
3. What are the individual outcomes of thriving at work?

The questions were designed to understand how positive psychology coaching serves as a catalyst in facilitating positive results as well as to learn the outcomes of thriving.

Analysis yielded rich contextual data that showed the definition of thriving restricted the results. The researcher synthesized the literature to create a definition of thriving, which was described as a psychological construct manifested through a marked sense of learning, vitality, energy, and connectivity to others and the work one does professionally. All four components had to be present for coachees to meet the criteria of thriving. However, data analysis showed that coachees do not distinguish between the

states of vitality and energy. They view them as similar variables. By definition then, it is impossible to conclude that coachees are thriving since they are only acknowledging three out of the four criteria established in the definition.

Another definition challenge that arose is that thriving is more temporal and contextually-based than the literature predicted. Changes in coachees' environments resulted in their moving in and out of a state of connectivity to others and their work. Employment disruptions led to coachees not feeling connected to their work or colleagues. It also resulted in coachees not being able to experience a sense of flow from doing what they loved, which altered their abilities to sustain physical transformation. Employment disruptions changed coachees' abilities to feel a sense of connectivity, energy, vitality, and learning.

The final difference in what was posited based on the literature and what resulted from the data was that thriving was not the ultimate outcome of positive psychology coaching. The primary benefit is the personal transformation that occurs through strengths regulation. By learning how to identify, use, and regulate their strengths, it was possible for coachees to transform in their connectivity to others and their work and to experience physical and emotional transformation. A more detailed explanation follows.

Research Questions Answered

One primary research question and three supplemental ones guided the investigation into positive psychology coaching and its relationship to thriving. The following section will discuss the answers to the research questions.

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between positive psychology coaching and thriving?

Positive psychology coaching was believed to serve as a catalyst for coachees' development, which culminated in their ability to thrive. It was posited that when they were thriving, coachees would experience connectivity to others and the work they do professionally as well as a marked sense of learning, vitality, and energy. However, data analysis indicated that coachees do not distinguish between the states of vitality and energy, two of the components of the definition of thriving. While they do experience a sense of learning, this was a means to an end rather than the final outcome.

The data also indicated that positive psychology coaching is a tool coachees use to create transformative outcomes. Through participating in strengths-based assessments designed to facilitate learning about their unique talents, coachees learn how to manage their strengths and recognize what fuels and drains their energy. They are able to use that information to connect with others and their work and experience physical and emotional transformation.

Research Question 1a: Are there key elements or activities specific to positive psychology coaching that contribute to thriving at work?

The restrictive definition of thriving adopted in this research made it difficult to conclude that specific coaching activities lead to thriving in the workplace. Using a modified definition of thriving that combines vitality and energy into a single component, the data supports the idea of thriving as defined by a marked sense of energy, learning, and connection to others and the work done does professionally. Positive psychology

coaches utilize various tools to create an opportunity for coachees to learn about themselves and others as well as to learn how to identify, use, and manage their strengths (see Table 3). It is important to note, however, that these activities may not be specific to positive psychology coaches, and that there may be overlap between tools they use and the tools used by other types of coaches. Many of these tools are common in other coaching methodologies, such as tailoring the approach and increasing the number of sessions at the beginning to allow time for developing trusting relationships. Further research is necessary to distinguish whether certain tools are more effective than others or if they are used exclusively with certain coaching methodologies. Scholars need to also investigate the efficacy of using strengths-based assessments instead of other types of assessments to see if one tool is more effective in helping coachees or if a combination of assessments and tools leads to the best outcomes.

Table 3. Key Activities Used by Positive Psychology Coaches

Activity	Reason for Use
View process holistically	Appreciate complexities of development
Tailor coaching approach	Meet individual coachee's needs
Increased frequency of initial sessions	Give coachee time to make progress
Develop trusting relationships	Provide emotional space for growth
Use powerful, reflective questions	Believe solutions reside within coachees
Strengths-based assessments	Build coachees' awareness of their strengths
Link goals to strengths	Facilitate empowerment and self-efficacy

Table 3. Key Activities Used by Positive Psychology Coaches (*continued*)

Activity	Reason for Use
Homework assignments	Extend learning outside of coaching sessions
Visualization techniques	View themselves as successful in their tasks
Journaling and portfolio projects	Tangible reminder of progress and goals
Learning about self and others	Integrate knowledge into daily lives
Identify, use, and regulate strengths	Sustainable change and transformation

Positive psychology coaches embrace a holistic perspective regarding the process of their work. They customize their sessions to meet the individual needs of their coachees by first creating an environment conducive to learning. They also increase the number of coaching sessions offered at the beginning, so they are able to develop relationships with their coachees as well as help them establish goals and see progress before eventually tapering off to fewer sessions. This creates a sense of momentum and success for coachees while also developing a foundation from which coachees can draw upon outside their sessions.

Positive psychology coaches also develop trusting, reflective relationships with their coachees that allows them to ask powerful questions designed to help coachees learn more about themselves in answering the questions. The reflective nature of their questions also demonstrates that they approach their coachees from a position of

abundance. They believe coachees already possess the answers, and that the best solutions stem from their own knowledge and experience. Their role is to help coachees find the solutions within themselves rather than seeking external validation. This approach facilitates trust and strengthens relationships, demonstrates respect for the coachees, and empowers them to find their own solutions. This is a critical outcome of positive psychology coaching since coachees are taught the skills to continue finding their own solutions long after the coaching sessions and the relationships end.

Assessments are another activity positive psychology coaches utilize to help coachees transform and create optimal outcomes. Positive psychology coaches select instruments that build coachees' awareness of their individual strengths and values. Participating in strengths assessments aids in coachees' understanding of their unique strengths and values and provides them with insight on how to leverage those skills to enhance their capabilities.

Goal setting is a common activity positive psychology coaches utilize to assist their coachees in optimizing their experiences. Once they help their coachees understand their individual strengths and values, they support them in developing goals that link to their strengths. This helps assure that coachees will be able to draw upon their own resources while simultaneously demonstrating that the power and ability to attain their goals lies within them and is not external. Internalizing their strengths empowers coachees to take action and often results in changes in self-efficacy and self-worth.

Providing homework assignments that extend the learning beyond coaching sessions is another activity positive psychology coaches utilize to create progress.

Providing coachees with tools they can use outside the sessions, such as visualization, journaling, and positive portfolio development enables them to envision success and consciously take action to create positive change. It also helps cement the possibility of goal attainment in coachees' minds, so they are able to draw upon internal resources to attain their goals. A visual reminder of their success fuels coachees' sense of efficacy and empowerment and often leads to a willingness to set new goals.

Another activity positive psychology coaches utilize requires coachees to reflect and make personal changes in how they view themselves, their world, and those around them. Learning about themselves and others requires coachees to be open to looking at both the positive and negative aspects of their lives and personalities. They learn to make changes by viewing themselves as whole rather than through a depreciating lens. Instead of criticizing themselves for making mistakes or not having the answers, they learn to reframe their thoughts and view their lives as a work in progress. This shift helps them to treat themselves nicer and with less judgment, which then allows them to do the same for others. Rather than immediately looking at others as competition or calculating their mistakes, they learn to approach them as having their own unique strengths as well. This results in coachees' being more receptive to collaboration activities as well as being more open in their communication and relationships.

Strengths management is the final activity positive psychology coaches use to help their coachees. As discussed throughout chapter 4, coachees begin by first learning about their strengths. Once they have identified their particular strengths, they begin using them and paying close attention to the feelings that originate when they are aligned

with their natural talents. They recognize a sense of energy and aliveness when they are using them or a loss of energy when they are forced to engage in activities that are not within their natural strengths. By paying attention to cues from their bodies, they are able to adjust their activities and make better decisions for themselves.

As coachees use and become comfortable with their strengths, they seek opportunities to create that experience. Over time, coachees learn to regulate their strengths through attention to changes in their energy levels. They may limit their exposure to certain people or tasks that drain their energy levels while simultaneously searching for opportunities to engage their strengths. Regulating energy and strengths is an advanced skill coachees can learn through positive psychology coaching.

There are many activities positive psychology coaches make use of during the coaching process. The approach they use depends on their coachees' needs. They customize their sessions and use powerful, reflective questions to empower coachees to reflect on their lives, experiences, strengths, and goals. As coachees gain insight, positive psychology coaches help them use what they learned, in combination with their strengths, to establish goals. As coachees make progress toward their goals, they begin to see changes in themselves. For some, the changes led to personal transformation in the way they connected with others and their work. In others, physical transformation occurs in which coachees feel changes in their bodies and energy levels. Others experience emotional transformation where they make significant changes in the way they view themselves and their capabilities. Their transformational journeys were personal and unique. Transformation occurred when coachees had the skills and were prepared to

change the way they interacted with others and viewed themselves. Positive psychology coaching served as a change methodology to help coachees in this study achieve their goals and make significant changes in their lives. Positive psychology coaches are effective in helping coachees create optimal outcomes because they design their approaches to elicit the best in people. Once this occurs, they help their coachees harness their strengths and use them to achieve sustainable change and personal transformation.

Research Question 1b: How does thriving contribute to emotional well-being and vitality at work?

Thriving is defined as a psychological construct manifested through a marked sense of learning, vitality, energy, and connectivity to others and the work one does professionally. The researcher initially posited that all four components are required for a coachee to meet the definition of thriving. Although energy and vitality were originally separated as two distinct variables, the evidence did not support their independence (see Table 4). Since vitality and energy were not distinguished by the coachees, there is no evidence that thriving contributes to vitality at work, as posited initially.

Table 4. Evidence Found for Thriving Components

Thriving Component	Evidence Found
Connectivity	Yes
Learning	Yes
Energy	Yes
Vitality	No

Although the data did not confirm the presence of thriving as it was defined, or its connection to emotional well-being and vitality at work, there is substantial evidence that shows coachees feel connected to their work and receive intrinsic reward without the need for external acknowledgement. They are enthusiastic and energized as a result of aligning their work with their strengths and being in flow. They also understand how their work supports and reinforces their personal values and strengths. Coachees who align their work with their strengths also feel a natural calling and view their work as a challenging career rather than a chore or a meaningless job. Many also achieve emotional transformation.

As coachees experience emotional transformation and increase their self-efficacy, they become empowered to try new activities, meet new people, and live life more fully. They let go of their fears of being judged or being wrong and they accept that mistakes are part of the learning process. They live life more freely because they release rigid expectations they place on themselves and allow for expansion in their identities and self-concepts. They also gain well-being by learning to love and accept themselves without negative labels, self-depreciating thoughts, or rigid expectations.

Coachees who experience emotional transformation find well-being and vitality at the workplace because they are not afraid to be themselves. They accept new roles and responsibilities, make career changes to align their work with their strengths and values, and they release old, negative, and restrictive beliefs about themselves. Simultaneously, they learn new skills that enable them to be better communicators and colleagues. Coachees experience a sense of connectivity to others and the work they do

professionally as well as physical and emotional transformation. This has substantial implications for organizations wishing to employ engaged staff since engaged employees are more productive (Clifton & Harter, 2003).

Research Question 1c: What are the individual outcomes of thriving at work?

It is not possible to identify outcomes of individuals thriving at work using the researcher's original definition of thriving that separates vitality and energy as two distinct components. Using a modified definition, which combines energy and vitality as a single component, coachees were found to experience a sense of learning, connectivity to others and the work they do professionally, and a marked sense of energy. They did not distinguish between feeling energy and vitality.

The study confirmed that coachees experience many positive outcomes as a result of their coaching experiences, if the modified definition of coaching that combines energy and vitality components together is employed. Coachees learn specific skills that enable them to do their positions better, such as the ability to develop contingency plans, host more effective meetings, and create a strategic vision. They are willing to try new activities and take risks whereas previously they were more conservative in their approaches. They purposely seek opportunities to learn new skills to better work with their colleagues and develop connectivity. They also learn about emotional intelligence, identify their egos and triggers, and accept their abilities to use both sides of their brains. They seek work-life balance and integrate the skills they learn with their coaches into their daily routines so they are habitual rather than forced. They also become more accountable to themselves and to others, and they challenge previous assumptions and

beliefs. Learning these types of skills increases their individual capacities both personally and professionally.

Increasing one's potential can have positive outcomes at work, such as being viewed as a valuable employee, recruited by Fortune 500 companies, successfully negotiating a salary increase, and receiving a promotion. Other positive outcomes for coachees in the study include receiving additional credibility, collaborating to increase creativity and synergy, setting and maintaining professional boundaries and having better time management. Coachees feel empowered to protect their own time and to establish healthier relationships, so they are able to create and maintain boundaries, which also leads to better time management since they do not get drawn into office conflicts, gossip, and drama.

Coachees in the study also experience more authenticity in both their relationships with colleagues and in their communication styles. They are better listeners, writers, and communicators. They stopped pushing their colleagues for answers and gave them the space to develop on their own and in their own time. They are also able to have deeper, more meaningful conversations because they are not afraid of conflict. Coachees in the study are better communicators because they stopped fearing vulnerability and are willing to listen to people rather than just hear them. They take an interest in understanding them and purposely seek to be more responsive. Learning about appreciative inquiry and the power of silence and questions also gives coachees tools to use to help them communicate more effectively and efficiently. They understand how to ask questions that expose the problem in a non-threatening manner.

Skill transformation is possible because coachees in the study experience emotional transformation that helps them become less self-conscious and concerned about what others are thinking about them. They stop worrying about making mistakes and instead take calculated risks based on sound evidence. They see increases in their self-confidence because they are successful in their attempts to change and develop new skills. Coachees experience connectivity to their colleagues because they are willing to accept them and work to develop stronger relationships. They learn how to connect with their colleagues and evolve and transform emotionally.

Evaluation of the Conceptual Models

A conceptual model of the developmental path of positive psychology coachees who are thriving was created and presented in chapter 2, based on a review and synthesis of the literature (see Figure 3). The purpose of the model was to clarify how coachees progress in their development and the processes they engage in as they develop. As a result of the data collected in this study, the conceptual model posited in chapter 2 was consolidated into a new model that better depicts the transformational process of coaching (see Figure 12).



Figure 12. Modified conceptual diagram of coaching process.

As seen in the diagram, the coaching process provides an avenue for coachees to engage in personal reflection. Positive psychology coaches ask powerful questions that help coachees gain insight and find their own solutions rather than looking for external answers or validation. This shift is one of many of the new skills coachees learn through their work with positive psychology coaches. Another primary skill, as described throughout the chapter, is coachees learning how to use, identify, and regulate their strengths. The changes they make in the way they view themselves, others, and their world results in transformation in relationships as well as physical and emotional transformation.

In figure 12, all of the elements posited in the original conceptual model are still present; however, they have been consolidated into larger categories. Rather than showing a nine-step process where coachees eventually reached a state of thriving, the new model shows a five-step process where thriving has been replaced with personal transformation. The model shows that coachees enter into coaching relationships and experience reflective techniques to help them learn new skills, which eventually lead to strengths management. Strengths management is the catalyst for personal transformation in three areas: connectivity to others and the work one does professionally as well as physical and emotional transformation. This model is useful to practitioners and researchers who want to understand the elements that are involved in the coaching process and the results that occur. It can also be used by researchers to investigate various components of the process or to determine their antecedents and timing.

Implications

This qualitative, grounded theory study sought to understand the relationship between positive psychology coaching and thriving to better appreciate how coaching can lead to positive work outcomes. Data analysis revealed both the developmental process coachees experience on their way to transformation and the processes involved that enable it to occur. It showed how positive psychology coaching serves as a change methodology that helps coachees gain insight into their lives, attitudes, and behavior, and then use that information, along with their strengths, to create lasting change.

As coachees began to change, they experienced transformation in the way they interacted with others and their work. They learned how to set their own egos aside and collaborate instead of compete. They became more trusting of others and gained an appreciation for life and the strengths others bring to their work. As they transformed physically, they learned to recognize changes in their bodies and energy levels as additional sources of information. They used that information to enter into a state of flow. Coachees learned how to regulate their energy levels, which helped them make better choices, such as engaging in activities that increased their energy and reducing or eliminating those that drained their energy. Other coachees experienced emotional transformation, which had the greatest impact on their lives since it involves changes in the way they view themselves. As coachees reframed negative thoughts and labels, and began appreciating their strengths, their self-confidence and self-worth rose. They also made changes to align their careers with their values and strengths, so they were energized by their work rather than drained by it. The process of transformation was

possible, in part, because of the support they receive through positive psychology coaching. This study contributes to the growing scientific knowledge on coaching and positive psychology. It also has implications for coaches and coachees.

The data analysis led to the development of several process models that are useful in explaining the cycle of learning, strengths sequence, process of personal transformation, the outcomes of connectivity, physical, and emotional transformation from using inherent strengths, and a model depicting coachees' transformation. A conceptual diagram explaining how coachees transform was also developed and will be useful for future scholars trying to understand positive psychology coaching, especially since this genre of coaching has been largely left unexplored. Although Linley et al. (2009) have investigated strengths-coaching, there have been no studies to date that include both positive psychology coaching and thriving; therefore, this study serves as a foundation from which others can continue to build.

This grounded theory study supports Fredrickson's work on positive emotions (2003), extends Spreitzer, Fu Lam, and Fritz' (2008) definition of thriving, and compliments the work of Baker and Dutton (2007) and Quinn (2007). Studying coaching from the coachees' perspective also answered a call by Grant and Cavanagh (2004) to understand the process from the coachee's point of view rather than the coach's. It enables better understanding of the processes coachees go through as they evolve and transform, and it illuminates the outcomes they experience as well as the three types of transformation that are possible from learning to manage one's strengths. It sits at the

junction of employee well-being and connectivity to others and the work one does professionally; therefore, it warrants additional consideration and investigation.

Both coaches and coachees will benefit from the application of the research since it investigated the processes that enable personal transformation to occur. From a coach's perspective, the results revealed key aspects of the learning process including important tools to use and character traits to nurture. It also showed the progression of strengths management and can be used as a tool by coaches in developing their individualized approaches with coachees. Coaches can review the results of this study and ensure they are including the activities coachees mentioned as important to their learning process, and then they can help coachees learn to identify, use, and regulate their strengths while keeping in mind transformation as the outcome.

Coachees also benefitted from the study. In addition to having their voices heard, they had the opportunity to reflect on why coaching was important in their lives, the types of outcomes they experienced, and the learning that occurred. As mentioned in chapter 4, many coachees remarked that they felt energized and excited talking about their coaching experiences, thereby illustrating that the very act of engaging in activities that enable reflection on positive outcomes and strengths is important. Coachees outside of this study will also benefit from its results as their coaches begin to tailor their approaches and incorporate coachees' recommendations and some of the key findings from the study. As the coaching industry continues to gain insight into the processes that make it effective, coachees world-wide will reap the benefits of an evidence-based practice.

Limitations

Transparency and identification of limitations are key components of scientific research. Scholars include them in the evaluation of their study so other scholars can benefit from their experiences and modify them as necessary when designing future research proposals. In addition to the limitations mentioned in chapter 3, there are other methodological challenges that arose during the study.

This study's primary limitation relates to a sample comprised mostly of positive psychology coaches. In designing the study, coaches were considered as a possible sample option; however, that decision was rejected based on initial feedback from coaches that they receive frequent requests from students. Their high rate of participation in the study was surprising and not predicted, and it cannot be overemphasized that their participation could have altered the study's results.

The coaches who participated in this study were selected based on their knowledge and training in positive psychology principles, so it is possible that they possess information specific to this coaching genre that coachees who are not professional coaches may not have. Their exposure to concepts and ideas inherent in the interview protocol may have unknowingly biased their responses as might their familiarity with values and strengths assessments. While answering the interview questions, they may have responded with information relevant to the assessments rather than their actual experiences. The coaches in this sample see multiple coachees throughout the day, so it is also possible that they may have inadvertently switched to sharing a story about one of their coachees when asked about their own experiences.

There is also a possibility that coaches in this sample could receive future financial benefits. If positive psychology coaching begins to receive more media attention, based on research studies such as this one, then positive psychology coaches could experience an increase in their business as more people learn of the outcomes possible through positive psychology coaching.

Self-report data also has the potential for the people involved to forget critical pieces of information or misconstrue timelines and events. Additionally, this particular sample all either voiced outright, or described through their stories, a love of learning. While this trait seems appropriate to this group, it may not always occur and should be noted as a possible limitation since learning was a key finding of the study. Another potential limitation includes a cross-sectional analysis of a very specific population. The results may be different had the researcher conducted a study over a longer period of time. As is the case with grounded theory studies, results are not generalizable; therefore, the findings are specific to this group and should not be generalized across other people, settings, or times. The researcher's constructivist beliefs may also yield different results than another researcher who has a dissimilar world view. Finally, the restrictive definition of thriving created a limitation in being able to answer the questions as did its temporal and contextually-based nature.

Recommendations for Research and Practice

Based on the results of the data, the researcher recommends changes in methodology, population, and research focus. The limitations noted earlier and coaches'

suggestions based on their experiences with positive psychology coaching warrant additional consideration and should also be considered when designing future positive psychology coaching studies.

The first recommendation for future research is to conduct a longitudinal case study with a positive psychology coach and his or her coachees. Following coachees over an extended period of time could illuminate additional processes coachees go through in their transformation as well as other outcomes they experience. It might also help researchers understand the length of time it takes for coachees to experience different types of transformation.

A second recommendation is to include a multi-method approach, such as including a survey in the process. Coachees could answer a survey regarding their experiences and thoughts around various coaching tools. Their responses could then be used to design interview questions that would help uncover additional information as to why the tools coachees use are effective and how the use of those tools influences the experiences and results coachees have.

This researcher also recommends that research be conducted using a different sample, such as including only coaches or only coachees. This approach would yield different perspectives than combining both sample groups. By separating the sample groups, it might be possible to discern differences in the outcomes achieved, length of time it takes to achieve the outcomes, or in outcome success rates.

Sampling across genders is another recommendation. One participant who was a female coach mentioned that she believes more women seek coaching than men due to a

lack of available mentors, and another coach mentioned that his entire clientele consists solely of women. Their observations may suggest the presence of a gender difference. Scholars could conduct an investigation to determine whether a gender difference exists as well as to learn the circumstances in which different genders seek coaching services and whether they have any unique experiences or outcomes. Research questions could also be designed to investigate gender differences in coaches. Questions such as, do men and women coaches coach differently or do they have different focuses should be asked to determine whether there are gender differences among coaches who are trained under the same institution. Exploring gender differences would also extend the existing body of knowledge in the coaching and gender literature and concurrently give coaches additional information about their coachees' needs.

The focus of the research should also be extended to include other positive psychology constructs. Positive psychology is gaining favor in academic circles because of its commitment to evidence-based practices. Its seminal authors are investigating various positive phenomena, networking with one another, and extending each others' research. Happiness is being investigated by Diener and Biswas-Diener (2008) while at the same time Fredrickson is investigating positive emotions and their ability to build personal resources (2005). This grounded theory study can serve as the starting point for further collaboration since there are opportunities present to investigate coaching practices and their relationship to positive emotions such as well-being, hope, gratitude, and flourishing. Researchers could ask questions such as, what is the difference between

thriving and flourishing, how does hope contribute to well-being in the workplace, and what elements of the coaching process affect an individual's sense of gratitude or hope?

Developing questions that probe the relationship between positive psychology coaching and positive emotions could result in a connection between coaching and positivity theories that has yet to be discovered. Researchers should ask: How does learning to manage strengths affect resiliency? How does being in flow and managing strengths affect physiology? What type of positive emotions does thriving elicit? How do the results from positive psychology coaching differ from those of a solutions-based approach? Asking these questions would provide further evidence as to the efficacy of positive psychology coaching while also demonstrating value to organizations considering coaching as a professional development tool for their staff. It will also extend the theoretical knowledge and literature on both coaching and positive psychology.

Additional research on coaching should be done through studying phenomena through a positive psychology lens. Seligman (2007) posits that positive psychology can provide both a theoretical and evidence-based foundation for studying coaching. Timothy T.S. So (2009) easily draws that connection by stating:

Theoretically, topics such as *happiness*, *well-being*, and *the good life* used to be regarded as unmanageable and unwieldy by coaches. Theories developed in the field of positive psychology about positive emotion, positive relationship, engagement and meaning, etc., have already in many ways regulated training, accreditation, and practice in coaching. On the other hand, evidence-based research has allowed nearly all these theories to be backed up by data. (para. 3)

Understanding the elements that make employees happy could positively affect organizations' productivity levels since happiness has been related to gains in productivity and profit (Jayne, 2005). Scholars studying organizational processes and human resources could benefit by teaming with positive psychology scholars to further investigate the implications of satisfied, happy employees. Employee well-being is especially important during economically challenging times when companies are forced to use drastic measures to cut costs. Working to maintain employee engagement and connectivity to their work should be key considerations for all organizations seeking to not only exist but to thrive.

Changes are also necessary in how thriving is defined. Future researchers need to understand its temporal and contextually-based nature and design studies that can effectively measure changes in thriving. Consideration needs to be given as to how changes in environment, health, or attitudes could alter the results. The definition needs to be more fluid and scholars should consider how definition changes will influence the study's results.

Finally, the coachees' stories gave remarkable testimonials to the power of positive psychology coaching in almost all aspects of their lives, and these could be used in both print and in oral attempts to increase business. The coaching industry could highlight some of the coachees' stories in articles designed to inform and encourage people to try coaching—the efficacy of which was clearly established. Another tool would be to share some of the stories during professional development conferences, thereby reaching another audience and building the professionalism of the industry. As

coachees answered their research questions, they reflected and made suggestions that would be applicable to coachees, coaches, and the coaching industry.

Coachees' recommendations should be examined as well since they come directly from the people who have experienced positive psychology coaching, and they also provide a unique perspective—having participated as a coachee, and in some cases, as both a coach and a coachee. Their suggestions encourage coachees to ask for the help they need and trust the process of coaching. They also provide coaches with information they need to make the coaching process more successful, such as a reminder to ensure the coachee is ready for change before helping him or her begin a change process. Please see Appendix C for additional details and coachees' recommendations.

Researcher's Concluding Thoughts

Conducting this investigation into positive psychology coaching has led to a greater understanding of the processes used to help coachees achieve transformative outcomes. This information benefits coachees as well as human resource staff charged with the responsibility of creating professional development tools that leverage employee capabilities. It also benefits humanity as a whole.

When people are happier, collaborative, and enjoy their work and lives, they feel better about themselves, which helps them feel better about others. In an economically challenging time, feeling good about oneself and others is paramount to successfully overcoming stressful events. As I prepare to end a process that has captured not only my mind but my heart over the past year, I am left with a sense of gratitude for having been

part of this experience. Coachees taught me the value of reframing thoughts and attitudes, and I hope that this research has helped those who read it do the same. By reframing thoughts and harnessing our strengths, we create our own opportunities to thrive.

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APPENDIX A. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

***Not all questions were asked. Questions were based on participant's answers to earlier questions and identification of key words that elicited additional questions from that theme*

Qualifying Questions (must meet criteria to be considered as a participant in the study)

1. What was your initial reason for entering into a coaching relationship?
(PROMPT: MUST HAVE GOAL of transforming a skill, behavior, attitude, or career)
2. Have you attended at least 3 sessions in at least 3 months with your coach?
(PROMPT must have attended at least 3 sessions in at least 3 months)

Coaching Process

1. What does coaching mean to you?
2. How would you describe the relationship you have with your coach?
3. Please describe a typical coaching session.

Thriving

1. Please describe an example you have from a coaching session where you felt an increased sense of being alive, full of spirit or energy, or a sense of progress and momentum in your development.
2. Please give an example of a time when you felt coaching positively effected your sense of learning and progress at work.
3. Please describe any experiences you have had where coaching empowered you to accomplish a goal or task.
4. Please describe any “ah-ha” moments you have had during coaching.
5. I am investigating the concept of thriving, which I define as having elements of learning, vitality, energy, and connectivity with others. Do any of these resonate with you, and if so, please describe your answers.

6. What effect, if any, does thriving have on your emotional well-being?
7. Are you aware of when you are thriving? If so, do you purposely look for opportunities to thrive? Please explain.

Flow

1. Please describe any experiences where you have felt an intrinsic reward from completing the work.
2. What caused those feelings to occur (if applicable)?
3. Would these feelings and experiences have occurred if you were not in coaching?

Strengths

1. Were you aware of your strengths before coaching began?
2. How did you become aware of your strengths? (assessments, inventories, discussions, etc.)
3. Are you aware of when you are using your strengths? If so, please describe what happens to alert you to them.
4. What type of feelings do you experience when you are using your strengths? When you are not using them?

Relationships

1. Please describe how coaching has effected your relationships at work, if at all.
2. What were your relationships like with your colleagues before coaching?
3. Have they changed at all since you began or finished coaching?
4. Have there been any changes in relationships that effected you professionally?

Learning

1. How have you been able to use the new information you receive from coaching in other areas of your life, including your work?
2. How has learning something new made you feel about your work?
3. What changes did you experience as a result of learning something new?
4. How would you characterize your sense of learning before and after coaching?
5. Are you aware of when you are learning something new?
6. How does coaching enable learning, if at all?

Professional Development

1. Why did you select coaching over other forms of professional development?
2. In what ways, if any, has coaching furthered your professional development?
3. How will you know if coaching has been successful?
4. Is there anything that I did not ask you that you feel is important to your coaching experiences?

APPENDIX B. COACHEES' DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

	Coachee	Positive Psychology Coach	Male	Female
P1		X		X
P2		X	X	
P3		X		X
P4		X		X
P5	X			X
P6		X		X
P7		X		X
P8	X			X
P9	X			X
P10	X			X
P11		X		X
P12	X		X	
P13		X		X
P14		X		X
P15		X		X
P16		X		X
P17		X		X
P18		X	X	
P19		X		X
P20		X		X

APPENDIX C. COACHEES' RECOMMENDATIONS

To Coachees	To Coaches	To Coaching Industry
Ask for help and stay open minded	Treat coaching like a business and take refresher courses	Get professional coaching networks together regularly
Know that change comes from within	Use different methods that involve multiple senses	Standardize the training and credentialing process
Learning is dependent upon where you are in the moment-must be ready	Find your niche in coaching and continue to get more education and training in it	Provide better education on coaching to lay community; warn them about an unregulated industry and introduce a buyer beware attitude
Be coach-able (open to change, learning, feedback, new ideas)	Learn the signs that signal when coachees are change-ready	Do more research on coaching types to: ---know the efficacy ---measure ROI
Apply the information you learn outside of sessions	Know when to stop coaching and let the person practice	Distinguish in magazine articles between: ---coaching and therapy ---coaching and mentoring ---coaching types
Be accountable for your goals	Set boundaries	
Ask coach for high-level overview of session or notes for later reflection and review outside of session	Recognize when coachees are externalizing problems instead of changing themselves	
Give coaching enough time for transformation	Know coachees are the experts; encourage them to find their own solutions. Invite them to be more fully who they are and accept and embrace their own strengths	