The Coaching Ripple Effect: The Individual and Systemic Level Influence of Leadership Development.

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Introduction

How the quality of the complex web of daily interactions effect the wellbeing of individuals and the broader wellbeing of an organisation is largely unknown. Often organisations embark on leadership development programs in an attempt to influence systemic level change of organisational culture or wellbeing. Most approaches assume a linear model that does not take the complexity of organisations seriously.

Leadership development through Coaching has shown positive results for individual level measures of wellbeing (Green, Oades, & Grant, 2006) and relationships exist between leadership style, employee stress and wellbeing (Skakon, Nielsen, Borg and Guzman, 2010).

What is largely unknown is how change in leaders may influence the experience of others in an organisation which in turn may influence the wellbeing of organisational members. Can the influence of leadership coaching development through coaching ripple through the broader complex dynamics of an organisation?

The relatively new methodology of Social Network Analysis (SNA; Scott, 2000) provides researchers with processes that better account for relational components of complex adaptive systems.. SNA is a technique that allows researchers to focus at a systems level on the relational data in networks. In doing so it allows research questions to focus on emergent properties and interconnectivity of a system (Scott, 1991).

This research attempts to answer the question of how change in leaders may lead to change in the wellbeing of individuals through change in the quality of the interactions across a network.

Methodology

An AB design coaching intervention study was conducted across an organisation (N=225). Wellbeing measures were taken for all employees and a social network analysis was conducted on the degree and quality (positivity and negativity) of all organisational interactions.

Social Networking Analysis (SNA) was used to measure network members closeness to those coached in order to determine if this would effect the degree to which their wellbeing might improve due to the coaching ripple effect.

20 leaders (n=20) received 8 coaching sessions over a 16-20 week period. Individual self report measures of goal attainment as well as 360 feedback on transformational leadership were assessed in the control, pre and post.

Results

Significant increase in the goal attainment (pre: $M = 4.21$, $SD = 2.07$, post: $M = 7.05$, $SD = 1.35$), transformational leadership (TL; pre: $M = 14.56$, $SD = 2.86$, post: $M = 15.49$, $SD = 2.88$) and psychological wellbeing measures (pre: $M = 167.85$, $SD = 16$, post: $M = 174.95$, $SD = 15.08$) were observed for those who received coaching.

Psychological wellbeing, Transformational Leadership and Goal Attainment measures for coached individuals over time.

Time Period	Mean PWB	SD	Mean TL	SD	Goal Attain	SD
Baseline	169.90	16.50	14.63	3.02	-	-
Pre-Coaching	167.85	16.60	14.59	2.86	4.21	2.07
Post-Coaching	174.95	15.08	15.49	2.88	7.05	1.35

Average change in the perceived quality of interaction improved for those who received coaching ($M = .196$, $SD = .308$) however the perception of change in quality of the interaction others believed they were having with those who received coaching declined ($M = -.226$ $SD = .367$).

Group Differences in Quality of Communication In Scores Across Time

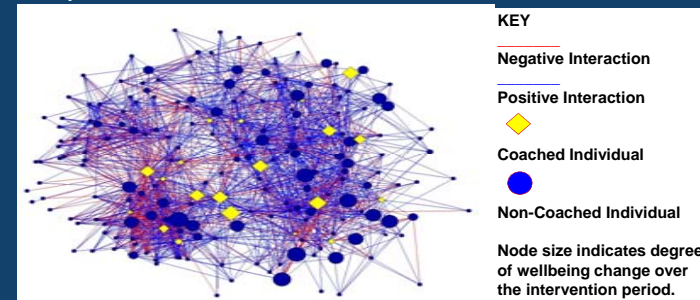| Time Period	Communication In Coached			Communication In Non-Coached		
	n	M	SD	n	M	SD
Control	20	-.024	.378	225	-.004	.551
Intervention	20	.226*	.367	225	-.033*	.561

Results Continued

Group Differences in Quality of Communication Out Scores Across Time

Time Period	Communication Out Coached			Communication Out Non-Coached		
	n	M	SD	n	M	SD
Control	20	.037	.721	81	-.004	.551
Intervention	20	.196	.308	81	-.062	.618

It was found that the closer members of the network were perceived to be connected to those that received coaching, by the Coachees themselves, the more likely they were to experience positive increases in wellbeing ($r = .223$ $p < .05$).

Quality of Interaction Network Post Intervention

KEY
Negative Interaction
Positive Interaction
Coached Individual
Non-Coached Individual
Node size indicates degree of wellbeing change over the intervention period.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The coaching Intervention was effective in increasing individual levels of wellbeing, transformational leadership and goal attainment for those coached. The quality of interaction also shifted however, while the Coachees themselves felt that their interactions had improved, others saw this shift as negative. Regardless, how closely connected others were in the system to those that were coached the more likely they were to experience improvements in wellbeing, leading to a coaching ripple effect.

This research has important implication into organisational wellbeing initiatives and how we measure the impact of interventions aimed at organisational change. It also highlights the influence of leadership coaching beyond the individual leader.

Full details of the research are available for free download in an article printed with in the Psychology of Well-Being http://www.psywb.com/content/3/1/2.