The role of coaching in developing character strengths in leaders

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Declaration

I, Brenda Lorraine Eckstein, declare that the entire body of work contained in this research assignment is my own, original work; that I am the sole author thereof (save to the extent explicitly otherwise stated), that reproduction and publication thereof by Stellenbosch University will not infringe any third party rights and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

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Abstract

Literature in the field of leadership development shows that leaders are sometimes not aware of their character strengths and thus do not use them to their advantage. Even a small coaching intervention using a Positive Psychology framework can lead to a shift in a person's 'way of being' and enhance cognitive and other areas of functioning. The aim of this research was to explore accountants' and lawyers' perceptions of strengths-based coaching, with particular reference to recognising and using their character strengths in their leadership roles.

An interpretive qualitative research methodology was used as it considers people's experiences as meaningful. Within that framework, a multiple-case study method was used. The research data from the ten participants was gathered through semi-structured interviews to identify leaders' awareness and use of strengths prior to the coaching programme. Changes in awareness and the application of participants' strengths during the five individual coaching sessions was captured via the coach's reflective notes.   As the researcher was also the coach, for the purposes of triangulation, and to avoid social desirability bias, a qualified field assistant conducted the final interviews in order to identify leaders' perceptions of the coaching process and the development of their strengths.

The findings in this research assignment suggest that participants perceive that even a small number of coaching sessions using a strengths-based approach can increase awareness and use. of their strengths in their leadership roles. In addition it was found that most of the participants were in a state of transition in their leadership roles. Only two of the ten had previous experience of coaching. Those from the larger global organisations had been through a structured programme as they progressed to higher levels as leaders. Whereas, those from the medium-sized and smaller firms had no formalised grooming for leadership positions.

Key words

Coaching

Character strengths

Leaders

Accountants

Lawyers

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List of acronyms and abbreviations

AC	Association of Coaches
ACC	Associated Certified Coach
BA	Bachelor of Arts
BPS	British Psychological Society
Brexit	British exit from the European Union
CA	Chartered Accountant Qualification
CCL	Centre for Creative Leadership
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CIC	Cornerstone Integrated Coaching Model
CKA	Coach Knowledge Assessment
EMCC	European Mentoring and Coaching Council
ICF	International Coach Federation
LLB	Legum Baccalaureus
LSSA	Law Society of South Africa
MBA	Master in Business Administration
MCC	Master Certified Coach
NYU	New York University
PCC	Professional Certified Coach
PERMA	Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationship, Meaning and Accomplishment
PwC	Pricewaterhouse-Cooper
SAICA	South African Institute of Chartered Accountants
SAMHRI	South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute
SCARF	Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relatedness, Fairness
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UCT	University of Cape Town
UK	United Kingdom
USB	University of Stellenbosch Business School
VIA	Values in Action
VIA-IS	Values in Action Inventory of Strengths
VUCA	Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous
WHR	World Happiness Report
WABC	Worldwide Association of Business Coaches

Terminology

In this report, when the term in the first column is used, the intended meaning or description is given in the second column.

The Big Four	The four major accounting firms in the world, namely Deloitte LLP, PricewaterhouseCoopers, Ernst & Young, KPMG.
Chemistry session	An informal meeting between a coach or researcher and potential client or participant prior to the start of the study. The purpose of this session is to provide information, assess suitability and initiate contracting, if relevant.
Grasshoppers	Millennial terminology which refers to a fable where a young person is like the grasshopper and sings the summer away while the ant works. Thus they have a different set of values.
Integral coaching	The New Ventures West approach to Integral Coaching and the terms used by that organisation.
Lawyers	A professional who is qualified to offer advice about the law or represent some-one in legal matters and meets the inclusion and exclusion criteria of this research study.
Millennial	A person born between 1982 and 2002 (Authors differ on the beginning and end years.)
Sherpa Survey 2016	2016 Executive Coaching Survey which was sponsored by major universities.
Structure of Interpretation	The way in which an individual interprets their experience of the world around them.
VIA Strengths Test	The Values in Action Survey of Character Strengths also known as the VIA-IS meaning Inventory of Strengths.
Way of Being	This term coined by Carl Rogers refers to the way in which an individual experiences and responds to the world around them.

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1   BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION

The World Happiness Report 2015 (WHR, 2015: 4) conceptualised wellbeing as part of countries' national strategies for development. Bersin (2015: 4), correctly predicted that 2015 would be a tumultuous year for business internationally. He argued for an integrated approach to leadership which incorporates various aspects of the individual's life: "While many talk of the 'new world of work', in reality we now have a 'new world of life' – one in which work, home, family and personal lives are completely connected in a real-time way" (Bersin, 2015: 4).

We live in a VUCA post-modern world (Bennett, 2014). The context is one of volatility, uncertainty, chaos and ambiguity in which leaders need to go beyond rational approaches and take action without sufficient information (Ungerer, Herholdt & Le Roux, 2013: 20). Leaders in the accounting and legal professions appear to be more analytically focussed (Bennett, 2014) and may therefore struggle with the need for a more intuitive approach.

The importance of individual reality is emphasised by Kahn (2011) who includes an individual's perception of the meaning of work as well as personal meaning. Similarly, Baets (2015) argued that "the success of every aspect of business depends on a search for meaning". In 1926, Smuts (Salmond, 1929) was concerned over the inability of business leaders and others to integrate their internal and external lives. Schumacher (1978 cited by Chapman, 2010: 19) referred to the 'inner experience' which he felt should be studied as well as the 'outer appearance'.

These ideas were incorporated in Wilber's (2001) Four Quadrant Integral Model which emphasised the importance of incorporating all domains for fuller life experience. Flaherty (2010: 71) operationalised Wilber's concepts for coaching, using four domains, two outer and two inner domains.   Chapman (2010: 19) believes that "given the demands of modern business, businesspeople tend to spend the bulk of their lives in the two outer domains (they are easier to see and to measure) and tend to neglect or sacrifice the inner domains".   The focus of this research was on participants' perceptions of making the inner, singular domain more explicit by recognising their character strengths and using them in their leadership roles during a coaching programme.

Leaders need to be perceived as, and be competent in their inner world (I/me), the societal world (we) and the external (it) world (O'Flaherty & Everson, 2005: 3-13). Ungerer *et al.* (2013: 20) use the (I/me) in order to promote reflection on self, enabling a leader to become aware of their strengths for the development of their leadership skills. These strengths are key and have previously been identified by Seligman (2002: 11) and Peterson and Seligman (2004: v).

Kahn's (2014: 57) approach to coaching is a way of helping individuals manage the complexities of their external reality, business reality and individual reality. Kahn's approach addresses the duality of client in leadership or management coaching by focussing on the needs of both the individual and the business. Coaching is believed to help sustain improvement and wellbeing by working on all four Quadrants (Wilber, 2001). The coaching process used in this study focused on character strengths, which would typically be part of the 'I/me' domain (Flaherty, 2010: 71).

1.2 RESEARCH PROBLEM, AIM AND OBJECTIVES

Given this background, the research question was: 'What are professionals' perceptions of their strengths-based coaching experience on their ability to lead?

1.2.1 Problem statement

It appeared that leaders were sometimes not aware of their strengths and thus did not use them to their advantage. Even a small coaching intervention using a positive psychology framework could lead to a shift in a person's 'way of being' and enhance cognitive and other areas of functioning (Kauffman, 2006: 219-249). These shifts could possibly more easily take place in a supportive environment like coaching. A key element in coaching leaders in accountancy and legal professions is the development of the Individual Interior Domain (Wilber, 2001). The coaching process may bring new awareness which would lead to further insights and practice. There was thus a need to explore the perceptions of these professionals of the role of coaching in developing their awareness and use of character strengths.

1.2.2 Research aim

The aim of this research was to explore accountants' and lawyers' perceptions of strengths-based coaching with particular reference to recognising and using their character strengths in their leadership roles.

1.2.3 Research objectives

The main objectives of the research were to:

- identify leaders' awareness and use of strengths prior to the coaching
- explore changes in awareness and application of character strengths during the coaching intervention
- identify leaders' perceptions of the coaching process and the development of their character strengths

1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

There would be likely be significance in the following areas:

1.3.1   Academic field of coaching

It was hoped that this research would add to the body of academic knowledge regarding coaching in the VUCA world (Rodriguez & Rodriguez, 2015: 855). It could also add to the understanding of the perceptions of analytically oriented people on being coached using a strengths-based approach.

1.3.2   Benefits to the context

Coaches would possibly have a greater understanding of how these kinds of leaders perceive changes in their awareness and use of character strengths during strengths-based coaching. This could help to improve their coaching approach.

1.3.3   Benefit to participants

Participants in this research could benefit through being more aware of their strengths and being able to use these in their leadership roles.

1.4   RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

1.4.1   Research design

An interpretive qualitative research design was used for this research as this foregrounded people's experiences (Babbie & Mouton, 2014: 643). This study aimed to investigate leaders' experiences of coaching. The interpretive perspective was appropriate because it takes people's experiences as valid and meaningful. A qualitative approach was appropriate because it allows in depth study of these experiences and yields rich data (Babbie & Mouton, 2014: 271).

1.4.2   Sample and sampling

A purposive, convenience sample of leaders in the accounting and law professions was used (Babbie & Mouton, 2014). The researcher has experience of coaching in this sector and thus had primary contacts in the field. A snowball sampling technique was used in recruiting potential candidates. Existing contacts were asked to canvass potential participants. The researcher's details were given to potential participants, who will made contact with the researcher if they were interested in participating. Details of the inclusion and exclusion criteria are provided in the methodology chapter.

Although Yin (2013: 9) argued that it is difficult to generalise a definite sample size required, this research was based on ten participants. The individual participants in this sample were working in South Africa and Australia as a study that sourced the participants from different continents but in the same field added richness to the research.

1.4.3   Data collection

Two different sources of data were collected to enhance triangulation.   These were two interviews, one before coaching and one after the coaching programme, and the coach's reflective notes after

each session. The steps in the coaching process, and the planned data collection points are described in detail in Chapter 3.

1.4.4   Data analysis

The data comprising interviews and the coach's reflective notes were analysed using thematic analysis. I used Braun and Clarke's (2006: 78) suggested six steps in analysing data. I then firstly familiarised myself with data before and after transcription, generated initial codes, searched for themes, reviewed the identified themes and patterns, defined and named the key themes and finally produced the report.

1.4.5   Validity, reliability and rigour

In this research, I was the researcher and the coach so that there was more uniformity in the way the coaching was conducted across participants. To encourage multiple perspectives (Golafshani, 2003: 65), triangulation took place through the two interviews per participant and five reflective commentaries from me in my capacity as the coach which will assisted with rigour. A qualified fieldworker conducted the final interviews in order to minimise the social desirability bias. Shenton (2004: 65) believes that "the use of different methods in concert compensates for the researcher's limitations and exploits their respective benefits". To enhance this, frequent debriefings between me as the researcher and the supervisor took place to ensure trustworthiness and rigour (Shenton, 2004).

According to Golafshani (2003) the credibility of qualitative research depends on the ability and effort of the researcher. To increase the trustworthiness of this qualitative research, the four criteria suggested by Shenton (2004) were incorporated. As the researcher, I addressed credibility through using well-established qualitative research methods and aimed to present a true picture of the process and outcomes. Transferability was promoted by providing a detailed description of the research and coaching process. For conformability, as the researcher I used supervision and peer consultation to ensure that the findings did in fact arise from the data and not from my own assumptions.

1.4.6   Ethical considerations

The Ethical Clearance procedure was correctly followed as per the Stellenbosch University Departmental Ethics Screening Committee Checklist. Further details are provided in Chapter 3. The ethical clearance number for the research was SU-HSD-002214 dated March 9 2016 (see Appendix A)

1.5   PRELIMINARY LITERATURE REVIEW

The focus of this study was on the participants' perceptions of their experience of developing awareness and use of their character strengths through strengths-based coaching.   In this

preliminary literature review, the key theoretical concepts and evidence relating to the research question are presented.

1.5.1   Coaching

The Sherpa 2016 survey (2016: 25) reported an increase in the number of coaches using a strengths-based approach. This is supported by neuroscience research (Rock, 2010) and positive psychology (Peterson & Seligman, 2004: v). Integral coaching, an holistic approach, focusses on internal/external, singular/plural domains and emphasises their interrelatedness (Flaherty, 2010: 71).

According to Reynolds (2011) there is a strong link between being coached and the ability to overcome obstacles for newly appointed leaders. This capacity to overcome obstacles is important due to the constant challenges in the volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous VUCA, (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014: 27) environment in which leaders find themselves today. Sosik, Gentry and Chun (2012: 367-382) also argue for the importance of understanding character strengths for improving performance in upper level executives.

1.5.2   Character strengths

There is a body of work that emphasises the value of awareness of character strengths, for example, the VIA Strengths Test (University of Pennsylvania, 2015) and the World Happiness Report (2015). Kaufmann (2006: 219-249) shows how a positive psychology (Peterson & Seligman, 2004: v) approach in coaching can help clients use their existing strengths to identify their vision of what they want and turn it into reality. Clifford (2011) explored how important it is to identify strengths and use them in strengths-based coaching.

1.5.3   Leaders

The context in which leaders operate is volatile, uncertain, chaotic and ambiguous (Bennett, 2014). This means that leaders need to be more intuitive and draw on their 'inner world'. Benchmarks of the strengths leaders need to build range from Jan Smuts (Salmond, 1929) to Jacob Zuma (Steyn, L. 2015), where the wide-spread and immediate socio-economic effects of leader's political decisions are evidenced. The World Happiness Report (2015: 32) illustrates the alarming slide in happiness of South Africans' over a five year period, further indicating the strength of leadership required in this context. Ungerer *et al.* (2013) speak of the different challenges, and therefore different styles of leadership required in this post-modernistic era, implying that leaders need a more intuitive and reflective style in order to cope with leading in a fast-changing world.

1.6   RESEARCH PLANNING

1.6.1   Time frame

The work plan was captured in the Gantt Chart (see Appendix B)

1.6.2   Anticipated problems and limitations

The researcher took care to pro-actively prevent problems arising. At the 'Chemistry Session' the fit between client and coach was assessed and all details of the coaching approach given as per ICF Code of Ethics (see Appendix C) and ICF Core Competencies (see Appendix D).

However, if problems had arisen, they would have been be dealt with as shown in the Table below:

Table 1.1: Problems and resolutions

	Problem	**Resolution**
1	Delayed Ethical Clearance	The sample to accommodate only South Africans or only Australians would have been altered. Or alternatively, Skype would have been used for research and coaching.
2	Candidates not being available for coaching sessions due to their being leaders and needing to travel.	They were offered the option of holding sessions via Skype.
3	A drop in commitment as the coaching proceeds	As per any normal coach/client programme, this will be was discussed with the candidate and possibilities explored, one being the option to withdraw. More than the minimum number of participants were initially recruited.
4	Discovering that the client actually needs the services of another professional rather than a coach	This client would have been invited to meet with a qualified professional in that field. If the client needed only that service, they could have withdrawn from the coaching programme, or if both services were required, they could have run 'in tandem'
5	Social desirability bias	Triangulation was in place to minimise the effects if this should have occurred. A research assistant conducted the final interview to try and minimise this.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   INTRODUCTION

The world is volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014: 27) Leadership was traditionally rooted in control and certainty (Bennett, 2015) and the old styles of leadership are not working effectively. Leaders are encouraged to explore a new leadership paradigm (Ungerer *et al.*, 2013: vii).

In response to this VUCA environment, one of the influences emerging is the use of positive psychology (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) in actively generating greater wellbeing globally World Happiness Report (WHR, 2015). In addition, the report notes that positive psychology is being built into the national strategy of certain countries like the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (WHR, 2015: 4) or states or provinces of counties in certain countries like Australia, where the state of South Australia has incorporated positive psychology into its strategies in fields like education and correctional services, etc. (SAMHRI, 2016a).

Leaders make change possible whether leading their countries, organisations, businesses or teams. Literature on leaders in the professions is explored below as accountants and lawyers tend to be analytical in their approach (Mishra, 2016: 96), and prefer to make decisions once they have all the facts. In this current state of turbulence, leaders often have to make decisions 'on the run' (Franke, 2011: 2). Leaders are facing new challenges (Ungerer *et al.*, 2013: 20) not only through working in this demanding external world, but also in their work-lives. New challenges are evident. Some of the many influences explored are decision-making under uncertainty, leading and developing Millennials (Rodriguez & Rodriguez, 2015) and also dealing with greater 'burnout' (Platsidou & Salman, 2012).

Leaders are encouraged to reflect within themselves to find the answers through practices such as mindfulness (Niemiec, 2014: 127-227) and reflection (Ungerer *et al.*, 2013: 28-38). To do this, there needs to be a shift in mind-set and leadership style. A strengths-based approach to leadership development is advocated with an emphasis on leaders recognising and using their character strengths (Zenger & Folkman, 2002: 1-151).

This study explored the role of coaching as a way of developing greater leadership ability in VUCA times for accountants and lawyers. A hybrid coaching framework was considered for this research and positive psychology was a strong component. Literature relating to the elements of coaching, character strengths and leaders, either singly or in combinations and other researchers' work in these fields is reviewed below.

2.2   THE VUCA WORLD (EXTERNAL REALITY)

The external world is volatile, uncertain, chaotic and ambiguous (VUCA) (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014: 27).   This section explores the context in which current leaders operate and reviews literature relating to global positive psychology initiatives.

2.2.1   What is it really like?

Leaders are operating in a world where the environment is VUCA (Rodriguez & Rodriguez, 2015: 855). This acronym originated in the American military (Franke, 2011: 1) and refers to a state which is volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous. The term has been adopted by the business world (Sheng, 2016: 1-13) as being an apt description of the global environment in which we are operating at present.

According to Petrie, in the new environment there are increased levels of complexity and interconnectedness (Petrie, 2011: 8). Often, the generally unexpected outcome of events in one country immediately spread globally. For example, this is evident in 2015, when the socio-political and economic influences of the Republic of South Africa's President, Jacob Zuma removed the Minister of Finance, Nhlanhla Nene, from office (Battersby, 2015). The subsequent immediate appointment of a person considered by the banks as unsuitable resulted in the new minster, van Rooyen being removed from office after 4 days, on the banks' insistence and a previous Minister of Finance, Gordhan, was immediately appointed as the Minister of Finance (Steyn, L., 2015). Thus in a four-day period, the Republic of South Africa had three different Ministers of Finance. Shock waves rippled internationally with the price of shares on stock markets being volatile. The complex situation created a great deal of uncertainly and ambiguity and cost South Africa R500 billion (South African Rand) (Carte Blanche, 2016). Likewise, in Europe, Britain's exit from the European Union (Brexit) (Investec Wealth & Investment, 2016) caused uncertainty which continues to reverberate internationally. The election of Donald Trump as President of the USA also created unprecedented international implications (Lawlor, 2016).

Global managing partner of McKinsey, Dominic Barton (2015), stated that the collision of global megatrends often causes the volatility we are experiencing at present. Thus meeting these fast changing challenges requires new skills and enhanced competencies in leaders. Pricewaterhouse-Coopers (PwC) 19th Annual Global CEO Survey reported one of the key issues for the future being the cultivation of 'pipelines for leaders of tomorrow' (PwC, 2016a: 6) whom they describe as people who have the ability to operate in a world with multiple stakeholders with different values and diverse attitudes towards law and rights, all in an increasingly volatile economic environment. Within the context of the leadership pipeline, Charan, Dotter and Noel (2010: 22) believe that Passage Four, the transition from Functional Manager to Business Manager is often the most satisfying as well as challenging. The leaders who were participants in this study would likely have experienced this transition as they are either at this level or an even higher level.

In PwC's, The Africa Business Agenda (PwC, 2016b: 7) the importance of strong leadership in VUCA times is reflected in the belief that strong leadership sets the tone from the top and instils a culture of high productivity. They also demonstrate how conventional leadership practices in the past have resulted in unsuccessful attempts at expanding business into Africa (2016b: 15). Leadership styles need to evolve to suit the new conditions and leadership development needs to embrace these changes. Of the South African companies surveyed in the USB Management Index Report 2014/2015 (Steyn & Bell, 2015: 7) only 59% of respondents believed their organisation was doing enough to develop the next generation of leaders.

2.2.2 The influence of positive psychology globally

Given the external VUCA environment in which leaders are functioning, globally and nationally, the science of Positive psychology is pro-actively working towards global and individual wellbeing (WHR, 2015: 3).

2.2.2.1 A brief overview of positive psychology

Positive psychology is the scientific study and an umbrella term (Park, Peterson & Seligman, 2004: 603), for theories and research about 'what makes life worth living'. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000: 5) identified six universal virtues, after researching the major historical and current religions and philosophies. These virtues were found across the millennia in unrelated philosophical traditions. Seligman (2002: 11) mentions/discusses how Confucius, Aristotle, Aquinas, the Bushido Samurai Code include the six core virtues of wisdom, justice, courage, temperance, humanity and transcendence. However, virtues are not measurable, so in relation to the virtues, based on the following criteria they isolated 24 character strengths, which are measurable and can be developed.

The criteria for character strengths are:

- valued in almost every culture;
- valued in their own right, not just as a means to an end;
- malleable.

In other words, each core virtue is subdivided and collectively form the 24 character strengths that can be measured and classified (these are discussed further in 2.5.3).

In the past, psychology has been concerned mainly with pathology and mental illness. Positive psychology professes that strength is as important as weakness and intends to complement and not replace traditional psychology. Seligman describes wellbeing as being made up of five pillars: positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishment (PERMA) (Prof. Seligman on PERMA, 2015).

The WHR (2015: 90 citing Davidson & Schuyler) notes that Aristotle described wellbeing as being defined by hedonia (pleasure or momentary wellbeing) and endaemonia (flourishing, thriving, a

meaningful life). The WHR report looks at the latest neuroscience research behind this in humans. Davidson and Schuyler in the WHR report concludes that in wellbeing research, the brain circuits responsible for wellbeing all exhibit plasticity (2015: 101). Thus, their findings show that happiness and well-being are best regarded as skills that can be enhanced through training.

Neuroscience can form a framework for coaching. Rock and Schwartz (2006: 5) point out that when you focus attention on something new, the brain makes connections, which has been shown to be true through neuro-plasticity where focussed attention plays a critical role in creating physical changes in the brain. This implies that people can improve in their capacity to self-correct and self-generate. In coaching approaches, cognitive techniques like self-observations and practices help to build new neural pathways (Flaherty, 2010: 3).

Other concepts important in positive psychology are FLOW and mindfulness. The term 'FLOW' was coined by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, co-founder of positive psychology (Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, 2004) and refers to a state where the individual is totally absorbed in what they are doing, where skills and challenges meet. The person is engaged and neither overwhelmed nor bored.

According to Niemiec (2014: 5) mindfulness, "involves deliberately focusing on what's happening in our moment-to-moment experience in a way that it is non-critical and non-judging". It involves moment-by-moment attention to thoughts and experiences, thus being grounded in the present and not the past or the future. He emphasises that the study of mindfulness is a robust area of scientific inquiry.

Globally, institutions like Google and World Bank have endorsed mindfulness as a tool that will improve performance in the workplace. Universities, like Harvard Business School and NYU Stern incorporate this practice into their programmes as an essential tool in times of change (The Mindful Leader, 2015: 31).

2.2.2.2   Global applications of positive psychology

The WHR (2015: 17) covers the research field of "subjective well-being" According to this report happiness is a measure of social progress and a goal that could enable people to live better lives (WHR, 2015: 3). This is evident in the national policy of the United Arab Emirates where the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Shaikh Abdullah Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, at the government summit of the UAE, 2015 (Nazzal, 2015) said that the most important contribution to the country's success is human capital. Positivity is built into their national strategy.   One of the central features of the design and delivery of the National Agenda is to "be the happiest of all nations" (WHR, 2015: 4).

Another example of where the principles of wellbeing have been incorporated is in the state of South Australia. Seligman, founder of the positive psychology visited Australia in 2012 (PERMA, 2012) and proposed that South Australia systematically measure and build wellbeing across society to improve the resilience of the population in this rapidly changing world. Adopting his

principles of wellbeing embedded in the acronym PERMA, the South Australia Health and Medical Research Institute (SAHMRI), through their Wellbeing and Resilience Centre added and expanded their theme from PERMA to PERMA+ with the plus sign denoting physical activity, nutrition, sleep and optimism at their Wellbeing and Resilience Centre (no date). The purpose is to measure and build wellbeing in the state of South Australia. SAHMRI organised the 5th Australian Positive Psychology and Wellbeing Conference (SAHMRI, 2016b) in September 2016 where 500 delegates explored six streams relating to applied positive psychology:

- Positive aging
- Positive education
- Positive communications
- Positive organisations
- Positive public policy
- Neuroscience and health

The fact that positive psychology principles have been incorporated in so many facets of public life is testament to the way the principles have been embraced by the state of South Australia. They have a bold vision to build South Australia as the 'State of Wellbeing', through a public health approach to wellbeing.

2.3   CHALLENGES IN THE WORK LIFE OF LEADERS IN THE ACCOUNTING AND LEGAL PROFESSIONS

Having reviewed literature on the external world in which leaders are operating, this section considers some general changes and challenges in their work environment. In this research, 'business reality' was considered the professional world of lawyers and accountants in leadership positions.

In this section I explore styles of leadership, developing leaders, some work related issues facing leaders and the choice of accountants and lawyers for this research.

2.3.1   Styles of leadership

The leaders chosen as participants in this research were leaders in the accounting and law firms, each responsible for leading organisations, branches or senior teams comprising seven or more individuals. Authors, including Stout-Rostron (2014: 14) provide multiple definitions of 'leader', such as 'some-one whose direction and approach other people are willing to follow'.

A range of leadership styles have been advocated over the last few decades (Mathur-Helm, 2016; Stout-Rostron, 2012; Zenger & Folkman, 2002). However, according to Petrie (2011: 20-21), the style most conducive to leading in the current VUCA times, is a collective style of leadership. Petrie (2011: 21) further refers to the rise of collective leadership and the decline of the heroic leaders. He says the complex, chaotic environment is less suited to one person in authority making decisive

decisions than leadership being distributed throughout their network. He advocates a shared process rather leadership being than a position (Petrie, 2011: 6). He draws the distinction between the current focus where leadership resides in individual managers and the future focus being on collective leadership. Mathur-Helm (2016) also speaks of a transition to a new paradigm where leadership is a 'collective process' spread throughout a network of people. She supports the view that this new, relevant approach in VUCA times is different to former times where leadership resided in a person or role. Porter, Lorsch and Nohria (2004: 9) refer to the awe in which new CEO's are often held as "in the cinematic image of indefatigable superheroes" which make it difficult for them to be vulnerable or to be introspective. Barton (2015) stated that a leader is no longer a knight on a white horse and needs to harness the contribution of his/her team. Thus there are many current research examples showing how a shift in leadership styles towards a more contributory style is advantageous currently.

Leadership styles need to respond to the shifting challenges facing them. Petrie (2011: 8) found that the most commonly cited challenges for future leaders were:

- Information overload
- The interconnectedness of systems and business communities
- The dissolving of traditional organisational boundaries
- New technologies that disrupt old work practices
- The different values and expectations of new generations entering the workplace
- Increased globalisation leading to the need to lead across cultures.

In the Africa Business Agenda (PwC, 2016b: 27), PwC draws attention to the need for leaders to strategically collaborate with all stakeholders (not just their teams). In order to lead in a collaborative manner or collective manner, I believe that it is important that a leader recognises his own character strengths and those of his team.

2.3.2   Developing leaders in the professions

In considering types of development for leaders, (Petrie 2011: 11) considers it necessary to move from a concentration on horizontal development (skills, abilities, behaviours) to a vertical mind-set, which refers to the mental developmental stages adults progress through and how they make sense of their world. He argues that at each predictable higher stage of mental development adults make sense of the world in more complex and inclusive ways. He says their minds grow 'bigger'. This is discussed in more detail in this study in the section on the inner world of leaders, as discussed in paragraph 2.4.1.

In referring to the difference between horizontal and vertical development of leaders, McGonagill and Doerffer (2011: 3) state:

A new leadership paradigm seems to be emerging with an inexorable shift away from one-way, hierarchical, organization-centric communication toward two-way, network-centric, participatory and collaborative leadership styles. Most of all a new mind-set seems necessary, apart from new skills and knowledge. All the tools in the world will not change anything if the mind-set does not allow and support change.

According to Barday (2015: 6), the construct of leadership development and leader development are often used interchangeably in the literature. Dalakoura (2010: 43) asserts that leadership development is geared more towards developing the collective leadership capacity of the organisation, whereas the intent of leader development is to develop individual leaders.

Regardless of terminology, a strengths-based approach to the development of leaders is advocated by Zenger and Folkman (2002). Strengths-based coaching has facilitated leaders recognising, identifying and developing their own strengths. Secondly it has enabled leaders to recognise and develop strengths in others. Linley, Woolston and Biswas-Diener (2009: 21) believe that leaders have a role in creating a strengths-culture in their organisations.

Given that the focus of this research was on leaders in the accounting and law professions, it is important to understand how leaders in those fields are understood and developed.

The 'Big Four' global accounting groups (Statista, 2015), Deloitte, PricewaterhouseCooper (PwC), Ernst & Young and KPMG, have structured approaches to developing leaders as they progress to different levels of leadership. At some points this includes coaching. Smaller firms rely more on internal mentoring.

According to Siptroth (2007: 181) while law schools provide professional development, they do not address the developmental needs of tomorrow's lawyers enabling them to lead full and healthy lives. The six major legal firms in South Africa have their own training academies, according to Scott, immediate past Co-chair, Law Society of South Africa (LSSA) (Scott, 2016). Coaching may form part of leader development whereas the smaller firms rely on the Law Society of South Africa (LSSA, 2015) to provide structured technical skills and continuing legal education. This is also provided by outside sources like private coaching or institutions like USB.

Often coaching forms part of a leadership development programme and sometimes participants may find it difficult to distinguish which elements were coaching, which were mentoring, counselling or training etc.

According to the Executive Coaching Survey, 11th Annual Public Report (Sherpa Coaching LLC, 2016: 24), the role of coaching has shifted from problem solving to leadership development over the last ten years. Thus to develop the style of leadership more conducive to effectiveness in the VUCA world, the role of coaching was explored in the current study.

2.3.3   Why were accountants and lawyers chosen for this research?

Accountants and lawyers tend to be analytical and thus strong in the cognitive fields (Mishra, 2016: 96). The findings of Novin, Arjomand and Jourdan (2003: 28) showed that accounting students showed a preference for a 'converger' style of learning which involves thinking and doing. However, they warned that accounting students therefore need to distinguish between problems requiring objective evaluation and those that demand subjective judgement. This ties in with Kolb's description (Businessballs.com, 2016b) of the converging learning style. Kolb notes a preference towards technical tasks as they are far less concerned with people and interpersonal aspects (Businessballs.com, 2016b). Snyder (2012: 7) states how Richard's earlier study on 3014 lawyers showed how a significant number of lawyers taking the Meyers-Briggs Type Indicator were 'thinkers' rather than 'feelers'. Thus Snyder says the law profession is dominated by analytical thinkers, which is understandable, given the nature of the work.

Barrick and Mount (1991) found that while 'openness' was positively related to performance for managers, for professionals there was a negative relationship between openness and performance and gave the example of accountants and lawyers. According to Stewart, Palmer, Wilkin and Kerrin (2008: 34), openness refers to an individual's curiosity about their inner and outer worlds and they hypothesised that openness would be positively related to providing coaching transfer and found that their results supported this. As coaching requires openness for self-observations and other ways of creating awareness (Flaherty, 2010: 71), the researcher in the current study was curious regarding accountant and lawyers' openness to coaching and openness during the process.

Edward de Bono's research shows that to be creative and think better we need to engage both sides of our brain (Driver, 2011: 20). While creativity and divergent thinking are often associated with the right side of the brain, this type of thinking needs to be channelled through rules and boundaries. This in turn relies on the left side of the brain. Thus, it is possible that lawyers and accountants tend to rely mainly on their cognitive abilities. If they are made aware of their character strengths, coaching might have a role to play in enabling them to develop their character strengths and thus shift their 'way of being' (van Nieuwerburgh, 2014: 10).

2.3.4   Some of the challenges of leadership

The challenges of the VUCA world have already been highlighted. Further issues that leaders in the professions are facing in the worklife follow:

2.3.4.1 *Decision-making under uncertainly*

In applying military principles to a broader spectrum of leadership, Franke (2011: 4) refers to the changing realities leaders are faced with in the VUCA world and thus the difficulty to make decisions with insufficient information that may not be 'up to date'. Ungerer (2015) stated that certain types are rational thinkers and do not want to make decisions until they have all the facts.

In the VUCA world this is not possible. Yet Lieberman, Roch and Cox (2014: 11) believe that many types of decisions made in the modern world, especially in organisations, depend largely on objective and relational judgements which are thus based on data, rather than relying intuitively on 'gut feeling'. They advise that better decisions may result through thinking more deeply. They promote the practice of mindfulness and link it to research. Leaders need to act more intuitively in the leadership aspect of their function. I argue that this requires introspection and more emphasis on the inner world.

2.3.4.2 Millennial influence

Millennials are usually the younger generation in professional offices and the more senior leaders are often older people who have different values or approaches to working in professional environments (Rodriquez & Rodriquez, 2015: 854-866). Rodriguez and Hallman (2013: 65) use Howe and Strauss's (2000) definition of Millennial which refers to those people born between 1982 and 2002 and they describe Millennials as "shape shifting portfolio people in response to rapidly changing technologies, literacies and economics". Some differentiating factors between them and previous generations include concerns over material goods, shifts towards greater use of technology and movement of workers over geographical borders.

The challenges facing leaders in the professions (Swart, 2016) include generational difference in values between the older leaders who play a role in developing Millennial leaders. So, although a person's values might be considered as an 'internal reality', a 'business reality' is that challenges are created in the workplace through different generations having different value systems. Coaching can help leaders to shift their 'way of being' (van Nieuwerburgh, 2016) a term coined by Rogers (1980), in order to cope better with these differences.

2.3.4.3 Technology

The changing demands of professions also creates uncertainly in leaders. One of the global megatrends which van Beeck (5 Megatrends, 2015) recognises is that of technology. This is supported by Barton (Dominic Barton, 2013) who shows how essential it is to keep up to date with technology both from understanding and being able to use it to maximum advantage.   In the corporate or professional world, agility and the speed of response are essential in order to have a competitive advantage. Keeping up to date with technology is often a challenge for leaders. Charan, Drotter and Noel (2010: 22-23) mention that going forward, leaders will need to be comfortable with data, analysis and new technologies.

2.3.4.4 Burnout

Burnout has been defined as "physical, emotional and mental exhaustion in situations that are emotionally demanding" (Stefanic and Delgado, 2005 as cited by Platsidou and Salman, 2012: 20). Here it is argued that lawyers' susceptibility to stress and burnout arises through the legal system inflicting a way of thinking on law students that values precedent and doctrine and underestimates

emotions, interpersonal relations and social context. Platsidou and Salman (2012: 13) could find no studies in the legal profession regarding a relationship between burnout and job satisfaction.

Burnout prevents leaders' optimal functioning. De Beer's study (2013) confirmed the existence of burnout in leaders and found that coaching has a statistically positive impact on reducing burnout. De Beer found that in order to remain competitive, work engagement and burnout levels in leaders need to be pro-actively managed and supported. Gazelle, Liebschutz and Riess (2015) study showed how coaching could help physicians coping with burnout. Similarly, Biswas-Diener (2009) found that introducing coaching could be useful to psychotherapists in preventing their own burnout.

Both burnout and brownout refer to conditions where leaders will not be able to function at optimal efficiency in all aspects of their lives. Kilber (2015) links being continually overwhelmed and disengaged as a state which he calls "brownout". This phenomenon, similar to 'burnout' was first described in 2015 by Kilber and is prevalent in many areas in the lives of leaders. He says this can be prevented through active partnering with a professional coach.

2.3.5   Some studies relating to the work life of lawyers

Wanser (2012) considered the emotional intelligence of general counsels in relation to lawyer leadership. According to Wanser, the millennial age brings new challenges to the workplace and lawyer leaders need to be prepared to meet these challenges. Whereas the 20th century is referred to as the 'information age', the 21st century is a conceptual age that stresses compassion, creativity and innovation. Wanser shows how trends such as the explosion of technology and the importance of visuals have led to greater right-brain stimulation. He shows how lawyers must be prepared to meet these challenges.

According to Rhode (2011: 472-473), lawyers occupy significant leadership positions in the profession and in their communities. She cites the fact that the majority of America presidents come from the legal profession and so do half of Congress. Yet rarely do leaders in organisations have any management training. Lack of attention to leadership development is of concern because Rhode argues that the most powerful predictor of large firm profitability is the quality of the partners' leadership skills. Rhode states that "the first step on the leadership path is self-knowledge and lawyers must be reflective". More emphasis is put on fees and producing the work than managing the business and building and developing individuals and leaders.

Levitt (2015: iii) also explored leadership in doctors and lawyers and commented how the training in law or medical schools, although highly rigorous in training them for their respective fields, rarely equipped them to manage staff or departments. Leadership coaching for these professionals is a newer field gaining momentum.

It was interesting to note that there were no relevant studies on the work life of accountants.

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2.4.   THE INNER WORLD OF LEADERS

Having looked at literature on the external and also business environment, this section focuses on the 'inner world' of leaders.

2.4.1.   Why work on the inner world?

In writing on Mandela as an authentic leader, Anderson and Mathur-Helm (2015) say that when Mandela was imprisoned and he saw that his outer world was becoming smaller, his interior world became bigger. There is an interesting parallel in that Smuts, another of South Africa's greatest leaders (Steyn, R., 2015; The flawed genius of Jan Smuts, 2015), who in addition to being a statesman was an ecologist and philosopher said that leaders in public life, business and the professions were usually absorbed in their external 'outer world', the activities that could be seen and observed but that their 'inner lives had died'. By 'inner lives' he was referring to thoughts and feelings that traditional scientific approaches at that time would have had difficulty measuring and therefore accepting (Chapman, 2010: 17-18; Kahn, 2014: 57). Smuts coined the term 'Personology' for his new discipline and his intention was to study people who lived strong inner and outer lives.

Smuts's work aligned with Schumacher (Chapman, 2010: 17) who from a developmental perspective drew attention to the fact that higher levels of development imply more of a person's 'inner world' while lower levels of development imply more of a person's 'outer world'.

These concepts are reflected in the work of many philosophers and psychologists. Three, whose work has been operationalised for coaching purposes, are Wilber (2000), Flaherty, (2010) and Habermas (MacIsaac, 1996; Heroux, no date; Cranton, 2006). One of the relevant coaching organisations using these models is New Ventures West (Centre for Coaching, 2011). Models used for coaching in this study are discussed further under 2.6.4.1

Another way of considering 'the inner world' is through Kahn's 'Coaching on the Axis (2014). He distinguishes between what is 'above the ground' (explicit – external environment including business reality) and what is 'below the ground' (implicit) and it is here that the 'inner world' resides. As a Business Coach (Khan, 2011) he sees the aim of coaching being to make explicit the implicit. In other words, creating awareness of man's inner world.

Similarly, Barton (Dominic Barton, 2013) and Seijts, Gandz, Crossan and Reno (2015), argue that as leaders in a VUCA world, it is not what we do that matters, but rather who we are, indicating a focus on the inner world again. Anderson and Mathur-Helm (2016) support this, saying that the best leaders have influence over their followers through being themselves. They are aware of what shaped them into who they are and communicate this.

Thus, Smuts's 'inner world', Habermas's domain of emancipatory knowledge, Wilber's 'inner singular' (depicted as D1 on Figure 2.4), Flaherty's 'it', Kahn's 'below the ground' and Barton's 'who we are', are all concepts important in coaching and emphasise the importance of

understanding and being our authentic selves (Goffee & Jones, 2009). Positive psychology's classification of 'character strengths' provides a way in which individuals may become aware of some of their strengths. Coaching can help them to use those strengths by cognitively creating awareness through self-observations and by using Neuroscience principles helping to build new neural pathways through structured practices. Coaching has a role to play in developing character strengths in leaders functioning in this VUCA world.

The above theories and models form part of the framework for the coaching conducted in this study where the goal was to consider what role strengths-based coaching might play in developing character strengths in leaders.

2.5.   CHARACTER STRENGTHS

This section describes a strengths-based approach and then focuses on character strengths, specifically from a positive psychology perspective.

2.5.1   The importance of a strengths-based approach to leader or leadership development

Linley and Harrington (2006: 39) define a strength as a 'natural capacity for behaving, thinking and feeling in a way that allows optimal functioning and performance in the pursuit of valued outcomes'. A similar broad classification or definition of psychological strengths is "ways of behaving, thinking or feeling that an individual has a natural capacity for, enjoys doing and which allows the individual to achieve optimal functioning while they pursue valued outcomes" (Govindji & Linley, 2007: 143–153).

Developmental initiatives previously focussed on identifying and working on individual weaknesses rather than on individual strengths (McDowall & Butterworth 2014: 153). McDowall and Butterworth's research and their review of other research shows a wide range of positive outcomes flowing from a strengths-based approach.

Zenger and Folkman (2002: 143) showed that a major weakness in most leadership development programmes has been striving for incremental improvements in individual areas of weakness instead of focussing on individual strengths. They emphasise that great leaders are defined not by their absence of weakness, but rather by their presence of clear strengths. According to Zenger and Folkman (2002: 137-157), great leaders possess multiple strengths and they list 16 strengths or competencies on which they assess individuals:

- Accountability/ownership
- Analytical thinking
- Challenges the status quo
- Communication
- Customer focus
- Decisiveness

- Developing others
- Drive for results
- Global perspective
- Innovation
- Integrity
- Leveraging diversity
- Organisational impact
- Strategic thinking/vision
- Teamwork
- Technical expertise

Whilst useful, Zenger and Folkman's competencies above do not correlate nor align with Seligman's more recent work (PERMA, 2012) which emphasises that there is a tendency for CEO's top strengths to be the cluster of hope, zest and curiosity.

A strengths-based approach is supported by neuroscience. Stronger synapses within the network of connections in the brain continue to strengthen, while weaker connections fade away. Thus, by focusing on those that are already strong, development is enhanced (Rock, 2010: 53). Rock says that improving leadership skills requires neural integration as leaders tend to overuse their cognitive skills and might thus become less functional in their self and social circuits. Coaching is one of the strengths-based approaches used in leadership development.

2.5.1.1 Strengths-based coaching

People who work on their strengths are happier, have higher self-esteem and experience higher levels of vitality than those who concentrate on strengths to a lesser extent Govindji & Linley (2007: 152). Govindji and Linley present empirical evidence supporting the use of a strengths-based approach to coaching. Within that broad category, different models and approaches are used, but all address a person's strengths, and work on these, while acknowledging weaknesses or areas for improvement.

The Executive Coaching Survey (Sherpa Coaching LLC, 2016: 25-29) distinguishes between two basic schools of through in Executive Coaching. The strengths-based approach involves identifying and working on strengths whereas the other focuses on identifying and correcting weaknesses. Their survey shows a marked increase in the use of a strengths-based approach by coaches internationally.   Executive Coaching Survey states

> *70% of coaches working on strengths rather than weaknesses and of those working on strengths 69% feel that the people who most need an Executive Coach are those who need leadership development. Of coaches working with strengths, 68% feel that the results of most coaching engagements are excellent.* (Sherpa Coaching LLC, 2016: 26)

On the contrary, Corbett (Sherpa Coaching LLC, 2016: 25) advocates a deficit-based approach and refers to a client who may be stuck because of a weakness citing a skill that a client may lack. In my opinion, the development of a skill would be enhanced by mentoring or training. Strengths-based coaching however, focuses on creating awareness in leaders so that they can take appropriate action. Further critiques are discussed below.

A strengths-based approach is not new in the coaching world. For example, the six 'expert' coaches used in Welch, Grossaint, Reid and Walker's (2014: 22) study all identified having used a strengths-based approach for many decades, despite the fact that positive psychology is a relatively new science, having been introduced only in the late 1990's early 2000's (Peterson & Seligman, 2004: v). The authors cite the work of Maslow (1954) which focused on self-actualisation, as having been a forerunner to positive psychology.

2.5.2   Background to 'strengths'

Quinlan, Swain and Vella-Brodrick (2011: 1147) say that "strength intervention is a process designed to identify and develop strengths in an individual or group". In order to work with strengths, an individual needs an indication of what their strengths might be. There are various ways of identifying strengths (Mackie, 2013: 18-20).

Three of the tests used to measure strengths are:

- The StrengthsFinder was introduced by Rath in 2007 which was designed for empirical workplace studies of talents which could in turn be developed into strengths (Quinlan *et al.*, 2011: 1146)
- Values in Action (VIA) Inventory of Character Strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004)
- Realise2 (Linley *et al.*, 2009: 23) which identifies 60 strengths and is used primarily in the workplace.

Besides differing in nomenclature, these tests also differ in origins and objectives (Quinlan *et al.* 2011). Quinlan *et al.* (2011: 1146) also say that theory and practice and research support working on strengths rather than weaknesses, as this produces greater benefits.

Leaders need to recognise and develop their character strengths (Ungerer *et al.,* 2013: 43). Humans have blind spots and often do not realise their capabilities or capacity (Stout-Rostron, 2012: 94). They need to develop new neural pathways (Doidge, 2011; Redesign my Brain with Todd Sampson, 2013) in order to integrate their character strengths into their 'way of being'. Recognising and using character strengths through a positive psychology approach needs to be explored in professional leaders. Studies show that this will help them to lead better in a VUCA world (Cameron, 2012: 1-2). They are more likely to be able to use a collaborative or collective style of leadership which is thought be more successful in these VUCA times (Petrie, 2011: 12).

2.5.3   Character strengths as defined by positive psychology

As mentioned in the brief overview (Section 2.2.2.1), Seligman and his teams identified six universal virtues from which stem 24 character strengths. These can be seen in the figure below.

The VIA Classification of Strengths

Every individual possesses all 24 character strengths in different degrees, giving each person a unique character profile. These all include the six virtues.

WISDOM
Creativity
Curiosity
Judgement
Lover of Learning
Perspective

COURAGE
Bravery
Perseverance
Honesty
Zest

HUMANITY
Love
Kindness
Social Intelligence

JUSTICE
Teamwork
Fairness
Leadership

TEMPERANCE
Forgiveness
Humility
Prudence
Self-Regulation

TRANSCENDENCE
Apprec. of Beauty & Excellence
Gratitude
Hope
Humour
Spirituality

Figure 2.1: The VIA Classification of Strengths

Source: Adapted from VIA Institute on Character, 2017

Peterson & Seligman (2004: 369) describe character strengths as being positive personal attributes that reflect virtue and human excellence and that can be developed through deliberate interventions or over time through personal experience. Park, Peterson and Seligman (2004: 603) defined character strengths as "positive traits reflected in thoughts, feelings and behaviour. They exist is degrees and can be measured as individual differences".

Some of the studies have shown the relevance of a particular strength for a particular career path. Seligman (PERMA, 2012) shows that people in certain occupations are more likely to have clusters of certain strengths. For example, the fact that CEO's, in general, exhibit zest, hope and curiosity (as mentioned above).

In the current study, there was no intention to focus on any specific character strength or cluster of strengths but rather allow the VIA Strengths Test to determine each participant's 'top five' strengths as part of the coaching process. Some studies tend to look at specific character strengths only.

For example, Sosik *et al.* (2012: 367-382) in their study of top executives, considered relationship between direct reports and the reports of boards members and found a direct relationship in three character strengths. These were integrity, bravery and social intelligence.

2.5.4   The VIA Strengths test

The VIA-IS (as it is known now) is the Values in Action Inventory of Strengths which was formerly known as the Values in Action Inventory. The VIA test is based on Peterson and Seligman's (2004) review of those virtues, both historically and currently which are universally valued by major religions and philosophies (Peterson & Seligman, 2004: 13).   Related to these virtues are 24 character strengths which are morally valued and contribute to fulfilment and happiness.

The on-line measure of strengths using the VIA taxonomy was created under the direction of Seligman and Peterson (Park, Peterson & Seligman, 2004: 605). This is the most widely used strengths assessment associated with the positive psychology movement. The VIA Inventory of Strengths measures 24 character strengths by means of a 240-item self-report questionnaire (10 questions per strength). The measure is typically taken on-line although Linley, Nielsen, Gillett and Biswas-Diener (2010: 8) administered it to 240 students through a paper-and-pencil version. The questionnaire asks individuals to report the degree to which statements reflecting each of the strengths apply to them (Park *et al.,* 2004: 605).

2.5.5   Critiques of a strengths-based approach

There are hundreds of studies showing the effectiveness of positive psychology and various elements of it. For example, Kauffman, (2006: 219-249) cites studies showing how a small number of coaching sessions using a positive psychology approach can provide significant shifts from a coaching perspective. Niemiec (2013), in reviewing literature pertaining to the first ten years of the VIA Character Strengths, considered applied research on the 24 character strengths, their use in practice, the effect of combinations of strengths and the outcomes stating that this is fairly new territory. He says that various studies show the most commonly and least commonly reported character strengths in various countries and between different population groups. He describes the science of character strengths as young and developing.

Contrasting with research supporting the use of positive psychology, Chamorro-Premuzic (2016) provides evidence showing that strengths-based coaching can weaken individuals. Stating that there is no scientific evidence that these approaches are effective, he provides reasons for scepticism regarding leadership development approaches that focus only on strengths, saying that they create a false sense of competence and overused strengths can become toxic. He doesn't acknowledge the Realise2 approach (Quinlan *et al.,* 2011: 1146), where, different to other classifications, respondents are advised of their individual strengths and weaknesses and given the option as to where to concentrate their developmental efforts.

The VIA Institute on Character (2017) show research reports on over 50 studies which include character strengths and many of these, although addressing strengths in various ways, also included studies where weaknesses have been incorporated.

2.6   COACHING

This section considers how coaching is defined and conceptualised in relation to other developmental approaches. As this study dealt with leaders in professions and their perceptions of the coaching process, it was important to explore general perceptions of the coaching industry and the steps that have been taken to 'professionalize' the coaching industry. A factor contributing to the confusion in consumers' and researchers' impressions of coaching is the status and qualifications of individual coaches.

2.6.1   Definitions of coaching

The literature shows that the term 'coaching' is contested as there are multiple understandings of what coaching is.

2.6.1.1 Professional Coaching

One of the most useful ways of viewing coaching is through the International Coach Federation (ICF) perspective and they define professional coaching as:

> *… partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential, which is particularly important in today's uncertain and complex environment …* (ICF, 2016b)

This definition is inclusive rather than excluding approaches which may be appropriate and applicable in different contexts.

Other definitions causing confusion are life coaching, executive coaching, leadership coaching, business coaching and coaching psychology. Each of these has now become a discipline in its own right.

2.6.1.2 Life Coaching

Jarosz (2016) referred to the same ICF definition under the guise of 'life coaching'. Jarosz appropriation of 'professional coaching' as 'life coaching' is likely to add even greater confusion around definitional issues. Different authors have a wide range of understandings as to what constitutes 'life coaching' and other styles of coaching. Thus it is often difficult to ascertain which kind of coaching researchers or authors are referring to in their studies, the focus of the coaching intervention, the approach to the purpose of the research, the coach's background, qualifications and 'fitness to purpose'.

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2.6.1.3 Executive Coaching

According to The Sherpa Survey (Sherpa Coaching LLC, 2016: 9) Executive coaching is a highly specialised type of leadership development. They define Executive coaching as:

> *"regular meetings between a business leader and a trained facilitator, designed to produce positive changes in business behaviour in a limited time frame. Thus trained facilitators produce positive changes in business behaviour on a set schedule within a limited time frame."*

The survey found a change from their 2006 to their 2016 survey in that in the former survey the rationale for executive coaching was behavioural problems, whereas in 2016 the emphasis has moved to leadership development (2016: 23).

2.6.1.4 Leader Coaching and Leadership Coaching

Ely *et al.* (2010: 285) define leadership coaching broadly in terms of a relationship between a client and a coach who facilitates the client becoming a more effective leader. They outline (Ely *et al.*, 2010: 586) a combination of four unique features in which leadership coaching differs from other forms of leadership development:

- Meeting two sets of needs – those the primary client and then of the organisation they are leading (this ties in with Kahn's duality of client)
- Coaches need a unique skill-set
- The client-coach relationship involves rapport, collaboration and communication
- The coaching process needs to be flexible to achieve the required results

The current study involved leaders so it is important to look at leader coaching and leadership coaching where authors have different interpretations. In this section, Ely *et al.* (2010: 585) cite the Centre for Creative Leadership's (CCL) definition of leadership coaching as being "a formal one-on-one relationship in which the coachee and coach collaborate to assess and understand the coachee and his or her leadership developmental tasks, to challenge current constraints while exploring new possibilities, and to ensure accountability and support for reaching goals and sustaining development"

2.6.1.5 Business Coaching

Although the participants in this study took part individually and 'duality of client' (Kahn, 2011) was not a consideration, it is interesting to consider the definition of Business Coaching as defined by The Worldwide Association of Business Coaches (WABC) (2016):

> *Business coaching is the process of engaging in regular, structured conversation with a "client" : an individual or team who is within a business, profit or non-profit organization, institution or government and who is the recipient of business coaching. The goal is to*

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enhance the client's awareness and behaviour so as to achieve business objectives for both the client and their organization.

2.6.1.6 Coaching Psychology

Although overlapping with coaching and psychology, Coaching Psychology is a form of coaching with strong theoretical foundations and is a complimentary partner to positive psychology (Madden, Green & Grant, 2011: 71).

In defining Coaching Psychology which embraces positive psychology, Grant (2006: 12) states that:

Coaching psychology can be understood as being a systematic application of behavioural science to the enhancement of life experience, work performance and well-being for individuals, groups and organisations who do not have clinically significant mental health issues or abnormal levels of distress.

2.6.2   What coaching is not

In discussing a professional identity for coaches, a complicating factor is the similarity between coaching and other intervention modalities. Griffiths and Campbell (2008) found substantive similarities between coaching and counselling. Gray, Saunders, Curnow and Farrant (2015: 3) concur that this constitutes one of the challenges in discussing the professional identity of coaches, as there are similarities in that both counsellors and coaches seek to help the individual, both conduct sessions either 'in person' or via electronic means and both aim at initiating personal change.

2.6.2.1 Counselling

Counselling tends to focus on past experience and on exploring and understanding the client's history (Gordon, 2012: 211-212). Biswar-Diener (2009: 544) speaks of how it would be a good idea for psychologist to expand their array of services by adding coaching. However, the author omits to say that these require different areas of expertise and new training would be required for a counsellor to become a legitimate/genuine coach.

2.6.2.2 Mentoring

Mentoring implies skills transfer from a wise elder or experienced person in the organisation or field. Often mentors could use their power or influence to reach mentoring goals. Carr (2015) International Mentoring Association, describes how mentoring differs from coaching.

Simply put, I believe that mentoring has to do with learning something that you might not have learned on your own or possibly might have taken you much longer to learn on your own. The essence of any mentoring relationship is the relationship itself. It is the relationship that determines whether anything of value is transferred between the mentor and the partner. Whether the mentor acts as a teacher, guide, catalyst, role

model or any of the other dozen roles that have been enumerated, the key factor as to whether there is a transmission of knowledge or wisdom depends on the quality of the relationship.

Most effective mentoring relationships grow and develop in a way that maximises the exchange of value between both parties (Carr, 2015).

The difference between coaching and mentoring is outlined by Forde, McMahon, Gronn and Martin (2013) and adapted as follows:

A coach does not necessarily have expertise in the area in which the client works. But they should be adequately qualified as coaches and have experience through the practice of coaching. A coach allows the client to find their own answers through powerful questions leading to reflection.

A mentor is usually a person with expertise and similar experience to the mentee. They have practiced skills and provide advice and suggestions.

In the literature, there is often ambiguity in the use of terms which makes it difficult to establish whether the authors were exploring coaching or mentoring.

2.6.2.3 Consulting

Consulting is led by experts in the field in which they are consulting. The consultant is expected to provide answers. There are differences between the consultant and coach (501 Commons, no date). A coach supports the client in achieving the client's own outcomes, builds on strengths, facilitates growth, helps the client to find their own solutions and has expertise in coaching techniques and promotes self-discovery. Usually there will be a programme of sessions spanning a period of time with coaching sessions taking place at regular intervals. Contrasting with that, a consultant is responsible for the results, tries to correct weaknesses or solve problems, gathers data and reports what needs to be done and is the technical expert or advisor and provides information. Consulting is usually project driven with faster results expected.

2.6.3   Perceptions of the coaching profession

As this research involved considering professional lawyers' and accountants' perceptions of changes during their coaching programmes, it seemed appropriate to review the literature regarding general perceptions of the coaching profession (or industry) and changes towards greater professionalisation. There is commonly a lack of information provided in the literature regarding the professional qualifications and experience of the coaches used for research purposes. There are still many grey areas (Van Nieuwerburgh, 2014: 5) regarding the conceptualisation and practice of coaching and as discussed above, many different definitions.

2.6.3.1 Steps to professionalise the coaching industry

Grant and Palmer (2015: 22-25) defined professionalisation as the process whereby a gainful activity moves from the status of 'occupation' to the status of 'profession'. In 2004, it appeared that

the diversity of backgrounds and methodologies used in coaching and volume of people claiming to be coaches resulted in confusion as to what qualifications or experience a coach needs and what constitutes coaching (Sherman & Freas, 2004: 1). Grant (2006: 14) implied that coaching was an industry and not a profession as there were no licensing requirements for coaches who were not psychologists. Gray (2011) explored the concept of the professionalisation of coaching and despite efforts by coaching organisations to unify knowledge, professional standards and codes of ethics, believed that it would be difficult to unify. However, Gray, Saunders, Curnow and Farrant (2015: 2) in a later study, concluded that the professionalisation of coaching could raise standards and improve the quality of helping interventions for clients and organisations.

In 2012 a global alliance between the International Coach Federation (ICF), the Association of Coaches (AC), European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC), was formed in order to rationalise coaching standards globally. A growing demand for coaching services, motivated consumers, the providers of coach training and coach practitioners to advocate that the coaching industry becomes more professionalised (Lane, Stelter & Stout-Rostron, 2010: 357-368). The ICF updated the eleven coaching core competencies in June 2015 (ICF, 2016c). They require that organisations offering coach training are accredited providers (ICF, 2016d) and that coaches are credentialed (ICF, 2016e) at either Associate Certified Coach (ACC), Professional Certified Coach (PCC) or Master Certified Coach (MCC) levels. The credentialing process requires that applicants, in addition to meeting other requirements, complete the ICF Coach Knowledge Assessment (CKA) test (ICF, 2016f) which is aligned to their Code of Ethics (ICF, 2016g) by which members are bound. Other coaching organisations have taken similar steps to regulate the industry.

In their 2016 study, Lai and McDowell (2016) compared relevant existing competency frameworks (for coaching practitioners) in organisations such as the ICF, AC and the Special Group in Coaching Psychology – The British Psychological Society (BPS) in order to consider similarities and differences. They drew up a new competence framework which they tested in a pilot study, the purpose being to acknowledge the perspectives of commissioning clients, coaches and coach practitioners. Many efforts are thus being made both by organisations and researchers in order to 'professionalise' the coaching industry.

2.6.3.2 *Status of individual coaches*

Regardless of attempts by coaching organisations to regulate the profession or industry, unless researchers are more vigilant regarding reporting the qualifications, certification and experience of the coaches in their studies, the validity of their findings will remain questionable. The results of the ICF 2016 Global Coaching Survey (2016: 5) showed that the main concern expressed was untrained individuals who call themselves 'coaches' (2016: 19). They estimate (2016: 7) that there are currently 53,000 professional coach practitioners worldwide.

It is encouraging to note that in a few studies attention was paid to the qualification, experience and niche area of expertise/speciality (Gazelle, Liebschutz & Riess, 2015). These all affect the outcomes of the research and the validity of findings.

2.6.4   Coaching models and approaches

As can be seen from the range of definitions, multiple approaches to coaching and ways of classifying these and the models used mean that the situation is complex (Stout-Rostron, 2012: 85-144).

Ives (2008: 101) in an attempt to distinguish between the different approaches to coaching, lists the following:

- Coaching from a humanistic perspective
- Behaviour-based approaches
- Cognitive coaching
- Adult learning approaches
- Positive psychology model
- Adventure-based model
- Systemic approach
- Goal-oriented approach

Neither integral coaching nor brain-based coaching are included in his list, despite the fact that they were both being used in 2008, at the time of this writing. It is thus difficult to draw up a comprehensive list.

It is not within the scope of this research project to discuss all possible models and approaches in detail. However, it has been important to explore the literature relating to the coaching framework and underpinning theories used for the coaching process used in this study.

2.6.4.1 *Theories underpinning the model used in the research*

The coaching approach used in this research was the first five sessions of the Cornerstone Integrated Coaching Model (CIC) developed by the author (Eckstein, 2015: 18). In the context of using their individual signature character strengths, sessions addressed the participants' 'inner world', their leadership of others and roles played and their 'way of being' in the external VUCA world.

The figure below shows the literature relating to the main theoretical influences behind the approach to coaching. Details of the approach are discussed in Chapter 3.

Theories and models

These are the strongest influences on the
The Cornerstone Integrated Coaching Model:

A Positive Psychology including the VIA strengths test and strengths-based coaching in general. Ungerer (et al) base their leadership reflective practices on the virtues and strengths of Positive Psychology.

B Wilber's philosophy, influenced by Habermas, as operationalised through Flaherty's Integral approach to coaching. The 'four quadrants' and 'six streams' models play a part. Flaherty incorporates Neuroscience in building new neural pathways.

C Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle. Incorporated in the coaching at all sessions for reflection on the coaching sessions and assignments and may be used for issues arising.

D Kahn's 'Coaching on the Axis' legitimatises the approach to incorporating Positive Psychology, Integral Coaching, Kolb and Neuroscience in a Business Context through awareness of 'duality of client' and making explicit, the implicit of 'below the line'.

Figure 2.2: Approach to coaching: Theoretical model

Many of the theories underpinning the model used in this research have already been described above.

A: Positive psychology (A in Figure 2.2)

A brief overview of positive psychology has already been discussed in 2.2.2. In 2.5.3 Character Strengths were defined and 2.5.4 the VIA Strengths as a test for measuring and prioritising an individual's top strengths was outlined.

Ungerer *et al.* (2013) work links these 24 character strengths (Seligman, 2002) with reflective practices as a way to access man's 'inner world' (Ungerer *et al.,* 2013: 33-37). They are referring specifically to leaders so their work links positive psychology and leadership. The aim of leaders engaging in reflective practices is to help them access their 'inner worlds'. In order to help leaders cope in this VUCA world, Ungerer *et al.* advocate that leaders engage in a set of reflective practices which they have based on positive psychology's 24 character strengths. This is a way for leaders to be more intuitive and thus have more influence.

B: Integral psychology and coaching (B in Figure 2.2)

In regard to man's 'inner world', the work of two other philosophers has reference, Habermas (Cranton, 2006; Heroux, no date; MacIsaac,1996) and Wilber (2000). They are philosophers and not coaches but their work has been operationalised for coaching purposes and represented as coaching models by various coaching organisations, for example New Ventures West.
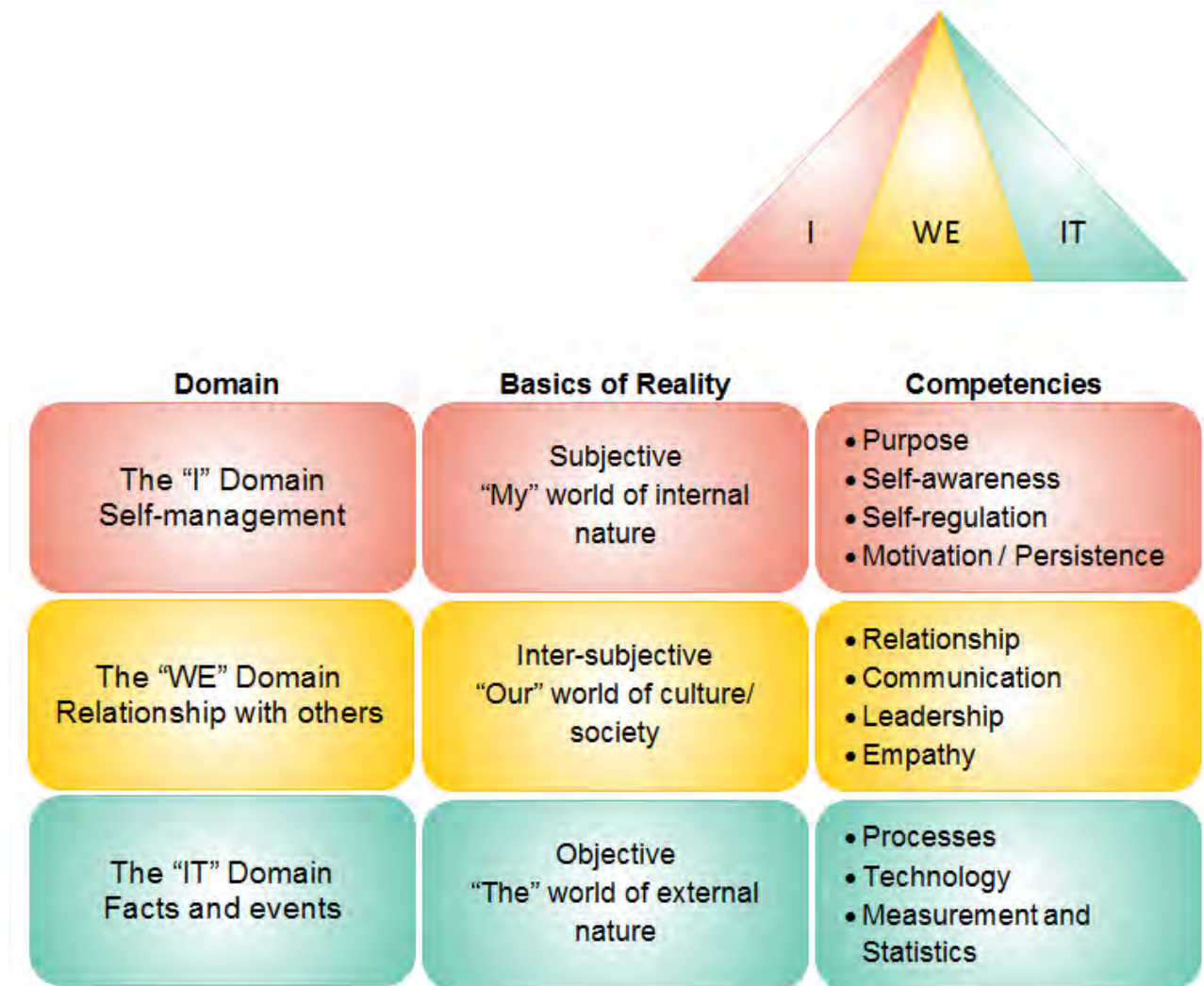
Figure 2.3: Domains of competence

Source: Adapted from Centre for Coaching, 2010: 18

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The Figure 2.3 above depicts an Integral coaching model and shows the 'I' domain in relation to 'we' and it' . The focus of this study is on the 'I' domain, the leaders' inner world'. However, there are elements of the other two domains as leadership in the VUCA world needs a strong element of 'we'. Petrie refers to this as a collaborative style of leadership (Petrie, 2011: 21). There would also be an element of 'it' where external factors like the VUCA world, systems, the organisation the

leader is leading would all fall in the 'it' domain. From an Integral perspective, whatever occurs in one domain will have influences in other domains (Centre for Coaching, 2010).

The figure above shows the way Habermas's theory has been operationalised for coaching purposes. Habermas's 'Three Generic Domains of Human Interest' (Cranton, 2006: 4) show three primary cognitive areas in which individuals generate knowledge (MacIsaac, 1996).   In the researcher's view, the domain of his 'emancipatory knowledge' identifies 'self-knowledge' or 'self-reflection' and I argue that there is an interesting link with Smut's 'inner world'. Heroux (no date: 1) refers to Habermas's three domains as being 'my world', 'our world' and 'the world' and he aligns these to Guattari's 'three ecologies' of self, society and natural environment. O'Flaherty and Everson (2005: 3-13) show how Habermas's model can be used in coaching leaders.
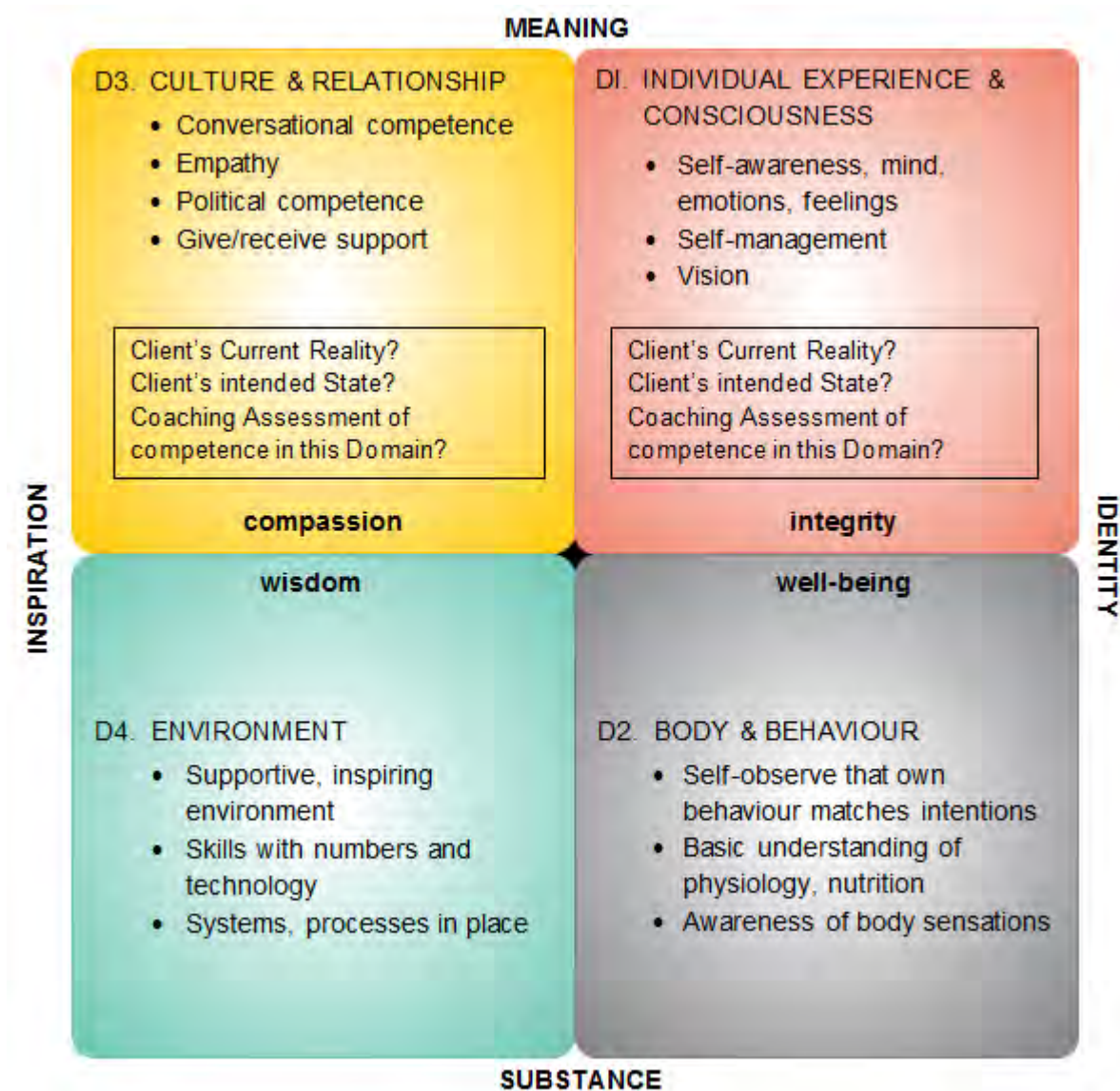
Figure 2.4: Four Human Domains Model

Source: Adapted from Centre for Coaching: 2011: 7

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The work of Habermas influenced Wilber's thinking and he (Stout-Rostron, 2014: 111-118) developed his Four Quadrant's model (Wilber, 2000) which is used in economics, politics, business and other fields. This model has been adapted by various coaching schools including the work done by Flaherty (2010: 59-80) who embraced various Eastern and Western philosophies. New Ventures West (2015) and the Centre for Coaching, 2011), Centre for Coaching use the model in various ways, including that shown in Figure 2.4 above. Domain 1, Individual Experience and Consciousness, is where 'internal reality' would be experienced in this version of Integral coaching. This is where Wilber would situate the 'inner world' that we are considering in this section of the literature review.

C: Kolb's experiential learning cycle (C in Figure 2.2)

Adult learning theory plays an essential role in all approaches to coaching. According to Kolb (1984: 132), learning is the process whereby development occurs. Thus because the current research looked at accountants' and lawyers' experiences and perception of the role of coaching in developing character strengths in leaders, Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory forms part of the framework on which the coaching programme was built. Learning underpins the models and techniques used in this research. In addition, developing implies building new neural pathways (Rock, 2010) and thus reaching a stage of Unconscious Competence (Businessballs.com, 2016a) in using those strengths. O'Flaherty and Everson (2005) show the use of the cycle in Leadership Development.
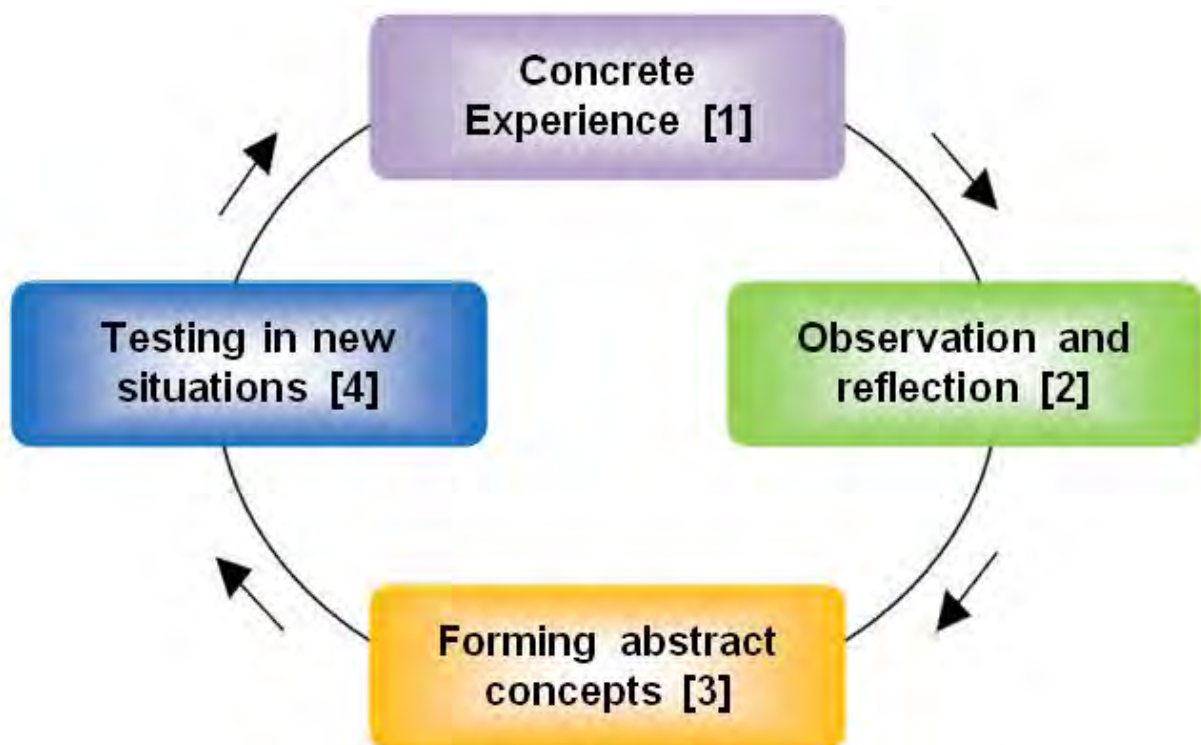
Figure 2.5: Kolb's Experiential Learning Model

Source: Adapted from Kolb, 1984: 42

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D: Kahn's Coaching on the Axis (D in Figure 2.2)

The theories on which Kahn's work is based are listed on the right of his diagram below. As a business coach, Kahn speaks of 'duality of client' meaning that coaching needs to address the needs of the person being coached and also the expectation that the business has in terms of the coaching agreement where a coach is engaged by an employer to develop its staff. In his coaching model below, he looks at what is above the ground (external environment and business environment) and thus he refers to that as being 'explicit'. In the coaching relationship, the aim is to create awareness, in other words, to make explicit which is implicit or 'below the ground'. This would include the individual aspects of 'inner world' and thus incorporate character strengths.
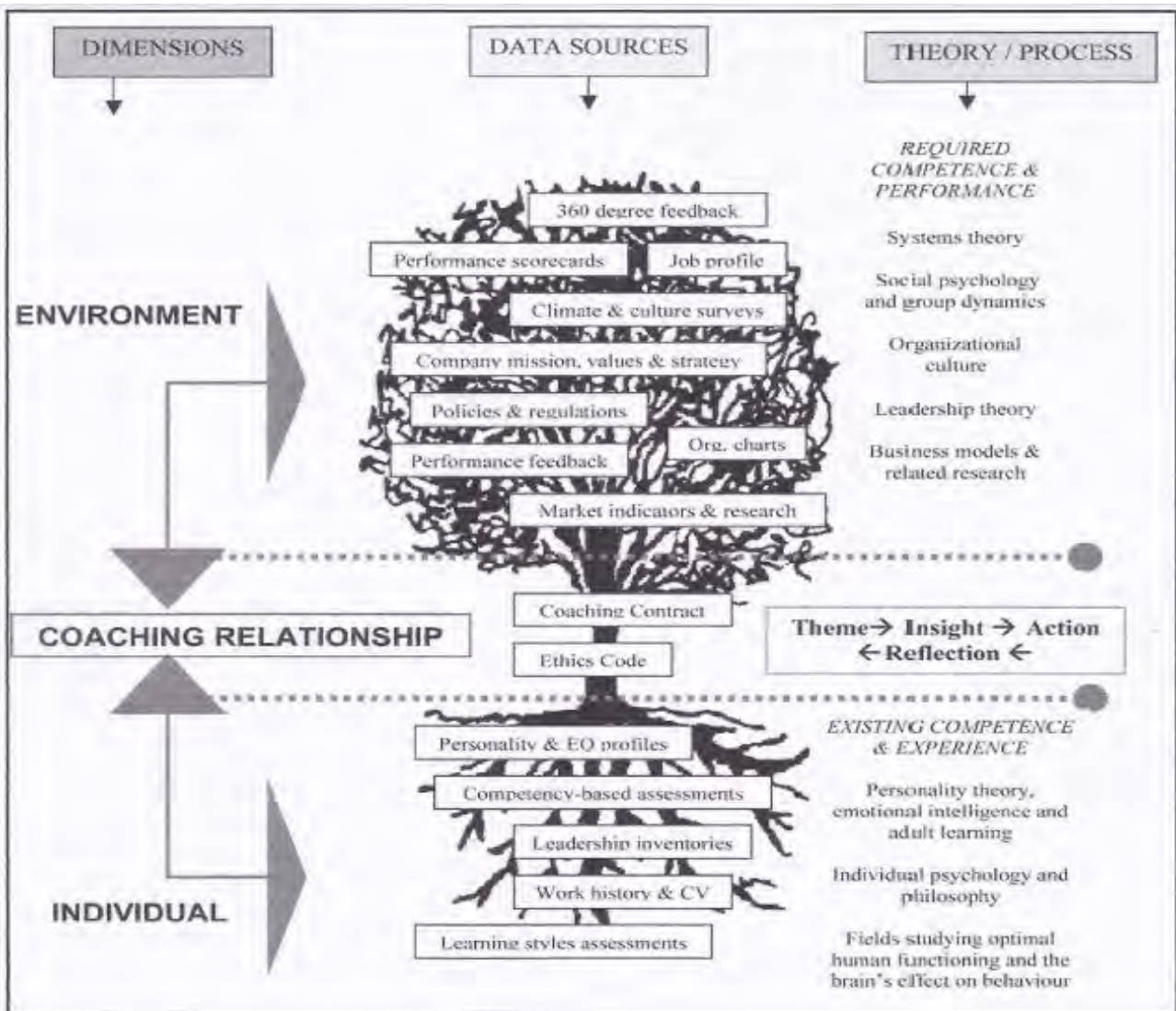
Figure 2.6: Kahn's Coaching on the Axis Tree

Source: Kahn, 2014: 57

Hattingh (2000) researched self-awareness as a condition for personal leadership. Self-awareness is essential in order for coaching to be effective. As a result she describes self-awareness as a "psychological state or condition of attending to one's physical, spiritual, emotional and/or mental qualities by means of reflection, introspection and/or inner speech" (Hattingh, 2000: ii). Minnaar (2012) expanded on Hattingh's findings and found that self-awareness could be increased through a coaching intervention without using many assessment tools.

2.7   OTHER RESEARCH THAT HAS EXPLORED STRENGTHS-BASED COACHING

Although there were no studies that directly relate to the research question, the following studies explored related areas.

Clifford (2011) explored what coachees experience, from their perspective, when exploring their strengths during a coaching process. The purpose of the study was to deepen understanding and to help enhance the coaching process when using a strengths-based approach. The author cites studies of executives working on their strengths in order to be more engaged in their jobs and have a better quality of life. Her findings show that various factors influenced how participants responded to exploring their strengths, including their comfort when talking about their strengths and weaknesses. This study used a multiple case study using a strengths-based approach (including the VIA strengths test) in coaching six professional people in senior positions for a three month period. Unfortunately, although the researcher acted as the coaching practitioner she did not refer to her coaching qualifications, experience, or methods used. In addition she was both the practitioner and the researcher which may have affected her results in terms of social desirability bias, and there is no evidence of triangulation.

Transitioning to new, higher levels of leadership often presents challenges and the failure rate is high. Reynolds (2011) explored the meaning of coaching for newly appointed senior leaders in their first twelve to eighteen months in role. The six participants in this research approach were transitioning from one senior level in their organisations to a higher level and being coached by the researcher/practitioner and three other coaches (who had recognised coaching qualifications). Reynolds found that the leaders perceived that coaching had assisted them in recognising and then developing new competencies, which they regarded as critical to their successful transition.

An issue which leaders face during transitioning to higher positions and at other times is that of maintaining a positive identity. This has become more difficult in times where the external environment has become VUCA. Bennett's (2015) study, in addition to covering the participant's experience of being coached and their lived experience of uncertainty, also considered the changes that executive and leadership coaches need to make during these times in order to meet the needs of the organisation and the leader being coached. Thus the coaches' perceptions were included in the data in considering developing an holistic capacity for uncertainty while a sense of positive leadership identity remained a crucial factor (Bennett, 2015).

Many researchers describe lawyers' feelings of dissatisfaction with the legal profession. In her study, with super women lawyers, Snyder (2012) combines research on this dissatisfaction with a decline in professionalism and mental health issues amongst lawyers. She believes that a decline in public perception could be attributed to a 'stereotypical lawyer personality', law school training and practice conditions. From a more analytical perspective Snyder's (2012) study suggests that contrary to previous studies, and the generally perceived view that thinking dominates feeling in every aspect of a lawyer's practice, this may not apply to those female lawyers who excel.

However, Snyder used the Brief Strengths Test (which she acknowledges as a shortcoming). It is possible that findings based on answering 24 questions (instead of the 240 question online Values in Action (VIA-IS)) make the research results questionable. It takes time for participants to fully assimilate the VIA findings for their signature character strengths.

Elston and Boniwell (2011: 16) conducted a strengths-based coaching study considering the value derived by women in the financial services. They launched a coaching intervention to help them identify their strengths and practice using them. Elston and Boniwell (2011:16) found that all participants derived value from using their strengths.   The purpose of this study was to explore their experiences. The VIA Strengths test was used. They found that this has practical implications for improving workplace experience and increasing engagement with work. Govinji and Linley (2007) provide evidence showing that it is necessary for individuals to take action to gain value from their strengths (Elston & Boniwell, 2011: 27). This is supported by Clifton and Harter (2003: 10) who suggest that strengths-based development should focus on identifying strengths and also on introducing these into the workplace.

According to Quinlan *et al.* (2011: 1148) in Seligman's comparative study of two groups with two different coaching approaches, in the one group, the use of one top strength every day for a week led to significant improvements in happiness, which was still evident six months later. The other group members were asked to use their top five strengths 'more often' experienced only transient benefits and thus their benefits were not sustainable. In other words, Quinlan *et al.* (2011) show how the use of strengths was an important factor in gaining benefits, rather than just the identification of those strengths. Of significance is the fact that Quinlan also pointed out that the attitude of coach practitioners in strengths-based interventions has also been shown to influence participants' outcomes.

Quinlan *et al.* study (2011: 1157) cites Decci and Ryan (2000) who argued that individuals have fundamental psychological needs for autonomy, relatedness and competence. The first two characteristics link to the work of David Rock's neuroscience approach to coaching and are elements of his SCARF model (2010). These were built into the coaching approach used in the current study, and also link to Quinlan's *et al.* approach that the coach practitioner's attitude influences the success of any strengths-based coaching approach.

The VIA Institute on Character (2017) provide a robust comprehensive inventory giving details of over 200 summaries of character strengths research. Many of these are relevant as they refer to the use of strengths in the workplace.

Biswas-Diener (2009) describes coaching and shows how coaching appears to be merging with psychology, suggesting that developing a hybrid practice incorporating coaching may protect psychotherapists from burnout and may also help them to innovate their practices. To demonstrate the synergy between personal coaching and psychotherapy, a coaching case study incorporating positive psychology VIA (Values in Action) strengths test was used. This article explores a way in which coaching could be useful to psychotherapists. Biswas-Diener suggests that adding coaching to services offered could help prevent the clinician's burnout. He does however not highlight the additional skills and training that a psychotherapist would need in order to become a qualified, competent coach.

Burnout is experienced by 25 to 60 percent of physicians across all specialities and the details, causes, indicators and effects are addressed in Gazelle's (Gazelle *et al.,* 2015: 508)   This case study involved a physician who, suffering from burnout engaged a coach who uses a positive psychology approach including a strengths test in his coaching programme. From the description and strengths identified it appears to be the VIA Strengths test. However, this is not clear from the article (Gazelle *et al.,* 2015: 508-513). This article is significant to the current study as it deals with coaching professionals and calls for further research in the role of coaching in managing physician's burnout.

Although Rodriguez and Rodriquez (2015: 854-866) do not define their understanding of the term 'Millennial', most authors and commentators use the year of birth of millennial individuals as being between the early 1980's and 2000's. Rodriquez and Rodriquez's conceptual paper shows that in this VUCA world, those leading Millennial need to adapt their leadership styles to bring out the best in Millennial who have different characteristics to older people. Leaders need to consider the Millennial strengths which include being tech-savvy, informed, diverse, multi-taskers and autonomous. The authors also advise leaders to be aware of millennials' 'less positive traits' such as their being plaintiffs, working at lightning speed and 'grasshoppers'.

In the current study, the leaders were professional accountants and lawyers with 40% to 60% of those they were leading (articled clerks and those who have qualified in the last 10 years) are likely to be classified as Millennial and, according to Rodriquez and Rodriquez, would benefit from a different style of leadership to older team-members.

Sosik *et al.* (2012: 367-382) stated that to date, no studies linking character strengths to executive performance could be found.   Their study isolated four character strengths as defined by the VIA Strengths test in 191 participants in the upper levels of executive leadership.   Their findings

showed that character strengths can be improved over time and this links back to potential development through coaching.

2.8   SUMMARY

Leaders are functioning in a VUCA world where their external reality is constantly changing and their professional reality is challenged by the demands of their professions and factors such as the influence of Millennials. Their internal reality is often submerged through the pressure of leading in difficult times. In the face of all these challenges, the aim of this research was to see if coaching had a role to play in assisting leader to recognise and use their character strengths and thus have a greater understanding of their internal reality, which in turn would enhance their ability to lead in the external VUCA environment and their business or professional environment.

CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1   INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter explored the literature relating to the role of coaching in developing character strengths in leaders. Given this background, the research question in the current study was: 'What are professionals' perceptions of their strengths-based coaching experience on their ability to lead? The aim of this research was to explore accountants' and lawyers' perceptions of strengths-based coaching with particular reference to recognising and using their character strengths in their leadership roles.

Thus, the main objectives of the research were to:

i)   identify leaders' awareness and use of strengths prior to the coaching

ii)   explore changes in awareness and application of character strengths during the coaching intervention

iii)   identify leaders' perceptions of the coaching process and the development of their character strengths.

This chapter provides the context of the study (Babbie & Mouton, 2014: 282), the rationale for the research approach, an overview of the research design, the sampling strategy, data collection, how the data was analysed and synthesised, the role of the researcher, ethical considerations, strategies to ensure the quality of the research and the potential limitations of this study.

3.2   CONTEXT

My main coaching experience over the last five years has been in coaching accountants and lawyers, many of them are leaders in their professional firms. These clients are significantly at the mercy of the VUCA (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014: 27) environment. Petrie's study (2011:7) shows that CEO's identified their number one concern as the growing 'complexity' of their environments where factors making it difficult to manage include lack of access to complete or decipherable information and results not being predictable.

I noticed that my clients were not aware of their character strengths as identified by Seligman (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) and when I incorporated awareness and development of these character strengths during the coaching programmes, there appeared to be shifts which positively influenced clients' 'way of being' (Rogers, 1980) in their leadership roles and personal lives. Utilising a positive psychology strengths-based approach as part of an Integral coaching framework (Flaherty, 2010) helped me as a coach-practitioner to achieve positive results in executive coaching programmes.

Thus, for this study, the Integral coaching approach was modified to incorporate self-observations, practices and exercises based on the participants' top character strengths. Thus, in addition to Ken Wilber's Integral philosophy (Wilber, 2000) operationalised by Flaherty (Centre for Coaching, 2011), the framework for the coaching included positive psychology (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

There was a synergy between my work as a coach practitioner and the work of Ungerer *et al.* (2013) who married positive psychology with reflective practices for leaders. Other elements underpinning the coaching process were the neuroscience basis of building new neural pathways (Rock, 2010), Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (Kolb, 1984) and Kahn's work (2014) in satisfying the needs of firm and participant.

The theories behind my coaching approach were explored further in the literature review.

3.3   RATIONALE FOR RESEARCH APPROACH

As the research objectives were to explore and describe the participants' experiences and perspectives on the role of coaching in developing character strengths in leaders, a qualitative approach was chosen as the best way to address the research aim. Bloomberg and Volpe (2012: 27) provide support for this by saying that the choice of the research approach is directly tied to the research problem, purpose and research questions. They note that a qualitative approach is suited to research providing a deep understanding from the perspective of the research participants.

Babbie and Mouton (2014: 271) add that qualitative research is suited to the study of social processes over time, rather than reconstructed in retrospect. Cresswell adds that researcher's own personal training and experience need also to be considered when choosing the research approach (Creswell, 2003: 22) and gives an example of the researcher's experience in conducting open-ended interviews and observations. Thus, I used an interpretive qualitative research methodology (Babbie & Mouton, 2014: 643) which was well suited to the current study, as it privileges participants experiences and perspectives. According to Bryman and Bell (2007: 402) qualitative research is a strategy that usually emphasises words rather than a quantification in the collection and analysis of data. Thus, this was appropriate for a study involving interviews and coaching.

To achieve the research objectives of understanding the participants' experiences and perceptions of the role of coaching in developing their character strengths, within the framework of a qualitative approach, the study was a multiple case study. Babbie and Mouton, (2014: 281) emphasise that the qualitative researcher, should make a deliberate attempt to see things from the participants' perspectives. This was consistent with the style of coaching used in this research where the coach, through assessments and the use of models looks at issues through the client's "structure of interpretation" (Flaherty, 2010) or way of seeing the world.

3.4   OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH DESIGN

In order to answer or address the three outcomes and the research question, the research project was designed so that data could be collected at three points, the pre-coaching interview, coach's reflective notes during the coaching programme and finally the post-coaching interview. Although not part of the research programme, a chemistry session was held in order to inform participants, answer their questions and assess whether they met the inclusion and exclusion criteria. At the pre-coaching interview, I collected the first set of data from the responses of the participants. This was followed by the VIA Strengths test (University of Pennsylvania, 2015) which is a self-test administered on-line and can be considered as part of the pre-coaching research interview as it wasn't part of the research, but provided a coaching tool through identifying individual's character strengths.

During the five coaching sessions of a minimum of one hour each, held at bi-weekly intervals, the coach's reflective notes, made immediately following each session, formed the second set of data which answered the second outcome in providing data on the changes in awareness and application of participants' character strengths during the coaching process.

The transcribed wording from the audio-recording of the final post coaching research interview provided the third set of data.
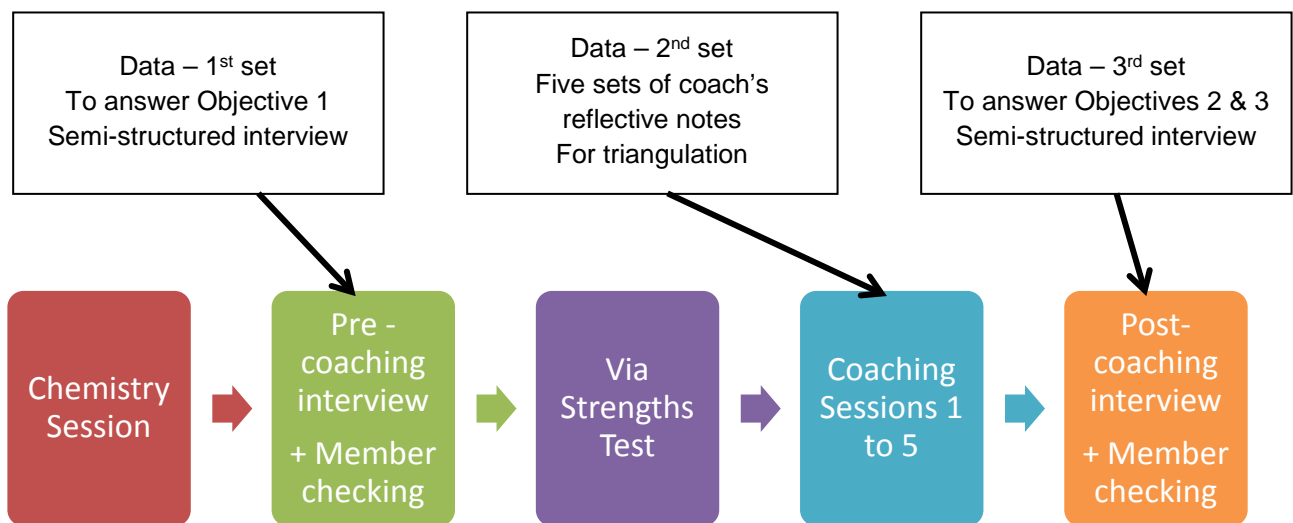
Figure 3.1: Flow of research and coaching

Putting the above sequence in the context of the whole research design, in the figure below, it can be seen that the literature review forms the foundation of research design, and the other stages flow from that.
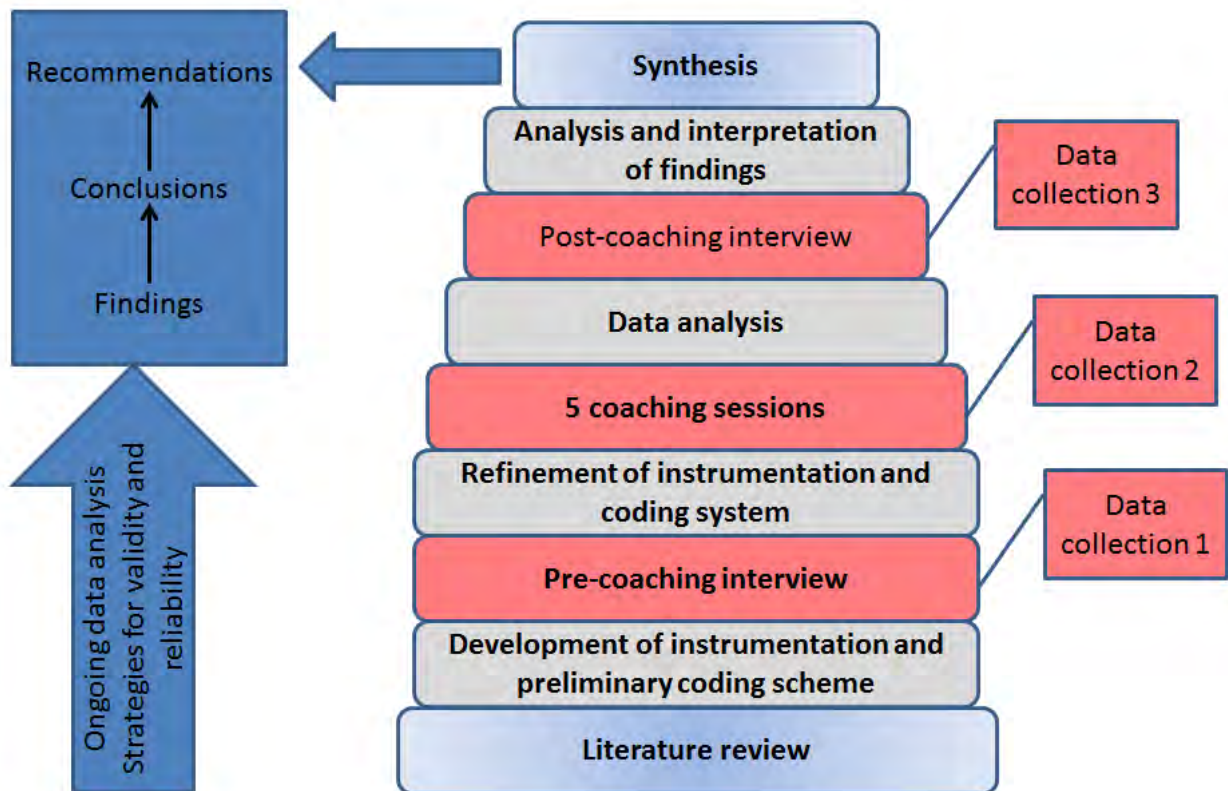
Figure 3.2: Flowchart of research design

Source: Adapted from Bloomberg and Volpe (2013: 251)

3.5   THE POPULATION AND SAMPLE

I used a purposive, convenience sample of leaders in the accounting and law professions as I had five years' experience of coaching in this sector and thus have primary contacts in the field. Bloomberg and Volpe (2012: 104) explain that purposive sampling is sometimes referred to as purposeful sampling.   The purpose is to select information-rich cases, with the objective of providing insight and understanding to the phenomenon being studied, thus describing the context in depth. This approach suited my study. There are limitations to using a convenience sample where the researcher relies on availability and the final participants may not provide rich input into the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012: 248). I considered this but decided that in this particular case I perceived those volunteering to be ideal participants.

Bloomberg and Volpe (2012: 119) describe their snowball sampling strategy as inviting participants to refer other participants to the researcher. I chose not to do this form of snowball sampling as, from a confidentiality perspective, I preferred participants not to know the identity of other participants. The snowball sampling strategy utilised to recruit potential candidates was by inviting my existing coaching clients (who were therefore excluded from participating) to canvass potential participants. They forwarded details of the study and my contact details to people whom they felt were potential participants. Those who were interested in participating were asked to contact me,

which they did. Thus, I made no direct approaches to participants whom I may have considered as suitable. I found that this approach led to a high level of buy in and full participation to the process by the candidates who did contact me.

Within the allocated time-frame, 20 applicants responded positively, showing interest in taking part in the research. I replied to all via e-mail or phone, answered their questions and ascertained whether they met all the inclusion criteria and whether any of the exclusion criteria applied. The original criteria were:

Inclusion criteria:

- Accountants and lawyers
- Currently in leadership roles
- Prepared to engage fully in the research and coaching programme.

Exclusion criteria:

- Clients of the researcher/coach in the last five years
- Where the researcher/coach was a client of the firm where they practise
- Any ethical reason for their not being included (e.g. conflict of interest).

Thirteen potential participants met these criteria and were invited to a 'chemistry session' where we meet and see if the researcher and the potential coachee get on well enough to be able to work together. The chemistry session did not form part of the research but was an important step in making sure that the participants were fully informed and suitable candidates to take part in the research and the chemistry was thus part of the selection process. All 13 were suitable but the sample size was considered too large to handle effectively. Although Yin (2013: 9) argues that it is difficult to generalise a definite sample size required, I originally anticipated working with five to eight participants. Yin (2013: 9) states that in deciding how many cases to include in a multiple-case study, the more cases, the greater confidence or certainty in a study's findings. Thus, in view of the high calibre of suitable applicants, I decided to extend the number of participants to ten as I anticipated that the attrition rate would be high owing to the nature of unexpected demands on these leaders in the VUCA environment in which they operate.

In order to choose which ten of the 13 would be included, the inclusion criteria were further modified. In addition to the inclusion and exclusion criteria above, the following inclusion criteria were introduced:

Inclusion criteria:

- Participants must have gained either a CA qualification with a minimum requirement of a Chartered Accountant Qualification (CA) or be qualified lawyers with at least a Bachelor of Arts (BA) or equivalent and in addition a Legum Baccalaureus (LLB) degree

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- They must currently be working full time in a professional practice where they were in a leadership role
- Prepared and available to engage fully in the programme.

This excluded one applicant who was head of a tax department in a major accounting firm but did not have a CA qualification, one participant who held a CA qualification but was employed in a government entity and the third was a CA and the financial director of a private manufacturing concern and therefore not full-time in a professional practice. Thus, three participants were excluded.

The resulting ten participants formed a rich optimal combination for research purposes and this is summarised in Table 3.1 below arranged according to Bloomberg and Volpe's Template for Participant Demographic Matrix (2012: 106).

Table 3.1: Participant demographic matrix

	Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Accountant or Lawyer	Number that they are leading			
						1 to 15	16 to 100	101 to 200	Big 4 Accounting firm
1.	Andrew	59	M	White	LLB	10			
2.	Charles	38	M	Asian	CA SA Board exams			200	
3.	Cynthia	33	F	Asian	LLB LLM (Masters in Labour law)?				Big 4
4.	Jane	37	F	White	CA SA B Com Honours				Big 4
5.	Kate	41	F	White	LLB		60		
6.	Kelly	55	F	Asian	LLB LLM (Business law)		16		
7.	Ron	65	M	White	LLB	3			
8.	Sam	28	M	Black	CA SA			200	
9.	Sylvia	33	F	White	CA SA				Big 4
10.	Tony	47	M	White	BA LLB MBA			120	

From the above table it can be seen that:

- There were ten participants

- Participants were given psedonyms to protect their identity

- Ages ranged from 28 to 65 years

- Five participants were female and five male

- Four race groups were represented

- Five were leaders in accounting firms and five were leaders in law firms. However, one leader in an accounting firm had an LLB and not the CA qualification so still met all the inclusion criteria.

- In addition to their formal accounting or law degrees, one had an MBA and two had Master in Labour Law. In addition to LLB, three had gained the extra Conveyancing qualification.

- Their main place of work covered six cities over two continents, South Africa and Australia.

- All worked for different firms (ten different firms) with the size of firms varying from a small boutique law firm up to three being leaders in three different of the the Big Four accounting firms.

- The size of the teams they were leading ranged from under ten people to teams in the Big Four accounting firms where the size fluctuated depending on the size of each project and could be greater than 70 people.

All participants were based in offices in four different large cities either in South Africa or Australia.

3.6   DATA COLLECTION AND RECORDING

Selected literature reviews preceded the data collection and this informed the study. In order to address the research questions, I collected data at three points, prior to the coaching programme, throughout the programme and after the conclusion of the programme.

I used two different data collection methods in order to enhance triangulation. Two semi-structured interviews were held, one before the start of the coaching and after the completion of the coaching programme. According to Bennett, Verwey and vd Merwe (2016: 5) semi-structured interviews enable the collection of rich data because the interview guide provides only a few open-ended questions and this enables the researcher or other interviewer to probe the participant's responses during the conversation and explore areas raised by the participant in a flexible manner. Thus, meaning could be clarified and rich data gained, and this fitted the purpose of this research programme.

Each of the 19 interviews (ten pre-coaching and nine post-coaching) was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim with the transcripts being provided individually to each participant to be checked for authenticity.

The other collection method involved the coach's reflective notes after each of the five coaching sessions with each of the ten participants providing 47 sets of data. One of the participants withdrew from the programme after the second coaching session. Thus in total 66 items of data were collected.

The steps in the coaching process, and the data collection points are described below:

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Table 3.2: Coaching process and the data collection

Step	Session	Process	Documents
1	Chemistry	After gaining Ethical Clearance, the first step was holding the Chemistry Session to meet the potential participants and provide preliminary information. The 'fit 'of client to coaching, and to this particular research was ascertained. During the session the participant was presented with the ICF Code of Ethics. This session did not form part of the research project but was necessary for the selection of research participants and for coaching to take place.	Appendix A: Letter confirming Ethical Clearance Appendix C: ICF Code of Ethics
2	Pre-coaching interview	Once it was agreed that the person would participate in the research, the next step was completing the Consent to Participate in the Research before the Pre-coaching Research Interview could take place. This semi-structured interview was held, recorded and transcribed forming the first set of data.	Appendix E: Information Sheet with Consent to Participate in the Research Appendix F: Interview Schedule 1
3	Member checking	Copies of the transcripts of their individual interviews were sent to each participant in order for them to do 'member checking' (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012: 113) for them to confirm and ensure the accuracy of the document.	
4	VIA Strengths test (Pre-coaching)	After the interview, participants completed the VIA Strengths test (public domain - reference) independently on-line and sent the results to the researcher. (This was part of the coaching process).	
5 to 10	Coaching sessions	I conducted five Executive coaching sessions with each participant using a strengths-based approach within a coaching model developed by the researcher. These were held about two weeks apart. The participants did assignments, crafted together by coach and participant between sessions. (This was part of the coaching practice.)	
		After each of the five coaching sessions, the coach completed reflection notes. (This data forms part of the research.)	Appendix G: Coach's Reflection Template
11	Post-coaching interview	This was conducted by a trained field assistant and held after the conclusion of the coaching programme for research purposes, recorded and transcribed. (This forms part of the research.)	Appendix H: Interview Schedule 2
12	Member checking	Copies of the transcripts of their individual interviews were sent to each participant in order for them to do 'member checking' (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012: 113) for them to confirm and ensure the accuracy of the document.	

3.7   DATA ANALYSIS

Literature relating to data analysis was reviewed and thematic analysis chosen as the method used in this study.

Thematic analysis is an analytic approach and synthesising strategy used as part of a meaning-making process (Lapadat, 2010: 926-928)

> *Thematic analysis is the systematic approach to the analysis of qualitative data that involves identifying themes or patterns of cultural meaning: coding and classifying data, usually textual, according to themes: and interpreting the resulting thematic structures by seeking commonalities, relationships, overarching patterns, theoretical constructs, or explanatory principles. Thematic analysis is not particular to any one research method but is used by scholars across many fields and disciplines.*

According to Lapadat (2010), researchers might use their interview questions as a starting list of prior themes for coding documents which they say is an approach that can facilitate within- or cross-case comparisons. They also state that an inductive approach to coding is more typical where themes emerge from and are grounded in the data. A combination of these two approaches was used as in the first and third sets of data, the semi structured interview questions formed an ideal starting point for recognising themes. Whereas in the coach's reflective notes following each of the five coaching sessions per participant, themes emerged from the data gathered.

Braun and Clarke (2006: 78) define thematic analysis as a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. However, they add that it often goes further in interpreting various aspects of the research topic. They (2006: 85-86) say that the researcher needs to be guided by a set of three questions, namely, the actual research question, the questions asked in the interviews and thirdly, the questions that guide the coding and analysis of data.

They say that one of the benefits of thematic analysis is its flexibility and provide a six-phase guide to applying thematic analysis. This approach was followed in the current study:

- Familiarise yourself with your data
- Generate initial codes
- Search for themes
- Review themes
- Define and name themes
- Produce the report

I followed Braun and Clark's process, remaining flexible, and reflecting and journaling on my evolving recognition of new codes needed for emerging concepts in the data. Details of the approach to thematic analysis and a sample of rough working papers in the appendices (see Appendix I, Figure I.2 and Figure I.3).

3.8   THE ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

I took careful notes, both in my capacity as researcher and as coach, in my reflective journal over an 18-month period, before and during the research programme and this provided valuable evidence in order to refine the methodology and approach to the coaching programme. Prior to the submission of the research proposal the research/coaching sequence was tested on five subjects and elements on three other participants. This resulted in modifications. For example, it was found that three coaching sessions were insufficient to gain useful data and the programme was increased to five coaching sessions.

At first it had been intended that I, as the researcher would engage other coaches to conduct the coaching part of the research. However, it seemed that different styles of coaching and different levels of experience would provide less consistency in the data collected. Thus, I chose to revert to performing the roles of researcher and coach-practitioner.

One of the weaknesses of this approach would be the validity of data collected thus greater attention was paid to triangulation and an external field-worker used for the post-coaching interviews.

3.9   ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Stellenbosch University Ethical Clearance procedure (University of Stellenbosch, 2016) was correctly followed as per the Stellenbosch University Departmental Ethics Screening Committee Checklist as set out on the website. No fieldwork took place until confirmation of clearance had been received. Each participant was given the ICF Code of Ethics (see Appendix C) and ICF Core Competencies (see Appendix D) by which the researcher is bound. Contracting was done upfront, both verbally and then the participant signed the Consent to Participate form (see Appendix E) I told participants that at any time if they wished, they did not need to answer any question that I might ask, not realising that this was of a sensitive nature to them. In addition, although they had signed permission for me to audio-record all interviews and coaching sessions, I invited them at any point to request that I turn off the recording. This happened on two occasions, once at the participant's request and on the other occasion at my suggestion.

The principles of voluntary participation; no harm to the participants; anonymity and confidentiality; avoidance of deception and analysis and reporting were adhered to (Babbie & Mouton, 2014: 520). In my capacity as the researcher, I explained these to each participant. As the research was conducted with leaders working in a range of professional firms, each individual participant had individually volunteered and their firms were not involved and no consent or permission was required from the firms. However, the special ethical considerations of their professions were protected.

3.9.1   Voluntary participation:

Due care was taken to avoid coercion and ensure voluntary participation.   Thus participants volunteered in their personal capacities to be part of the research programme. In order to preserve the integrity of the research, the exclusion clause ensured that participants were not drawn from firms who were clients of mine nor firms where I was a clients of theirs either in my private or any of my business capacities.   No payment was made to me by participants. Nor did they receive monetary compensation for the time they invested in the research programme. Thus there was no reason for any participant not to be truthful in their responses during the research. I also respected the right of any participant to withdraw from the project at any time during its duration and advised them of this during the contracting.

3.9.2   No harm to the participants:

In addition to avoiding any activity or inference that may cause harm, I made sure that they knew that support was available and participants were given contact details and had access to this. However, none felt that they needed support. In addition, as a coach bound by the ICF Code of Ethics and having passed the Knowledge Assessment Test, I'm alert to areas that may arise during the coaching process where I should refer the participant to a professional qualified in a different field to mine (e.g. counsellor or social worker). This situation did not arise.

3.9.3   Anonymity:

The participants were known to me as researcher and coach so anonymity was not possible. However, participants were allocated pseudonyms in this research report.   The identity of participants was not shared with anyone.   The researcher made sure that adequate time was allowed between interviews or coaching sessions so that there was no overlap of participants at any interview or coaching venue.

3.9.4   Confidentiality:

Input relating to participants (audio recordings, character strengths printout, relational maps, interview transcripts or information) was handled with great care. All documents were password protected. My computer is not used by anyone else and has a password to gain access. Recordings were stored on a separate hard-drive in a locked steel cupboard. The researcher signed a Confidentiality Pledge as part of the Information Sheet and Consent to Participate in the Research (see Appendix E)

The researcher checked each participant's preferred e-mail address to ensure privacy for any correspondence needing to be sent to participants.

Potential conflict of interest: No conflict of interest was anticipated and nor did it materialise during the research study.

3.9.5   Avoidance of deception:

The research purpose and aims were outlined in the initial information letter and the informed consent. The chemistry session provided an opportunity for information to be shared and questions asked. If any changes had become necessary, the participants would have been advised timeously and given the option to withdraw if they should so wish. Nine of the ten participants completed all interviews and coaching sessions except for one who was posted to a position in the USA and found it difficult to continue because of the pressure of his leadership role and also because of the time zone differences for holding Skype calls.

3.9.6   Analysis and reporting:

Ethical standards were maintained. A hard-copy of the Information Sheet with Consent to Participate in the Research (see Appendix E) was handed to each participant before the commencement of any research. This detailed the above-mentioned ethical standards.   In addition, an additional document drew attention to the need conduct audio-recordings of interviews and coaching sessions. This was sent to each of them and they were required to sign it and return it to me. The field assistant was made familiar with the Information Sheet with Consent to Participate in Research (see Appendix E), trained, given the Interview Schedule 2 (see Appendix H) and signed a Confidentiality Pledge (see Appendix J).

3.10   STRATEGIES TO ENSURE QUALITY

In this study, the researcher chose to be the coach to ensure more uniformity in the way the coaching was conducted across participants.

3.10.1   Credibility

According to Golafshani (2003) the credibility of qualitative research depends on the ability and effort of the researcher. To increase the trustworthiness of this qualitative research, the four criteria suggested by Guba (1981 cited by Shenton, 2004: 63) were incorporated. Shenton (2004: 64) recommends the following eleven steps to ensure credibility and these were followed:

3.10.1.1 Research methods

I addressed credibility through using well-established qualitative research methods relevant to this study and aimed to present a true picture of the process and outcomes.

3.10.1.2 Familiarity with culture of the professions

Shenton recommends early familiarity with the participating organisations before starting to collect data but this did not apply in this study. However, I was accustomed to working with accountants and lawyers in professional firms so had an understanding of the tacit features applicable to their working environment. Pilot studies took place in advance of the beginning of the research programme to ensure the smooth-running of the project.

3.10.1.3 Self-selected sampling

As has been described above, the snowball method of sampling involved self-selection.

3.10.1.4 Triangulation

To encourage multiple perspectives triangulation took place through different data collection methods. According to Golafshani (2003) triangulation is typically a strategy for improving the validity and reliability of research or evaluation of the findings. The two semi-structured interviews per participant and my five reflective commentaries per participant assisted with the rigour of the study. A qualified fieldworker conducted the final interview in order to minimise the social desirability bias. Shenton (2004: 65) believes that "the use of different methods in concert compensates for the researcher's limitations and exploits their respective benefits".

3.10.1.5 Steps to ensure honesty in information

All participants took part in a voluntary capacity. The chemistry session provided an extra opportunity for them to ask questions and ensure that they were fully informed before committing to the process. They knew that their information would be treated with confidentiality so there was no reason for them to provide information that was not honest. In addition, the steps recommended by Flaherty (2010) of establishing the relationship to develop trust between researcher/coach and participants and only then exploring possibilities encouraged honesty. They also knew that their integrity was not at stake but that they were contributing to the research process.

3.10.1.6 Negative case analysis

Although these criteria didn't apply directly to this study, of importance is that no attempts were made by the researcher to find themes inclusive to all participants.

3.10.1.7 Supervisor briefings

For confirmability, I utilised supervision and peer consultation to ensure that the findings did arise from the data and not from my own assumptions. Frequent debriefings at regular intervals took place between me and my supervisor to ensure trustworthiness and rigour (Shenton, 2004: 67).

3.10.1.8 Peer scrutiny and member checking

Academics and peers were given the opportunity to scrutinise the project at various stages of refinement both prior to the submission of the research proposal and during the process. Both sets of interviews (pre and post coaching) were audio-recorded and transcribed and send to the participants to verify the correctness of those transcriptions. In one case, one of the participants felt that one sentence was not correctly transcribed and this was changed to conform to his memory of the interview.

3.10.1.9 Researcher's reflective commentary

I kept a research journal throughout the process of developing the research question, deciding on outcomes, preparing the research proposal, refining the pilot studies, doing the literature review and during the research programme. Mostly Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle model (1984: 42) was used as the framework for capturing these reflections.

3.10.1.10 Background qualification and experience of the investigator

As the researcher/coach was the major instrument in data collection, as recommended by Maykut and Morehouse (1994) my personal, professional and coaching qualifications relevant to the study are included in the appendices (see Appendix K).

3.10.1.11 Thick descriptions and audit trail

I took steps to ensure that findings emerged from the data and not from my own assumptions Bloomberg and Volpe (2012: 113) say that the richness of descriptions adds to the criterion of trustworthiness. They describe 'thick descriptions' as a 'vehicle for communicating to the reader a holistic and realistic picture'?. Transferability was promoted by providing a detailed description of the research context and coaching process.

3.10.1.12 Previous research findings

Enhancing credibility through comparing with previous findings was not applicable as no previous similar studies could be found. Elements were discussed in the literature review.

3.10.2   Transferability

In describing transferability, Bloomberg and Volpe (2012: 113) say that it is likely that the lessons learned in one setting might be useful to others. However, they say that qualitative researchers do not expect their findings to be generalised to all other settings. Shenton (2004: 69) states that in qualitative research it is impossible to demonstrate that the findings and conclusions are applicable to other situations or populations.

3.10.3   Dependability and confirmability

Babbie and Mouton (2014: 278) state, regarding dependability, that the audience must have the evidence that if the study were to be repeated with similar or the same participants in similar or the same contexts, that the findings would be similar.

Confirmability, according to them, refers to the degree to which the findings are the product of the focus of the inquiry and not the biases of the researcher. As discussed above, frequent interaction with the supervisor and triangulation were used to ensure confirmability.

3.11   LIMITATIONS

Because I realised that inconsistency of coaching might provide unreliable data, I performed the role of researcher and coach-practitioner. This is a major limitation in that few other coaches will have the same qualifications or experience that I have and nor do others necessarily use a strengths-based approach. Thus it would be hard for other researchers to replicate the type of coaching done during the research. However, the actual research methodology would be easy to transfer and replicate.

In order to compensate for that I was at all interaction points collecting data except the post-coaching research interview. In my role of researcher and coach-practitioner, I made sure that my coaching was evidence-based (Stober & Grant, 2006) thus in line with available best-practice, that I was competent to coach in that manner at that time and that I was always acting in the best interests of the participant's individual needs. From a research perspective, the triangulation aspects mentioned above also ensured validity and reliability.

Literature on coaching accountants and lawyers is scarce. In addition, for coach-practitioners to have access to coaching accountants or lawyers in leadership positions may be more difficult for other researchers or coaches who have not been working in those fields. Having participants in different cities on different continents could be a problem for coaches and research interviewers who are not accustomed to working electronically.

3.12   SUMMARY

In this chapter I provided a detailed description of the study's research methodology, including the context within which the study took place. I used an interpretive qualitative research methodology which was well suited to the current study, as it privileges participants experiences and perspectives. I further described the sampling approach and population followed by the methods used to collect and analyse the data. The role of the researcher, ethical considerations, strategies to ensure quality and limitations of the study were outlined and the potential limitations of the study given together with my attempts to address these.

CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS

4.1   INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter covered the methodology of the current study in relation to the research question and three objectives. The context, rationale for the research approach, overview of research design, population and sample including the demographic mix, data collection and recording, flow of research design, role of the researcher, ethical considerations, strategies to ensure quality and data analysis were covered.

In this chapter, the findings are presented in line with the purpose of this study which was to explore with a sample of accountants and lawyers in leadership positions, their experiences and perceptions of a five-session strengths-based coaching programme. I believed that when coaching clients in leadership roles, a deeper understanding of their experiences and perceptions would be beneficial, enabling leaders to cope better in this VUCA world.

This chapter presents the key findings derived from 19 in-depth one-hour interviews and coach's reflections on 46 one-hour coaching sessions. The study's three objectives were to:

- identify leaders' awareness and use of strengths prior to the coaching
- explore changes in awareness and application of character strengths during the coaching intervention
- identify leaders' perceptions of the coaching process and the development of their character strengths.

As is typical of qualitative research, I have included examples of quotations from participants in the report. To protect the identity of the ten participants, I have given each a pseudonym and all direct quotes are noted with the relevant reference. When quoting from the transcripts in which the participants words were captured verbatim, I have used their own words and included hesitations, 'ums' and breaks in wording. English was the home language of nine participants and the tenth was fluent in English so no translations were necessary. However, I have retained any grammatical errors in the way participants may have expressed themselves in order for the reader to capture the essence of what the participant intended thus authentically recording the participant's perceptions and experience (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012: 164).

The table below shows the three research objectives, three data collection points, format of how the data was handled, who conducted the interview or who reflected on the coaching sessions and the main themes arising.

Table 4.1: Data collection

Objective	Data collection	Format and how	Role	Main themes

	points	data handled		
Identify leaders' awareness and use of strengths prior to coaching	Pre-coaching interview	Semi-structured interview Recorded Transcribed Member checked Analysed	Researcher	Coaching Strengths Leaders
Explore changes in awareness and application of character strengths during the coaching intervention	5 coaching sessions	Coach's reflective notes captured in the research journal Analysed	Coach-practitioner	Growing awareness and use of strengths
Identify leaders' perceptions of the coaching process and the development of their character strengths	Post-coaching interview	Semi-structured interview Recorded Transcribed Member checked Analysed	Field-worker	Perceptions of their experience of the strengths-based coaching programme and use of strengths.

4.2   FINDINGS FROM THIS STUDY

4.2.1   Research Objective 1: Leaders' awareness and use of strengths prior to coaching

In order to consider the findings relevant to the first objective, I have first presented the context in which the leaders operate. This provides background to where they may recognise and use their strengths and ties in with the research question which explores the role of coaching in developing character strengths in leaders.

4.2.1.1 *Leaders*

Leaders are operating in a VUCA world. Some of the challenges I found them to be facing within their firms were the composition of teams they were leading and gender issues.

Composition of the teams they were leading

Some leaders were newly appointed to their positions while others had been leading the same team for up to 15 years or were in the process of transitioning to new firms.   Firstly, the size of the teams they were leading ranged from three to 70 people, but some numbers fluctuated according to what their current projects required and sometimes escalated to far higher numbers. Two were the principal members in privately owned boutique law firms whereas the other leaders were all directors of firms. Three participants were leading teams as part of the Big Four accounting firms. Thus the challenges facing each participant in their leadership roles were different.

Age of both the leader and team-members played an important part in their experiences, as generational differences within the teams presented various leadership challenges where different strengths were needed.

For example, at the pre-coaching interview, referring to age differences in his team members, Charles said:

There are fundamental differences in the way they look at things.

(Session: Pre-coaching, 28 March 2016)

This was supported by Cynthia whose conversation with the interviewer included:

RESPONDENT: … is quite difficult to manage because the 40 year olds do not want to be micro managed...

N: Um.

RESPONDENT: and the 21 year olds want to feel like they're adding value.

N: Yes

RESPONDENT: And they want to be, you know, young and vibrant...

(Session: Post-coaching, 6 July 2016)

I was surprised to find some Millennials as the leaders with team-members ranging in age to over double the leader's age. The above participant herself is a Millennial leading a team comprising people ranging in age from 20 to 60 years. In addition, most younger leaders were dealing with stakeholders much older than they were.

Gender issues

Some comment here… then excerpt

Amongst the broad spectrum of challenges facing her, Sylvia said:

A large portion of my engagement with stakeholders is playing in an area where I'm generally the youngest and often the only female: Managing stakeholders from that perspective is actually quite interesting because there is unconscious bias which is an interesting dynamic.

(Session: Coaching session 3, 6 June 2016)

Kelly also reported that gender was a dynamic she needed to manage in the workplace:

People open up more to a male rather than to a female.

(Session: Pre-coaching, 18 April 2016)

Reasons for volunteering for the programme

Their primary reasons for participating varied over the ten participants. Four mentioned either wanting to become aware of strengths or use their strengths more in their leadership roles. Yet,

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even these differed in ways in which they thought strengths-awareness could help them in their leadership roles.

Tony included in his reasons for volunteering at the pre-coaching interview:

…. To get out of stuckness…. To deploy strengths and get leverage.

(Session: Pre-coaching, 25 April 2016)

Kate said:

I want to know what my strengths are….., self-awareness and thereby improve my leadership.

(Session: Pre-coaching, 18 April 2016)

Cynthia wanted to understand her strengths and how she could use them in her current position having been newly appointed to this leadership role.

(Session: Reflective notes (S2), 2 June 2016)

4.2.1.2 Coaching

As the research question was 'what is the role of coaching in developing character strengths in leaders', it was important to explore their previous experience of coaching. Where they had no previous experience, it was intriguing to find out what their reasons were for not engaging in coaching previously, particularly as they had volunteered to be a participant in this programme. Six participant had experienced no coaching.

Of the four who had experienced coaching, there had been a few coaching sessions at different levels of formal leadership development programmes for the three participants working for global firms. And even where there were leadership development programmes in place (the Big Four), the coaching component was insignificant.

In one case in describing the coaching she had experienced in a leadership development programme, Cynthia said:

…it was more goal setting and competency based rather than relating to leadership development…

(Session: Reflective notes (S4), 27 June 2016)

A case of someone not in accounting and not one of the Big Four, was a lawyer in a private law firm who, over the last few years had six coaching sessions.

All the participants experienced high levels of stress.

Andrew said:

My sessions in the past were based on direction and depression rather than on planning the future.

(Session: Pre-coaching, 25 April 2016)

He also further commented in the post coaching interview:

RESPONDENT: came and sat down to me and said Andrew you know you're the problem, you're not really being nice these days.

N: Um.

RESPONDENT: And because I'm naturally a Mr Nice Guy that's obviously causing conflict within me.

(Session: Post-coaching, 8 July 2016)

Being professional accountants and lawyers, they all maintain their continuing professional development but these cover mostly technical skills relating to their professions.

Although their engagement in development outside of their professions appeared limited, some participants had engaged in a variety of different forms of self-development. For example, one participant had experienced six years of tutoring in Scientology. Others were very involved in religious groups including one participant whose development through her religious group centred around music. Thus individual participants had developed what they considered strengths in those areas.

4.2.1.3 Strengths

None of the participants had done the VIA Strengths Test prior to the pre-coaching interview and nor were they familiar with the concepts of virtue and character strengths. They did not appear to have any knowledge of the type of strengths identified in this test. So when I asked them to list their top strengths at the pre-coaching interview, their answers were spontaneous and based on their perceptions prior to the study. I did not specify the term "character strengths" as I did not want to pre-empt their natural responses.

The table below, in the shaded area, gives the exact words participants used when describing their strengths.

Column 1 shows their pseudonym. In column 2, the date of their pre-coaching interview is shown.

in the next column, the participants' informal, spontaneous responses to the question (Appendix F: Interview Schedule, Question 2b) at their individual pre-coaching interview, relating to their leadership roles:

'If you were to list your top strengths now, what might they be?' (This referred mainly to their leadership roles at work.) They were not given any prompts.

I have captured each person's responses in the order in which they mentioned them.

Table 4.2: Participants perception of strengths prior to coaching

Pseudonym	Date	Perception of strengths – the words participants used
Andrew	Apr 25 2016	Compassion/empathy People centeredness Honesty, integrity Patience Humility Practical
Charles	Mar 28 2016	Confidence Knowledge Making people feel comfortable Social intelligence – relationships – building and sustaining Helicopter view Showing appreciation
Cynthia	Apr 26 2016	Ability to trust and make decisions
Jane	Apr 19 2016	Relationship building Authentic – leads from her own experience, not from theory
Kate	Apr 18 2016	Transparent Accountable Available – accessibility Very organised and communicate this. Make decisions (but also said 'I agonise over things') Reflection Being properly prepared
Kelly	Apr 18 2016	A good teacher (current) People skills
Ron	May 13 2016	Innovation Ability to read and research Integrity Courage Quiet – softly spoken Good listener Respectful
Sam	Apr 19 2016	People person – may tend to be a bit soft Being a role model and being able to see things through other people's eyes Persevere when things go wrong Willingness to learn and research Continuous improvement
Sylvia	March 23 2016	Leadership Empathy. Ability to create follower- ship
Tony	Apr 25 2016	Good at training and mentoring Builds rapport

Thus the phrases that the participants used to describe their strengths, were not 'character strengths' in VIA terminology. They appeared to be values without action or characteristics. It was interesting to note that some, particularly the three who have been on structured leadership development programmes through working for the Big Four, found it easier to spontaneously identify and name their strengths than the other participants. However, it still wasn't easy for them or any participants.

Cynthia said:

It's difficult for me to say what a strength is,…it was to trust my ability to make decisions and to engage and to lead in a situation when I needed to.
(Session: Pre-coaching, 26 April 2016)

Only one participant had done a test similar to the VIA and his answer to 'what have you done in the past to build those strengths?' Tony typified the general answers given:

Tony said:

Nothing much.
(Session: Pre-coaching, 25 April 2016)

Most of the others had no coaching experience nor had been engaged in other training modalities that included strengths awareness nor the development of these strengths. The reasons for this were varied. Some participants admitted that they had previously not engaged in coaching programmes because they had been aware of others being engaged in coaching programmes where in their words, 'the coaching was a waste of time'. They had not seen positive results from others' engagement. People calling themselves 'professional coaches' often appeared to have insufficient training, no accreditation through professional coaching organisations and no experience in the relevant area in which they were coaching. Thus their approaches and outcomes could destroy the credibility of coaching, and especially strength-based coaching. Thus people like Grant (2006) and Stout-Rostron (2012) campaign to raise standards so that coaching can be viewed as a profession rather than as a money-making industry.

a. **Organisational approach to strengths**

Relating to Objective 1, it is relevant to look at the organisation's approach to strengths in relation to few being able to identify their strengths easily. The leaders working in the three global firms all said that their firms were shifting towards a more strengths-based approach to leadership development.

I have noted in my coach's notes from Jane's S3 that in looking back on their firm's approach to coaching, she said:
There is a shift towards being more strengths-based. New courses to meet strengths and development needs have been introduced.

(Session: Reflective notes (S3), 2 June 2016)

Working in one of the medium-sized firms, Charles showed scepticism and said:

…although externally they say they are working on strengths, underneath these nit-picking and I need to make sure I don't end up the same way.

(Session: Reflective notes (S3), 17 June 2016)

In relation to other ways in which firms go about developing people, there were various approaches, but mostly geared towards professional skills. Mentoring was one approach.

Coach's reflective notes:

Kelly stated that although she'd had no coaching, when she was young (in the small firm where she was working) her boss was her mentor and she had one other mentor.

(Session: Reflective notes (S3), 10 June 2016)

Most of the leaders were in some form of transition in their work life and felt that by volunteering and participating in the programme this would help them to transition more easily through using their strengths.

b. Transition

Referring to his reasons for wanting to be coached, Charles mentioned the fact that he was moving to a different firm at the end of the financial year and spoke about currently being:

…in an interesting space.

(Session: Pre-coaching, 28 March 2016)

Cynthia:

I just try and think about it. It's been...because I've probably been in the biggest transition here that I've had since I've joined the firm. Because before I became a director I was an associate director which is one level below the same team...And using my strength is helping me.

(Session: Post-coaching, 6 July 2016)

4.2.2   Research objective 2: Strengths – changes in awareness and application during the coaching intervention

4.2.2.1 *VIA test results*

The VIA strengths test was done after the pre-coaching interview and the strengths identified were used as a tool in the five coaching sessions that followed. See Appendix L for the Classification of the 24 strengths. In this section I show the comparison between what they stated as strengths before taking the VIA strengths test and then actual results.

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4.2.2.2   Comparison between their prior perception and VIA

Table 4.3 below shows the comparison between their spontaneous responses when asked what they considered their main strengths to be, with particular reference to their leadership roles, with their results of the 'top five' or signature strengths as determined by the VIA Strengths test.

The columns in the table below show the following:

Column 1: Pseudonym of participant

Column 2: Date of their first coaching session where data collected at the pre-coaching interview given in Table 4.2 above was used for comparative purposes.

Column 3: Their previous answers have been placed here for ease of reference

Column 4: At the first coaching session, their responses were compared with the VIA Strengths Test results, thus providing a tool for the coaching programme. This column shows the results from the VIA Strengths Test (top five) in priority order with 1 being their top strength.

This was also the date of the first entry in the coach's reflective journal, the second set of data.

Table 4.3: Comparison between participants prior perception and VIA results

Pseudonym	Date of their first coaching session	Perception of strengths – the words participants used	VIA Strengths Test – top five
Andrew	May 2 2016	Compassion/empathy (People centeredness) Honesty, integrity Patience Humility Practical	1. Social intelligence 2. Kindness and generosity 3. Curiosity and interest in the world 4. Judgement, critical thinking and open-mindedness 5. Appreciation of beauty and excellence
Charles	April 25 2016	Confidence Knowledge Making people feel comfortable (Social intelligence) – relationships (building and sustaining) Helicopter view Showing appreciation	1. Hope, optimism and open-mindedness 2. Creativity, ingenuity and originality 3. Kindness and generosity 4. Capacity to love and to be loved 5. Social intelligence
Cynthia	May 27 2016	Ability to trust and make decisions	1. Judgement, critical thinking, open-mindedness 2. Industry, diligence and perseverance 3. Capacity to love and to be loved 4. Spirituality, sense of purpose, faith 5. Gratitude
Jane	Apr 27 2016	Relationship building Authentic – leads from her own experience, not from theory	1. Honesty, authenticity and genuineness 2. Industry, diligence and perseverance 3. Citizenship, teamwork and loyalty 4. Caution, prudence and discretion 5. Self-control and self-regulation
Kate	Apr 28 2016	Transparent Accountable Available – accessibility Very organised and communicate this Make decisions (but also said 'I agonise over things) Reflection Being properly prepared	1. Gratitude 2. Capacity to love and to be loved 3. Kindness and generosity 4. Spirituality, sense of purpose and faith 5. Modesty and humility
Kelly	Apr 28 2016	A good teacher (current) People skills	1. Gratitude 2. Spirituality, sense of purpose, faith 3. Hope, optimism and future-mindedness 4. Zest, enthusiasm, energy 5. Curiosity and interest in the world

Pseudonym	Date of their first coaching session	Perception of strengths – the words participants used	VIA Strengths Test – top five
Ron	May 22 2016	Innovation Ability to read and research Integrity Courage Quiet – softly spoken Good listener Respectful	1. Kindness and generosity 2. Citizenship, teamwork and loyalty 3. Forgiveness 4. Leadership 5. Fairness, equality and justice
Sam	Apr 21 2016	People person – may tend to be a bit soft Being a role model and being able to see things through other people's eyes Persevere when things go wrong Willingness to learn and research Continuous improvement	1. Fairness, equity and justice 2. Capacity to love and to be loved 3. Citizenship, teamwork and loyalty 4. Judgement, critical thinking and open-mindedness 5. Curiosity and interest in the world
Sylvia	April 13 & 20 2016	Leadership Empathy Ability to create follower- ship	1. Industry, diligence and perseverance 2. Hope, optimism and future-mindedness 3. Honesty, authenticity and genuineness 4. Self-control and self-regulation 5. Leadership
Tony	Apr 29 2016	Good at training and mentoring Builds rapport	1. Humour and playfulness 2. Capacity to love and to be loved 3. Spirituality, sense of purpose and faith 4. Judgement, critical thinking and open-mindedness 5. Curiosity and interest in the world

During the coaching, the initial responses to the VIA classification of their individual strengths varied.

There are some interesting indirect similarities. For example, Kelly said regarding her previous university lecturing:

That was something I liked because they (the students) had interesting questions.

One of her strengths according to the VIA strengths test is 'curiosity' and 'interest in the world'. These two seem congruent with 'interesting questions' in his statement.

(Session: Pre-coaching , 18 April 2016)

Tony:

I think sense of humour is one strength and for me it's a way of interacting with the world. For me it feels odd if I can't build rapport with some-one.

This links with one of his actual strengths, 'humour'.

(Session: Pre-coaching, 25 April 2016)

Another example was Sylvia:

…my ability to handle complex situations and get the right outcome.

This requires self-control and self-discipline, one of her VIA top five strengths.

(Session: Reflective notes (S1) , 13 April 2016)

Mostly the participants agreed with the VIA results.

Tony:

I could identify with all of them.

(Session: Reflective notes (S3), 2 June 2016)

However, not all agreed when they first saw the results.

Charles:

Surprise at some of strengths.

(Session: Reflective notes (S3), 17 June 2016)

4.2.2.3 Comparison of character strengths over ten participants

Whilst beyond the scope of the current study, it was interesting to note the variability of strengths among this group of leaders. The ten participants' top five strengths are consolidated in the table below where a score of one denotes the participant's top strength, rank ordered down to five which represents the participant's fifth to top strength.

Table 4.4: Comparison of character strengths over ten participants

Virtue	Strength	Andrew	Charles	Cynthia	Jane	Kate	Kelly	Ron	Sam	Sylvia	Tony
Wisdom/ Knowledge	Curiosity	3					5		5		5
	Creativity/		2								
	Open-mindedness	4		1					4		4
	Love of learning										
	Perspective										
Courage	Bravery										
	Persistence			2	2					1	
	Integrity				1					3	
	Vitality					4					
Humanity	Love		4	3		2			2		2
	Kindness	2	3			3		1			
	Social int.	1	5								
Justice	Citizenship				3			2	3		
	Fairness							5	1		
	Leadership							4		5	
Temperance	Forgiveness							3			
	Humility					5					
	Prudence				4						
	Self-control				5					4	
Transcendence	Appreciation	5									
	Gratitude			5		1	1				
	Hope		1				3			2	
	Humour										1
	Spirituality			4		4	2				3

I have included this table here because it shows very few patterns or similarities in participants top five character strengths. Leadership was identified as a strength only in two of the participants and yet they are all successful leaders. Thus notions regarding leading, leaders and leadership may need to change in this new era.

4.2.2.4 Changes to awareness and use of strength during research programme

My reflective notes for each participant reveal that there was definite growing awareness of strengths during the coaching programme.

Sylvia said:

I'm confident that these are my strengths.

(Session: Reflective notes (S3), 6 June 2016)

Jane said:

I am far more aware of my strengths.

(Session: Reflective notes (S4), 9 June 2016)

4.2.3   Research objective 3:   Leaders' perceptions of the coaching process and development of strengths

This section reports on the findings related to the participants' perceptions of the coaching process and the development of their strengths. These refer mainly to data collected at the post-coaching interviews.

4.2.3.1 Leaders in turmoil

Three sets of influences are considered, these are the external environment, the firm's environment in which they lead, and internal influences.

a.   External

Unemployment in South Africa places an extra burden on leaders. Andrew employs eight people and all are the sole breadwinners in their families. Any strategic decisions he makes will impact on the lives on those families. He says:

Andrew:

RESPONDENT: Yeah I...I...I think um I'm gonna need a decision making which…a primary decision making to mine down quite heavily on the open-mindedness, judgement critical thinking...

N: Um.

RESPONDENT: particularly because I need to make the right decisions...

N: Sure.

RESPONDENT: about accommodation, residential and...and...and um location of office.

N: Um.

RESPONDENT: So my judgement's gonna have to be exceptionally good...

N: Yeah.

RESPONDENT: in making those decisions because they're big decisions.

N: Yes.

RESPONDENT: And they effect a lot of people.

N: Absolutely.

RESPONDENT: And unfortunately or I suppose fortunately or unfortunately every single one of my staff members is the major breadwinner in their home.

N: Um.

RESPONDENT: So effectively...

N: Yeah.

RESPONDENT: I support eight families...

N:: Um.

RESPONDENT: not...not just eight staff members.

N: Yes.

RESPONDENT: Which is...which adds to the stress a bit...

N: Um.

RESPONDENT: because if it doesn't work...

N: Yeah.

RESPONDENT: and I've got to let a staff member go...

N: Yeah.

RESPONDENT: that's a family I'm letting down, not a staff member.

N: Yeah.

RESPONDENT: So...so I think that open mindedness, judgement and critical thinking right now....

(Session: Post-coaching, 8 July 2016)

Above, the strengths he mentions are amongst his top five identified in the VIA strengths test.

The VUCA environment has not changed.

In discussing leadership, Cynthia said:

RESPONDENT: So a lot of the leadership of how I see this role has been around leading firstly agreeing on what is um strategy for the...for the year and we've got a three year view...

N: Um.

RESPONDENT: um where do we see our market and then a lot of it is me leading the individuals in...from a team mix perspective. And then making sure that we all align to that....

(Session: Post-coaching, 6 July 2016)

b. Business related

Because of the dynamic environment in which businesses operate, all felt that they were in a state of transition and this created internal stress.

As mentioned previously in this chapter, all participants were in transition. Two were moving to other firms. Two were battling with having been recently appointed to top positions. One had moved from a major law firm to a boutique firm. During the research programme one participant was seconded to the firm office in Washington DC and was not able to complete the programme. An example given above was of a participant who is considering restructuring his business. The

remaining participant was engaged in a transition of two regional departments merging some of their functions.

c.   Internal

High stress levels were expressed by all the participants. Some of this is evident in the excerpts above. In my reflective journal on June 8th, as an observation I noted how many examples there were of each participant appearing to be stressed.

4.2.3.2 Coaching process

None of the participants had been through full formal coaching programmes before. They had no experience of the benefits of a full coaching programme run by a qualified coach. Thus their perception of coaching was that it was an industry. They felt that coaches were running commercial businesses in order to make money and were not producing the results.

During the coaching sessions many raised the concepts of purpose and meaning.

In reporting on his/her experience of the current coaching Cynthia said:

RESPONDENT: We did a valuing exercise in the one session and from there we came to what do I really feel about this leadership role.

N: Um.

RESPONDENT: Um and I think we ended along what is my purpose...

N: Um.

RESPONDENT: as a leader.

N: Okay.

RESPONDENT: Is to...to be clear in my purpose.

N: Yes.

RESPONDENT: Yeah.

N: And were you over articulate that or is it a um sorry...?

RESPONDENT: It's a work in progress.

N: it's work in progress yes.

RESPONDENT: It's a work in progress.

(Session: Post-coaching, 6 July 2016)

Kelly:

I'm more at peace – general lightness. I used to feel hunted.

(Session: Post-coaching, 7 July 2016)

When confirming that he had no previous experience of coaching, his prior perception of coaching, and his reason for accepting the invitation to take part in this coaching, Andrew said:

N: Yeah. Have you ever been involved in some form of coaching before?

RESPONDENT: No.

N: Not.

RESPONDENT: No.

N: Okay.

RESPONDENT: Um never.

N: Okay.

RESPONDENT: In fact I've... interestingly enough and Brenda won't like to hear this but I've always been sceptical of...of people who call themselves life coaches.

N: Um. Um.

RESPONDENT: Okay and there...and I think there are quite a few...

N: Yeah.

RESPONDENT: business um coaches out there as well.

N: Um.

RESPONDENT: Um so um but I know Brenda from many years and I know her reputation and how...

N: Um.

RESPONDENT: how involved she's been in business planning and structuring and leadership issues. So it was...it was very easy to say well let...let me not regard you as a business coach...

N: Um.

RESPONDENT: but somebody who's really interested and got a lot of knowledge...

RESPONDENT: on this area.

N: Yeah. It sou...I mean it sounds like the coach's history in business and reputation is what...what encouraged you as well to participate in this...

RESPONDENT: Yeah.

N: If it had been a...a random life coach that you...

RESPONDENT: Um.

N: didn't know about you might...

RESPONDENT: There's no ways I would have embarked on it.

N: Yeah.

RESPONDENT: Um but um yeah certainly you know Brenda's reputation is...is amazing...

N: Um. Um.

RESPONDENT: that I was only too happy when she approached me.

N: Okay.

RESPONDENT: I see it as a lovely opportunity.

N: Yeah.

RESPONDENT: You know and po...possibly could put to bed some of my scepticism...

N: Okay.

RESPONDENT: about the whole concept of...of coaching.

(Session: Post-coaching, 8 July 2016)

a. Openness to being coached

The reasons for engaging in this research programme varied. And thus their expectations of what the benefits might be varied, too. The chemistry session had been important in ensuring that each participant was fully informed and not being coerced into participating. One of the inclusion criteria were that they were committed to improving themselves.

Andrew:

RESPONDENT: how that will go. So the synergy between my own strategy planning exercise...

N: Yeah.

RESPONDENT: and focussing on...on...on...on leadership areas particularly based on that um that um uh uh the test that I did with...

N: Um.

RESPONDENT: with Brenda...

N: Um

RESPONDENT: which seems to indicate strengths in certain areas...

N: Um.

RESPONDENT: um has been very useful...

(Session: Post-coaching,8 July 2016)

The aspects of the coaching programme which had been of benefit to each individual were surprising. Daily reflection and journaling had been assigned as part of the coaching programme.

Andrew:

RESPONDENT: Um well interestingly enough um Brenda got me doing journaling...

N: Uh-um.

RESPONDENT: okay which is a...a very new concept to me.

RESPONDENT: and um I set myself at half past five every day...

N: Um.

RESPONDENT: in the afternoon and limited it as like three to seven minutes.

N: Um. Um.

RESPONDENT: And just on my notes thing on my phone...

N: Um.

RESPONDENT: just jot down a few thoughts.

N: Yeah.

RESPONDENT: And funny enough the...out of all of...out of all of the other categories the...the kindness and generosity one seems to be the one I journaled most often.

(Session: Post-coaching, 8 July 2016)

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4.2.3.3 Development of strengths

When the interviewer queried regarding continued use of the newly identified strengths after the conclusion of the coaching programme, the replies were all in the affirmative

a.   Personal strength

Cynthia:

RESPONDENT: Co-incided effort, set the meeting up, have the effort and use that strength of being able to built relationships to my advantage.

N: Um. Um.

RESPONDENT: And um I did that and that was positive.

RESPONDENT: I really have seen...I would say I definitely have seen a positive the last three to four weeks of focussing on the strengths, been more aware of them...

N: Um.

RESPONDENT: and use it.

N: Yeah.

RESPONDENT: That's being the big...the big I suppose eye-opener as I say.

(Session: Post-coaching, 6 July 2016)

Knowing strengths and helped some participants in transitioning.

Cynthia:

RESPONDENT: when um Brenda will say I found it quite valuable...

N: Um.

RESPONDENT: because it's been at a time where I transition from probably in the mix of being a management and cross year...

N: Um.

RESPONDENT: from an associate director to now being...having to operate on that level...

N: Um.

RESPONDENT: for a year.

N: Um.

RESPONDENT: And seeing it differently...

N: Um.

RESPONDENT: to when I was levels below.

N: Um.

RESPONDENT: Sounds okay about the ranks, I wasn't hired as a director.

N: Um. Um.

RESPONDENT: So I've also seen the different side I guess when you are a junior in the team and you don't quite understand why things happen...

(Session: Post-coaching,6 July 2016)

While most were satisfied in having worked only on strengths, some did say that, in future they would also like to work on weaknesses.

Kate:

RESPONDENT: I've always been intrigued by it and um Daisy* who used to work at my firm a long long time ago but however I got closely with her since Christmas I think was approached or something but she forwarded the e-mail...

N: Okay.

RESPONDENT: and I immediately thought yeah this looks good.

N: Yeah.

RESPONDENT: So I replied to Brenda and said yes I'm keen...

N: Yeah.

RESPONDENT: to be a guinea pig, sign me up.

N: Yeah.

RESPONDENT: So I found it fantastic actually.

N: Really.

RESPONDENT: It's opened my eyes. I probably will um go uh on for uh you know maybe another session maybe focussing on weaknesses.

* Not her real name

(Session: Post-coaching,1 July 2016)

None of the participants had done the VIA Strengths Test before the research programme and were unfamiliar with the concept of virtues and character strengths. Although there was very little correlation between what the participants stated as their strengths at the pre-coaching interview and their VIA classification (see Appendix L), in most cases, even if not immediately obvious to them, through the coaching programme they began to recognise and use those strengths. As the coaching proceeded, participants often noticed how their strengths had helped to channel them into their areas of expertise.

In some cases they become much more aware of how important a strength-based approach was.

Reflecting on her development prior to the current study, Sylvia said:

It doesn't make sense to focus all your efforts on a weakness because your weaknesses are inherent whereas you build a strength. Your discretionary effort you are going to get out of a strength is going to be much higher than fixing a weakness.

(Session: Reflective notes (S5), 27 June 2016)

Sylvia:

Two things. One, I think you've got to surround yourself with people that know what your strengths are so therefore you give the opportunity A to push yourself and B to be put in a situation to use your strengths. I'm pretty upbeat most of the time.

(Session: Post-coaching, 8 July 2016)

In some cases, participants drew attention to how they had become aware of how overuse of their character strengths were a hindrance. In my reflective journal I noted that Andrew was showing such great kindness to so many people that he was becoming stressed through it.

b.   Strengths in others and broader impact

Cynthia:

RESPONDENT: Yeah so it is a multi-disciplinary team.

N: Um.

RESPONDENT: So there are lawyers um some are ex prosecutors or advocates...

N: Uh-um.

RESPONDENT: ex policemen, accountants. Some with psychology techniques...

N: Um.

RESPONDENT: so a mixed band of people.

(Session: Post-coaching, 6 July 2016)

In many cases, by the leader identifying and using their character strengths and through that changing his or her behaviour, a better atmosphere has been created at work. I noted in my coach's reflective journal on June 9th that Kelly was intrigued at how, not only was she aware of her strengths and knowing when to use them, she was also noticing the strengths in her team and finding ways of incorporating their strengths into team functioning.

In my reflective journal notes on June 17th I noted that one of Andrew's strengths. kindness was showing in the way that he went out of his way to go and have a 'cup of tea' with the elderly. I wrote that he was listening to his staff more and encouraging feedback on his own 'way of being' and that his staff were responding well to his encouraging them to use their strengths.

4.3   SUMMARY

Thus I have presented the findings according to the three objectives. The following chapter shows my discussion on the findings and links back to the literature review.

CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

5.1   INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this discussion is to see how the findings linked to the literature review. The discussion is organised around the research question: 'What is the role of coaching in developing character strengths in leaders?', and the three main research objectives which were to:

- identify leaders' awareness and use of strengths prior to the coaching
- explore changes in awareness and application of character strengths during the coaching intervention
- identify leaders' perceptions of the coaching process and the development of their character strengths

5.2   LEADERS' AWARENESS AND USE OF STRENGTHS PRIOR TO COACHING

It was important to understand the VUCA context in which the participants were operating, in order to better understand the challenges facing them and their use of strengths. The findings showed that all participants, regardless of whether they were working for global organisations or smaller firms, were subject to the volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity that other authors mentioned (Lemoine and Bennett (2014), Franke (2011), Rodriquez and Rodriquez (2015). It was apparent that all the participants' needed strengths and skills that will help them to cope in this new ever-changing environment. Nothing is static and this makes leading more difficult (Ungerer *et al., 2003*).

Consistent with Rodriquez and Rodriquez (2015), Sheng (2016) and others was the influence of the Millennials. In my findings I was surprised to find that, although I had expected to continue finding older leaders struggling with leading Millennial people and the resulting issues, three of the leaders in very high positions were Millennials who had taken over the leadership of existing teams in professional firms and were leading people up to double their ages. Some of these team-members had been in their current positions for many years. Thus, the old norms of ascending to a leadership position over time are being shattered. The scales are being turned around. Younger people are leading older people in some cases and the stakeholders are often much older than the leader. Every leader is experiencing some aspect of interaction with Millennials.

The challenges facing each leader were different and dynamic. Of interest were the organisational approaches to developing leaders highlighted by the literature reviewed Steyn and Bell (2015), PwC's (2016a) CEO's report. If those organisational approaches have not kept up with the fast-changing times, the old style of leadership will be perpetuated. Petrie (2011), Anderson (2015) and others have shown the old styles not to be effective in the VUCA world. The importance of leading to the future through leadership pipelines was also mentioned by Charan, Drotter (2010) and other

authors. Thus a strengths-based organisational approach was consistent with the work of Zenger and Folkman (2002). This approach has been recommended by these researchers who have studied thousands of leaders and whose principles are being used by global organisations. It was interesting to find, amongst the participants, that even where their firm purported to support a strengths-based approach, some participants were cynical as to whether in practice that was the approach applied. Some questioned whether their organisation was actually following through and using a strength-based approach, or whether this was a facade.

Three participants, each from a different firm in the Big Four, had experienced some coaching sessions as part of their structured leadership development programmes, confirming that larger international firms have a more structured approach and this incorporated some but limited coaching. Only one other participant had previously engaged in coaching (6 sessions). The other six participants had no experience of coaching at all. Their perceptions added richness to the context of the study.

Studies like de Beer's (2013) show how coaching has a role to play in helping to cope with burnout (Gazelle (2015), Biswas-Diener (2009) and that organisations may not appreciate the benefits of coaching for their employees. If they engaged in coaching programmes it might help people experience less stress and thus less burnout. According to certain authors like Siptroth (2007) and Levitt (2015), one of the main reasons for burnout is the mindset cultivated by law or medical schools in ignoring what I have referred to as 'the inner man'. This emerged as applicable to both lawyers and accountants in my study. The current approach promoted during professional training is not conducive to coping in the VUCA world where Petrie (2011) argues we need to concentrate on vertical rather than horizontal leadership development. That is consistent with working on the 'implicit' (Kahn, 2014), a person's 'inner world' (Salmond, 1929), Barton's (2015) 'Who am I?' and other approach aimed at creating greater awareness of aspects like character strengths.

Participants felt that they could not be their authentic selves, as they were constantly inhibiting their ability to express or feel. This could lead to increased levels of stress in their roles in the workplace. I also found that the continuing education programmes available in these professions do little to develop personal skills or management skills, rather concentrating on technical skills. There is a great deal of literature on this and the old norm needs to be broken down and new ways of thinking applied. As shown by the WHR (2015), SAHMRI (2016a), and Niemiec (2014), reflection, mindfulness and meditation have a role to play. Organisations like Google have introduced mindfulness and meditation practices. None of the professional firms at which the participants worked encourage practices like this.

At the pre-coaching interview participants found it very hard to name their strengths. They battled to identify what their strengths were and then find the right words for each strength. This also links to the work of Habermas and individual's ability to name things that occur in D1 or his domain of emancipatory knowledge. This would be Wilber's 'inner singular' domain or where thoughts,

feelings and experiences are found. This could also be relevant in relation to Rock's (Rock & Schwartz, 2006) work in neuroscience where he notes overuse of cognitive skills can lessen a person's use of self and social skills. Incorporating identification or strengths into leadership development programmes has benefits.

Most of the participants were in some type of transition. Their external world is changing constantly and if their work lives are also changing it is hard to find stability. I found that two participants had moved into the top positions in the last year. They needed new coping skills and a new ability to lead into the future and not manage the present. In other words, they were accustomed often to managing the daily processes of 'getting the job done' rather than strategizing or taking the organisation forward in line with the vision. As they progressed they had to leave something behind and thus allow others to perform the management function. In addition, and settle into a new identity (Bennett, Verwey & vd Merwe, 2016).

During the programme, one participant vacated a leadership position in a large law firm and was now in a boutique practice. This required a huge shift in self-identity and a feeling of having his sense of self entwined in his previous firm for so long. He did not have the confidence to know if he could be successful on his own. Two participants were leaving their current firms in the next year. So they were having to lead their existing teams while simultaneously preparing themselves for their new roles.

The tenth was considering relocating and restructuring his firm. All his staff are the sole breadwinners in their families so this is a huge responsibility and weighed heavily on his decision-making. The work of Franke on the VUCA world (2011) and other authors is relevant here. Bennett's (2015) work on maintaining a positive self-identity while developing capacity for uncertainty is also relevant. Reynolds's (2011) study highlights the benefits of coaching during times like this. The challenge is to get firms and individuals to appreciate the importance of approaches, such as strengths based coaching, that will bring some sense of stability.

An unexpected finding was that the five female leaders in the study all mentioned gender related issues during interviews or coaching, whereas none of the five male participants referred to any gender related issues. The gender related issues that female leaders in this study referred to included the attitudes of male fellow directors, members of their teams and other stakeholders. This needs to be explored further in future studies.

5.3 CHANGES IN AWARENESS AND APPLICATION OF CHARACTER STRENGTHS DURING THE COACHING INTERVENTION

The second objective was to study changes in awareness and use of character strengths during the programme. I compared what they said their strengths were before doing the VIA Strengths Test and the five top character strengths as identified by the VIA Strengths Test. It showed differences between their awareness of strengths and a scientific test validated against in excess

of 100,000 participants. On reflection, they mostly agreed that the VIA results were strengths and this was supported by all the studies using the work of Seligman and his teams (Prof Seligman on PERMA, 2015) and Niemiec (2013) where once individuals had identified their strengths they could practice and become more proficient at using them. People do have blind spots (Flaherty, 2010) and often do not recognise positive aspects of themselves. But as shown by Seligman and others, just identifying strengths without creating awareness and use of those strengths over a period of time does not bring great benefits. Coaching can help to build new neural pathways by encouraging a process of using those strengths.

Without exception, my findings demonstrated that all participants were becoming aware of their individual strengths increasingly during the five coaching sessions. Kauffman (2006) also found that a small number of coaching sessions using character strengths can achieve positive outcomes. Quality coaching is effective if it is the right kind of coaching for that person at that time. In much coaching practice, a strengths-based approach is 'normal'.

The actual character strengths identified were not the focus of this study. The focus was the use of character strengths as a coaching tool and leaders' awareness and use of their strengths. However, for further studies, it may be useful to compare the participants' perceptions with their VIA results, as per the table (Table 4.3) showing the strengths of all ten participants. The diversity of the participants five signature strengths was interesting, especially in the light of Seligman's (PERMA, 2015) recent findings which show hope, zest and curiosity to be a cluster of strengths in which successful CEO's are high. This cluster did not appear similar to the top strengths in the leaders in my study. Perhaps leaders in the professions have different character strengths to successful CEO's? And nor was there a similarity between Seligman's study and in Sosik, Gentry and Chun's (2012) findings of top executives. The character strengths identified by the VIA for the participants in my study are thus not consistent with those that might have shown up in other studies, or using other tools to measure strengths. A significant factor might be Mishra's (2016) findings on people who are strong in the cognitive fields. Rock (2010) also stated that cognitive overuse can inhibit recognition of self.

It was evident from my reflective notes that all participants expressed becoming more aware of their strengths and using them in their leadership roles as the coaching progressed. This ties in with the coaching aims expressed by Kahn (2011) as making the implicit explicit, another way of experiencing creating awareness. In other words, individuals have blind spots and do not recognise their strengths. In the literature I have reviewed other theories relating to creating awareness of our 'inner worlds' or ways of helping people to become more aware. Philosophers and coaches theories and models as reviewed in the literature emphasise the importance of increasing awareness.

5.4   LEADERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE COACHING PROCESS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THEIR CHARACTER STRENGTHS

The third objective was to identify leaders' perceptions of the coaching process and the development of their strengths. The main source of data for this section was the post-coaching interview.   It was evident that the degree of environmental turbulence in which they were leading had not changed. Barton (2015) and van Beeck (5 Megatrends, 2015) commented that a collision of megatrends was causing the volatility that we are experiencing in the external environment. Thus, it was not an change in the nature of the external environment that brought about the perceived changes in their 'way of being'.

What appeared to have changed was the leaders' ability to cope and thus their capacity to lead differently. All nine participants who completed the programme believed that they were in a better position to deal with the external and work pressures and in their personal lives. This ties in with the work of Petrie (2011) in advocating what he refers to as vertical rather than horizontal development for leaders in these VUCA times. This is supported by much of the current literature on leadership (Ungerer (2013), Niemiec (2014) who advocate reflection, mindfulness and meditation as some of the ways to develop in a vertical manner (Petrie, 2011). A strengths-based approach provides ways in which to implement vertical development in order to achieve a style of leadership that will help leaders to cope better in these VUCA times. Positive psychology and wellbeing programmes emphasize enabling people to flourish globally (WHR, 2015).

The 2016 Sherpa Survey (Sherpa Coaching LLC, 2016) showed how there has been a shift from coaches previously being engaged by organisations to help clients solve problems to currently being engaged for leadership development purposes. Coaches were previously engaged for reasons that required (traditionally) a deficit approach, and are now geared towards leadership development and a strengths-based approach (Zenger and Folkman (2002). It was interesting to note how participants reported that having recognised the power of using their own strengths, were noticing and using the strengths of others, thus working towards a more strengths-based approach. This also indicates a move towards more collaborative leadership styles (Petrie, 2011; Marthur-Helm, 2016). They were recognising and drawing on the strengths of the team.

While the aim of this study was to use a strengths-based approach to coaching, there are many studies showing how combining a strengths-based and deficit approach to coaching also brings positive results. Niemiec (2013), Seligman (PERMA, 2012) and their teams are working on studies in these areas. It will be interesting to read their findings. The literature also shows how some authors and business schools are very against a strengths-based approach (Chamorro-Premuzic (2016)). It is interesting to consider opposing approaches and this needs to be explored further in future research as it was beyond the scope of this study.

The changes in participants' perceptions of coaching were interesting as well as their perception of awareness of the benefits of coaching for leaders. They reported that they are more likely to think of it for themselves or their teams in the future. As only four had any experience of coaching (not substantial coaching programmes), it was interesting to note the changes in their perceptions through their experience in the programme. They also reported transference to other aspects of their lives. Stober and Grant (2006) and Stout-Rostron (2014) comment on coaching as a profession or industry. Participants in this study appeared to now understand that they need to find coaches with the right experience, qualifications and interest in their fields.

In considering the participants' awareness and use of strengths, Seligman's (2015) five pillars encapsulated in the PERMA acronym are relevant. This study found that all nine participants showed **positive emotions** seeming to look forward to the coaching sessions. If coaching is enjoyable, they will remain engaged. They were **engaged** in the programme and although I had expected high attrition rate due to the demands on these leaders' time, nine of the ten participated fully in both attending the sessions and mostly in sticking to the assignments. As this required commitment they were thus keen to improve themselves and were particularly drawn to the identification and use of their strengths. This was also evident in their attendance and their generally excellent attention to the assignments geared at creating awareness and use of strengths. This ties in with the neuroscience work of Davidson and Schuyler (2015), Rock and Schwartz, (2006) Doidge (2011), Sampson (Redesign my Brain with Todd Sampson, 2013) and others mentioned in the literature review. By building new pathways through constant use of their strengths, they saw the benefits and were encouraged to stay in the programme even with the high demands on their time as leaders in the VUCA world.

Relationships, the third letter in PERMA, was raised often throughout the coaching process by most of the participants. They realised how important relationships were to them. So while accountants and lawyers might be cognitively orientated, they still appreciate the importance of people and their connection to them. Of particular interest was evidence in the form of statements by one participant who spoke of how she could more easily engage with stakeholders at all levels despite the fact that she had previously found gender and age (she is a female Millennial) (Rodriquez & Rodriquez, 2015) a stumbling block. Thus, gaining awareness and using strengths helped the participants to cope with situations that were previously difficult. Without a good relationship, coaching is not be effective (Grant (2006), Stout-Rostron (2014) and Van Nieuwerburgh (2014).

Meaning, their own purpose and helping their teams to find purpose came through strongly in much of the data. This relates to the work of Kahn (2014), Flaherty (2010), and Bennett (2015). This emphasizes the importance of making explicit what is in our inner world, being able to name a strength, and make it explicit and thus the subject of the coaching process. Participants also experienced a sense of **accomplishment** at the conclusion of the coaching. They reported having

achieved new levels of competence in leading in this VUCA world. The literature supports the fact that strengths can be developed, working on them can bring benefits (Kauffman, 2006).

Changes in attitude to leadership style were an emphasis in the literature review, as the old style of leadership is no longer effective (Ungerer, 2015). Some of the participants found that they personally could handle stakeholders better through internalising the coaching practices and using their strengths. As mentioned above, Petrie (2011) and Mathur-Helm (2016) advocate a collective or collaborative style of leadership, which involves drawing on the strengths of others, and not believing that you are invincible (Barton, 2015; Ungerer *et al.*, 2013). This was particularly important to these leaders some of whom were handling diverse groups from an age perspective. It was not only age that made the group diverse, most were leading a mixture of other professionals who were not necessarily from the same profession as they were, people in administration capacities and interns. This is unlike in previous times where people 'climbed the ladder' because they were good in their field or had been there a long time.

5.5   CONCLUSION

This chapter has discussed the findings relating to the three objectives and research questions in relation to the work of others in this field. There were many consistencies with previous studies. Some suggestions for further research arising out of this study have been made, these are expanded on in the next chapter, which also reports on the implications for coaching practice and highlights the limitations of the study

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1   INTRODUCTION

This conclusion chapter summarises the findings, key conclusions and recommendations stemming from the current study. The limitations of this study and further research opportunities are also highlighted.

The research aim was to explore accountants' and lawyers' perceptions of strengths-based coaching with particular reference to recognising and using their character strengths in their leadership roles.

6.2   SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

Following is a discussion of the findings with evidence that supports the analysis and synthesis both from the research, practice and also from the literature perspective. These were derived from applying thematic analysis to the data collected for the three research objectives and the research question.

- **Research objective 1** – To establish leaders' awareness and use of strength prior to the coaching

It was found that prior to the study, participants had little experience of coaching. Those working for the Big Four had been through leadership development programmes at each stage when being promoted to a higher leadership level. However, coaching did not play a significant role. None of the participants had done the VIA Strengths Test prior to the research study and had done little to develop strengths. When asked to name their strengths, most found this difficult.

- **Research objective 2** – To observe/establish changes in awareness and application of character strengths during the coaching intervention

Before the coaching started, each participant took the VIA strengths test and this became a coaching tool as they were coached using only their signature strengths. Once these strengths had been named, most immediately identified with those strengths. However, through systematic use of the strengths, during the five coaching sessions, they all claimed to be using those strengths to cope with challenges in their leadership roles.

- **Research objective 3** – To identify leaders' perceptions of the coaching process and the development of their character strengths

Prior to the coaching, some of the participants admitted to being sceptical of the role of coaching in developing leaders. Some also said that they had perceived coaches in a negative manner because of the reputation of coaches whom they knew. However, during the coaching, their

openness to being coached and their commitment to the programme led to positive feedback on the role of coaching in developing character strengths.

At the post-coaching interview, when asked about their awareness and use of strengths, all had noticed an increase in their awareness of their top five character strengths and their use of them in their leadership roles. This included being aware of the strengths in their team-members and enabling them to apply their strengths thus employing a more strength-based approach in the functioning of their teams. In some cases they gave examples of how they were using their character strengths in their private lives, too.

6.3   IMPLICATIONS FOR COACHING PRACTICE

6.3.1   The capacity for uncertainty

This study helped to demonstrate how leaders can benefit from building their strengths through coaching, and that this helps them to cope better when leading teams in conditions that are volatile, uncertain, chaotic and ambiguous.

6.3.2   Professionalisation of the coaching industry

Where participants might have perceived coaching in a negative manner, the positive outcomes helped them to see coaching as a profession rather than as an industry. Their increased awareness will assist in the credibility of coaches and their willingness to engage in coaching programmes in the future. There scepticism however points to the need to focus on the professionalization of coaching, and the need for regulatory bodies.

6.3.3   Strengths-based coaching

Studies have shown how there has been a shift in the reasons for engaging a coach. Where it used to be to fix problems, in other words deal with weaknesses and thus a deficit approach, the majority of coaching engagements now are for the purpose of leadership development. This study shows how a strengths-based approach is useful in leadership development. It has also shown how a small number (five in this case) of strengths-based coaching sessions can bring about positive change. This has potential for helping to design time limited approaches that are still effective.

6.3.4   Benefits to other coaches

This study may assist other coaches who might be coaching leaders in the VUCA world. If they are coaching lawyers and accountants, it may show the benefits of using character strengths as a tool to aid them in achieving positive outcomes through a small number of coaching sessions.

6.3.5   Benefits to the researcher/coach and implications for my coaching practice

Reading the literature enabled me to focus on a specific area and enhance my understanding of coaching as a profession or industry, and build my theoretical knowledge on topics including this

VUCA world, leaders, character strength and current trends and conversations regarding the various aspects of my research. Understanding more about the role of coaching in developing character strengths in leaders has added to my ability to coach in this manner. Being supervised through this process added to my learning and ability to fine tune my research topic and guided me through the process, it also highlighted the benefit of consultation and meta-reflection.

6.4   LIMITATIONS

- The ability to draw on different theories and philosophies and different coaching styles and models was a key component of the coaching used in this research. The capability of the coach could have influenced the outcomes and could do so in future research.

- Strengths vs Character Strengths. It is important that attention is paid to clarifying the process of naming of strengths. As the literature shows, there are many different tests which measure strengths, the main ones being Gallup Strenghtfinder, Realise2 and the VIA Strengths test. Each one measures strengths differently. A lack of understanding of what a character strength was became evident as the pre-coaching interview where participants were asked to name their main strengths. Their responses covered a wide range of characteristics and values which did not necessarily have actions associated with them. As the coaching proceeded, and after the identification of their 'signature strengths' according to the VIA strengths classification, and by using those strengths during the coaching programme, they noticed the benefits. This process will vary depending on the strengths assessment and coaching process used.

- Having the same coach coaching all participants could be regarded as a strength because it provided more consistency in the style of coaching. It could also be regarded as a limitation in that there a range of coaches were not involved, and thus the benefits of the coaching in this study may relate more to the characteristics of the coach. This was not explored in the current study.

- The number of sessions held could also be regarded as both a strength and a limitation. The number of high quality suitable people volunteering and meeting the inclusion/exclusion criteria made it necessary to introduce further exclusion criteria in order to limit the numbers. However, the resulting number of ten participants having 5five coaching sessions and two interviews each produced an excessive amount of data because there was high commitment and nine of the ten participants completed the programme despite me expecting a high attrition rate. This commitment may not be present in future studies which attempt to duplicate the findings.

- Having the same person as both coach and researcher could be regarded as a limitation. But greater triangulation was introduced in order to increase the validity of the study, and to reduce social desirability bias.

6.5   FURTHER RESEARCH

- For further studies it would be interesting to note how the researcher, coach practitioner or researcher-coach's character strengths influence the outcomes of the coaching process.

- This introduces the question that if a collective style of leadership is most effective in these VUCA times, does leadership not require greater social intelligence than prior to the post-modern times? Leaders need to know the strengths of their team-members and be able to draw on those strengths in a collaborative way. Further research could thus focus on the link between leadership (according to Seligman and Peterson's classification (2004)) as part of the Justice virtue and the social intelligence character strength, which is part of the Humanity virtue.

- This also ties in with Ungerer et al. 'Leadership for all' approach (2013) where reflective practices for leaders tie in to positive psychology's 24 character strengths. Although applauding the work of Ungerer, Herholdt and Le Roux in the field of developing reflective practices for leaders on their character strengths, a criticism would be that adopting a generalist view and not encouraging their leaders to take the VIA Strengths Test first and focus on their top five (signature) strengths, their own efforts will not build the new neural pathways as much as if individuals narrowed their focus. A study that addressed these issues would focus only on the person's top strengths, one at a time and steadily create awareness and practices that incorporated each strength.

- It would be interesting to investigate whether other researchers have found clusters of character strengths for lawyer and accountants in leadership roles. (In his 2012 video, Seligman shows clusters for teachers, CEO's etc. but not the specific combination used in this study).

- It would be interesting to extend Snyder's study of the occurrence of heart strengths in female lawyers, to both men and women in the legal or other professions. In the current study, five people had love in their top five strengths, and those five consisted of three men and two women.

- Although not the intent of this study to question or study the VIA Strengths Test, it is interesting to note the spread of results down the 24 character strengths and across the ten participants in this multiple case study. An unexpected finding was the fact that leadership appeared only twice, as Ron's fourth strength and as Sylvia's fifth strength. A question for future research might be 'What constitutes the character strength of leadership in this VUCA world?'

6.6   CONCLUSION

Although this study has addressed the main research question and objectives, there is still much that is worthy of further investigation.

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APPENDIX A:

LETTER CONFIRMING ETHICAL CLEARANCE

USB
Universiteit van Stellenbosch Bestuurskool
University of Stellenbosch Business School

9 March 2016

Dear Brenda

Re: Ethical screening: Brenda Eckstein - Approved (SU-HSD-002214)

US ID No   : 19735863
Research programme : MPhil in Management Coaching
Title   : the role in coaching in developing character strengths in leaders
Supervisor   : Dr Carol Mitchell

The Departmental Ethics Screening Committee of the University of Stellenbosch Business School (USB DESC) reviewed your application for the above-mentioned research. The research as set out in the application has been approved.

We would like to point out that you as researcher are obliged to maintain the ethical integrity of your research. As such, you should adhere to the ethical guidelines of Stellenbosch University, and remain within the scope of your ethical clearance application and the supporting evidence submitted to the USB DESC. Should any aspect of your research change from the information as presented to the USB DESC, which could have an effect on the possibility of harm to any research subject, you are under the obligation to report it immediately to your supervisor. Should there be any uncertainty in this regard, consult with the USB DESC.

We wish you success with your research, and trust that it will make a positive contribution to the quest for knowledge at the USB and Stellenbosch University.

Should any research subject, participating organisation, or person affected by this research have any questions about the research, feel free to contact any of the following:

Researcher   : brenda@strategy-leadership.com
Supervisor   : mitchellc@ukzn.ac.za
USB DESC Chair : Mias.deKlerk@usb.ac.za

Yours sincerely

Professor Mias de Klerk
Chair: USB Departmental Ethics Screening Committee

Universiteit van Stellenbosch Bestuurskool · University of Stellenbosch Business School
Adres / Address: Posbus / PO Box 610 Bellville 7535 Carl Cronjé Rylaan / Drive Bellville 7530
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APPENDIX B:

GANTT CHART

Month / Activity	DECEMBER GRADUATION: SECOND YEAR											
	Jan	**Feb**	**Mar**	**Apr**	**May**	**Jun**	**Jul**	**Aug**	**Sept**	**Oct**	**Nov**	**Dec**
Research Proposal	Feedback on proposal (30 January)											
Presentation		Proposal presentations										
Revision based on feedback		Revision and consultation	Revision and consultations									
Introductory chapter			Submit chapter 1									
Literature review chapter/s				Work on Literature	Submit Chapter 2 (Turnitin)							
Research method chapter				Data collection instruments		Submit Chapter 3						
Data collection					Field work	Field work						
Data analysis					Analysis	Analysis						
Writing up results							Submit Chapter 4					
Conclusions chapter								Submit Chapter 5				
Full report								*Editing and finalising report	Submit full research report			
Revision									Feedback and revision			
Final report										Supervisor to submit final assessment report mid-Oct (31 October deadline)		
Graduation												GRADUATION

APPENDIX C:

ICF CODE OF ETHICS

ICF Code of Ethics

Preamble

ICF is committed to maintaining and promoting excellence in coaching. Therefore, ICF expects all members and credentialed coaches (coaches, coach mentors, coaching supervisors, coach trainers or students), to adhere to the elements and principles of ethical conduct: to be competent and integrate ICF Core Competencies effectively in their work.

In line with the ICF core values and ICF definition of coaching, the Code of Ethics is designed to provide appropriate guidelines, accountability and enforceable standards of conduct for all ICF Members and ICF Credential-holders, who commit to abiding by the following ICF Code of Ethics:

Part One: Definitions

- **Coaching**: Coaching is partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential.

- **ICF Coach**: An ICF coach agrees to practice the ICF Core Competencies and pledges accountability to the ICF Code of Ethics.

- **Professional Coaching Relationship:** A professional coaching relationship exists when coaching includes an agreement (including contracts) that defines the responsibilities of each party.

- **Roles in the Coaching Relationship:** In order to clarify roles in the coaching relationship it is often necessary to distinguish between the client and the sponsor. In most cases, the client and sponsor are the same person and are therefore jointly referred to as the client. For purposes of identification, however, the ICF defines these roles as follows:

  Client: The "Client/Coachee is the person(s) being coached.

  Sponsor: The "sponsor" is the entity (including its representatives) paying for and/or arranging for coaching services to be provided. In all cases, coaching engagement agreements should clearly establish the rights, roles and responsibilities for both the client and sponsor if the client and sponsor are different people.

  Student: The "student" is someone enrolled in a coach training program or working with a coaching supervisor or coach mentor in order to learn the coaching process or enhance and develop their coaching skills.

- **Conflict of Interest:** A situation in which a coach has a private or personal interest sufficient to appear to influence the objective of his or her official duties as a coach and a professional.

Part Two: The ICF Standards of Ethical Conduct

Section 1: Professional Conduct at Large:

As a coach, I:

1. Conduct myself in accordance with the ICF Code of Ethics in all interactions, including coach training, coach mentoring and coach supervisory activities.

2. Commit to take the appropriate action with the coach, trainer, or coach mentor and/or will contact ICF to address any ethics violation or possible breach as soon as I become aware, whether it involves me or others.

3. Communicate and create awareness in others, including organizations, employees, sponsors, coaches and others, who might need to be informed of the responsibilities established by this Code.

4. Refrain from unlawful discrimination in occupational activities, including age, race, gender orientation, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, national origin or disability.

5. Make verbal and written statements that are true and accurate about what I offer as a coach, the coaching profession or ICF.

6. Accurately identify my coaching qualifications, expertise, experience, training, certifications and ICF Credentials.

7. Recognize and honor the efforts and contributions of others and only claim ownership of my own material. I understand that violating this standard may leave me subject to legal remedy by a third party.

8. Strive at all times to recognize my personal issues that may impair, conflict with or interfere with my coaching performance or my professional coaching relationships. I will promptly seek the relevant professional assistance and determine the action to be taken, including whether it is appropriate to suspend or terminate my coaching relationship(s) whenever the facts and circumstances necessitate.

9. Recognize that the Code of Ethics applies to my relationship with coaching clients, coachees, students, mentees and supervisees.

10. Conduct and report research with competence, honesty and within recognized scientific standards and applicable subject guidelines. My research will be carried out with the necessary consent and approval of those involved, and with an approach that will protect participants from any potential harm. All research efforts will be performed in a manner that complies with all the applicable laws of the country in which the research is conducted.

11. Maintain, store and dispose of any records, including electronic files and communications, created during my coaching engagements in a manner that promotes confidentiality, security and privacy and complies with any applicable laws and agreements.

12. Use ICF Member contact information (email addresses, telephone numbers, and so on) only in the manner and to the extent authorized by the ICF.

Section 2: Conflicts of Interest:

As a coach, I:

13. Seek to be conscious of any conflict or potential conflict of interest, openly disclose any such conflict and offer to remove myself when a conflict arises.

14. Clarify roles for internal coaches, set boundaries and review with stakeholders conflicts of interest that may emerge between coaching and other role functions.

15. Disclose to my client and the sponsor(s) all anticipated compensation from third parties that I may receive for referrals of clients or pay to receive clients.

16. Honor an equitable coach/client relationship, regardless of the form of compensation.

Section 3: Professional Conduct with Clients:

As a coach, I:

17. Ethically speak what I know to be true to clients, prospective clients or sponsors about the potential value of the coaching process or of me as a coach.

18. Carefully explain and strive to ensure that, prior to or at the initial meeting, my coaching client and sponsor(s) understand the nature of coaching, the nature and limits of confidentiality, financial arrangements, and any other terms of the coaching agreement.

19. Have a clear coaching service agreement with my clients and sponsor(s) before beginning the coaching relationship and honor this agreement. The agreement shall include the roles, responsibilities and rights of all parties involved.

20. Hold responsibility for being aware of and setting clear, appropriate and culturally sensitive boundaries that govern interactions, physical or otherwise, I may have with my clients or sponsor(s).

21. Avoid any sexual or romantic relationship with current clients or sponsor(s) or students, mentees or supervisees. Further, I will be alert to the possibility of any potential sexual intimacy among the parties including my support staff and/or assistants and will take the appropriate action to address the issue or cancel the engagement in order to provide a safe environment overall.

22. Respect the client's right to terminate the coaching relationship at any point during the process, subject to the provisions of the agreement. I shall remain alert to indications that there is a shift in the value received from the coaching relationship.

23. Encourage the client or sponsor to make a change if I believe the client or sponsor would be better served by another coach or by another resource and suggest my client seek the services of other professionals when deemed necessary or appropriate.

Section 4: Confidentiality/Privacy

As a coach, I:

24. Maintain the strictest levels of confidentiality with all client and sponsor information unless release is required by law.

25. Have a clear agreement about how coaching information will be exchanged among coach, client and sponsor.

26. Have a clear agreement when acting as a coach, coach mentor, coaching supervisor or trainer, with both client and sponsor, student, mentee, or supervisee about the conditions under which confidentiality may not be maintained (e.g., illegal activity, pursuant to valid court order or subpoena; imminent or likely risk of danger to self or to others; etc) and make sure both client and sponsor, student, mentee, or supervisee voluntarily and knowingly agree in writing to that limit of confidentiality. Where I reasonably believe that because one of the above circumstances is applicable, I may need to inform appropriate authorities.

27. Require all those who work with me in support of my clients to adhere to the ICF Code of Ethics, Number 26, Section 4, Confidentiality and Privacy Standards, and any other sections of the Code of Ethics that might be applicable.

Section 5: Continuing Development

As a coach, I:

28. Commit to the need for continued and ongoing development of my professional skills.

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Part Three: The ICF Pledge of Ethics:

As an ICF coach, I acknowledge and agree to honor my ethical and legal obligations to my coaching clients and sponsors, colleagues, and to the public at large. I pledge to comply with the ICF Code of Ethics and to practice these standards with those whom I coach, teach, mentor or supervise.

If I breach this Pledge of Ethics or any part of the ICF Code of Ethics, I agree that the ICF in its sole discretion may hold me accountable for so doing. I further agree that my accountability to the ICF for any breach may include sanctions, such as loss of my ICF Membership and/or my ICF Credentials.

For more information on the Ethical Conduct Review Process including links to file a complaint, please click here.

Adopted by the ICF Global Board of Directors June 2015.

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APPENDIX D:
ICF CORE COMPETENCIES

International Coach Federation

ICF Definition of Coaching:

Partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential.

Find more about ICF Core Competencies at **icf.to/CoreCompetencies**

ICF Core Competencies

Setting the Foundation

1) **Meeting Ethical Guidelines & Professional Standards**
   Understanding coaching ethics and standards and applying them appropriately in all coaching situations.

2) **Establishing the Coaching Agreement**
   Understanding what is required in the specific coaching interaction and coming to agreement with the prospective and new client about the coaching process and relationship.

Co-Creating the Relationship

3) **Establishing Trust & Intimacy with the Client**
   Creating a safe, supportive environment that produces ongoing mutual respect and trust.

4) **Coaching Presence**
   Being fully conscious and creating spontaneous relationships with clients, employing a style that is open, flexible and confident.

Communicating Effectively

5) **Active Listening**
   Focusing completely on what the client is saying and is not saying, understanding the meaning of what is said in the context of the client's desires, and supporting client self-expression.

6) **Powerful Questioning**
   Asking questions that reveal the information needed for maximum benefit to the coaching relationship and the client.

7) **Direct Communication**
   Communicating effectively during coaching sessions, and using language that has the greatest positive impact on the client.

Facilitating Learning and Results

8) **Creating Awareness**
   Integrating and accurately evaluating multiple sources of information, and making interpretations that help the client to gain awareness and thereby achieve agreed-upon results.

9) **Designing Actions**
   Creating with the client opportunities for ongoing learning, during coaching and in work/life situations, and for taking new actions that will most effectively lead to agreed-upon coaching results.

10) **Planning & Goal Setting**
    Developing and maintaining an effective coaching plan with the client.

11) **Managing Progress & Accountability**
    Holding attention on what is important for the client, and leaving responsibility with the client to take action.

APPENDIX E:

INFORMATION SHEET WITH CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH

STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT:

The role of coaching in developing character strengths in leaders

REFERENCE NUMBER:

RESEARCHER: **Brenda Eckstein**

ADDRESS: **M Phil (Management Coaching)**

CONTACT NUMBER: +27 82 4993311 or eckstein@mweb.co.za

Dear xx,

My name is Brenda Eckstein and I am currently engaged in an M Phil programme through Stellenbosch University, Republic of South Africa.   I would like to invite you to consider participating in a research project entitled 'The role of coaching in developing character strengths in leaders'. I thought this research project might be of interest to you in your capacity as a leader in a professional firm.

This study has been approved by the **Humanities Research Ethics Committee (HREC) at Stellenbosch University** and will be conducted according to accepted and applicable national and international ethical guidelines and principles.

I'd appreciate your taking time to read the information presented here, which will explain the details of this project.

1. Purpose of the study
The purpose of the study is to explore accountants' and lawyers' perceptions of strengths-based coaching with particular reference to recognising and using an individual's character strengths in their leadership roles.

2. Potential benefits of this study

It is hoped that this research will add to the body of academic knowledge regarding coaching leaders in the VUCA world. This acronym refers to a world that is volatile, uncertain, chaotic and ambiguous. Most leaders find it difficult to cope in this context. The study may also add to the understanding of the perceptions of analytically orientated people on being coached using a strengths-based approach. Coaches will possibly have a greater understanding of how these kinds of leaders perceive strengths-based coaching and thus will be able to improve their coaching skills and approach, achieving better results for clients. You may benefit through being more aware of your strengths and being able to use these in your leadership role.

3．Procedure
If you are interested in volunteering to participate in this study, and you meet the criteria, I invite you to take part in the following:

Step1: Chemistry Session.
You will be asked to meet with me in my capacity as the researcher, either in person or via Skype for approximately 1 hour for you to gain information about the research project and details of the two interviews and five coaching sessions forming the research and coaching programmes. It will also provide me with the opportunity to learn more about you. If possible, these sessions will all take place at a venue convenient to you or be held via Skype. At the chemistry session you will be given a copy of the ICF Code of Ethics by which I, in my capacity as a certified coach, am bound. Coaching, in particular a strengths-based coaching approach, will be explained to you. You will have the opportunity to ask questions and decide whether you wish to be considered as a participant in the research programme.

Step 2: Pre-coaching research interview.
If you wish to take part and are included as a participant in the research, after going through this document, the informed consent, and having any questions answered, you will be asked to sign this 'Declaration by Participant' at the end of this document. The pre-coaching interview will then be conducted by me, in my capacity as the researcher.

Step 3. VIA Strengths test
You will be invited to complete the VIA Strengths Test independently on-line after the pre-coaching interview session and asked to bring two printed copies with you to the first coaching session.

Steps 4 to 9: Coaching programme
The coaching programme will follow. Five one-hour coaching sessions will be held at your convenience approximately two weeks apart. In addition, together with your coach, you'll co-create assignments which will require possibly 5 to 10 minutes per day between the coaching sessions.

Step 10: Post-coaching interview
The final step will be the post-coaching research interview which will be conducted by a research assistant. She'll interview you regarding your perceptions of your experience of identifying and using your strengths through the coaching programme. This will take an hour and be conducted at a time and venue convenient to you

4．Payment for participation
Your participation is on a voluntary basis. You will neither make any payments to the researcher/coach nor to the field worker. You will not receive payment for taking part in this research.

5．Audio recordings
The pre and post interview sessions will be audio-recorded providing data for analysis by the researcher. These will be stored in a locked steel cupboard to which only the coach/researcher has access. As soon as the research is completed, these will be destroyed.

6．Confidentiality
Pseudonyms will be assigned to each participant and any distinguishing information avoided in the final report. All recorded, verbal and written information relating to participants will remain confidential and be disclosed to a third party only if the participant agrees or in the event of the researcher being subpoenaed by court to provide this as evidence. Another condition under which confidentiality would be broken is if the coach considers that the participant is in danger. These are considered highly unlikely.

The research assistant will have access to limited information relating only to the post-coaching interview and will sign a confidentiality clause. Access to the researcher/coach's computer needs a password which only she has access to, and each document will be password protected. Handwritten notes or printed documents will be stored in the locked steel cupboard to which only the researcher/coach has a key. No items will be stored in cyberspace.

7. Potential negative effects

Although it is highly unlikely that you'll experience any form of discomfort or psychological distress through your participation in the research, in advance you'll be provided with the name and contact details of a support person in case you should need it.

As the programme progresses, if the coach feels that another modality would be more suitable for you than coaching, she may suggest a different approach for you and offer you the names and contact details of people in those professions.

8. Participation and withdrawal

Your participation is entirely voluntary and you are free to decline to participate. If you say no, this will not affect you negatively in any way whatsoever. If you do volunteer to participate, you are free to withdraw at any point during the research study without negative consequences. At any point you can choose not to answer certain questions, yet still remain in the study. If circumstances arise which warrant doing so, the researcher/coach may withdraw you from the study.

9. Identification of investigators

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please contact:
The researcher: Brenda Eckstein on +27 82 4993311 or e-mail to eckstein@mweb.co.za
The research supervisor: Carol Mitchell on +27 83 264 2061 or e-mail to mitchell@ukzn.ac.za

Please contact me if you require further explanation or clarification of any aspect of the study.

10. Rights of the research subjects

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS: You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact Ms Maléne Fouché [mfouche@sun.ac.za; 021 808 4622] at the Division for Research Development. You have a right to receive a copy of the Information and Consent form.

You are welcome to email me should you wish to receive a summary of the research findings. You can also indicate this at the post coaching interview and the research assistant will note this for follow up.

Thank you for considering this invitation.

Yours sincerely

Brenda Eckstein
Principal Investigator

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If you are willing to participate in this study please sign the Declaration of Consent and hand it to the investigator

DECLARATION BY PARTICIPANT

By signing below, I …………………………………………………. agree to take part in a research study entitled 'The Role of Coaching in Developing Character Strengths in Leaders' to be conducted by Brenda Eckstein.

I declare that:

- I have read the attached information leaflet and it is written in a language with which I am fluent and comfortable.
- I have had a chance to ask questions and all my questions have been adequately answered.
- I understand that taking part in this study is **voluntary** and I have not been pressurised to take part.
- I may choose to leave the study at any time and will not be penalised or prejudiced in any way.
- I may be asked to leave the study before it has finished, if the researcher feels it is in my best interests, or if I do not follow the study plan, as agreed to.
- All issues related to privacy and the confidentiality and use of the information I provide have been explained to my satisfaction.

Signed at (*place*) …………………………………….. on (*date*) ………………………… 2016.

…………………………………………………….
Signature of participant

Consent to audio record
The researcher will be making audio recordings of the interviews for data collection and transcription purposes. Any identifying data will not be included in the write up of the report and pseudonyms will be used. The recordings will be destroyed upon completion of the study. Your permission is sought in order to record the interviews. Please indicate by ticking the box below whether you consent to allowing the researcher to make an audio recording of the interview.
□ Willing to be audio-recorded.
□ Not willing to be audio-recorded.

_____   _____
Signature of participant   Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

I declare that I explained the information given in this document to _____ He/she was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any questions. This conversation was conducted in English and no translator was used.

_____   _____
Signature of Investigator   **Date**

APPENDIX F:

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE 1

Name of coach

                                                      Pseudonym of coachee

Date

Coaching

1. What is your previous experience of coaching?

   a. What type of coaching (e.g. Integral)

   b. How many sessions?

   c. How long ago?

   d. What benefits were there from your coaching?

   e. What was challenging about the experience for you?

   f. In which ways might your strengths or other attributes have been identified? (Coaching, psychometric testing etc.)

Strengths

2. Tell me more about your strengths or talents – in your leadership position or life in general

   a. If you were to list your top strengths now, what might they be?

   b. What puts you into a state of FLOW (explain)?

   c. What have you done in the past to build your strengths?

   d. What drains your energy?

Leader

3. How are you using your strengths in your leadership role?

4. What are some of the personal challenges facing you in your leadership role at present?

APPENDIX G:

COACH'S REFLECTION TEMPLATE

Name of coach

                Pseudonym of coachee

Date

                Session number

1. Coach's reflective outline

2. What was the coach's experience of the session?

3. How aware is the coachee of their strengths at this point?

4. In which ways is he/she using strengths?

5. How is this influencing their relationships in general?

6. How are any changes showing up in the system within which they function in their leadership role?

7. What were the participant's insights towards the end of the session?

APPENDIX H:
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE 2

Name of coach

Pseudonym of coachee

Date

Coaching

1. How have you experienced this coaching programme?

2. What challenges might you have faced during the coaching?

Strengths

1. Tell me more about your strengths or talents – in your leadership position or life in general

2. What changes in awareness might you have noticed since participating in the coaching?
3. What changes in your practices might you have noticed since participating in the coaching?

Leader

1. What are the personal challenges currently facing you as a leader?

APPENDIX I:

CODING SCHEME DEVELOPMENT CHART

Table I.1: Coding scheme development chart

Development phase of analytic framework	Explanation and description of resulting changes to the coding system
October 2015: In evolving the research question and research objectives, I developed a relevance tree (Albertyn, 2015) which showed three branches covering the components of the research question, namely, coaching, character strengths and leaders. Breaking each of these down into sub-sections provided valuable categories for ongoing literature reviews covering those aspects. Thus those three branches and their sub-sections were clear indicators for the development of the initial coding framework.	This was based on lectures, lecture notes (Albertyn, 2015) and provided a system for coding data. At the onset, this included only 32 codes but provided a sound base for beginning the various stages of the research process and was ideal for organising information. It also provided a clear framework for my ongoing research journal.
November 2015 to January 2016: I realised that in line with qualitative research, I would need to remain flexible in my coding. In order to achieve the three research objectives, I needed to develop the following documentation in consultation with peers and supervisor : Objective 1: Interview schedule for a semi-structured interview to gain insight into the participant's perceptions before the start of the programme. Objective 2: Coach's reflective sheet for capturing the second set of data after the conclusion of each coaching session with each participant Objective 3: Interview schedule for a semi-structured interview to gain insight into the participant's perceptions of their experience of the strengths-based coaching programme incorporating their character strengths	As a result, the carefully thought out questions in the two interview schedules each covered coaching, character strengths and leaders. Thus the coding was adapted to incorporate these new nuances gained in the pilot interviews. The main coding developed as coaching, character strength, leaders and sub-categories of these. Throughout attention was paid to chronological developments. What was their previous experience of coaching? How did they perceive changes during this strengths-based approach? How will they continue using the perceived changes and new behaviour patterns in the future? The coach's reflection sheets provided similar codes, but even the initial pilot schemes showed that here, the codes needed to be allowed to evolve to an even greater extent. There were many unexpected themes emerging. One of the issues faced was that as an Integral coach I automatically analysed information in terms of Wilber's Four Quadrant model. I had to unlearn this technique in order to recognise new codes emerging.
March 2016 onwards; Even when Ethical Clearance was gained (March 10, 2016) and the actual research programme started, my ongoing reflection brought more changes to the way I recognised codes and clustered into themes. This was enhanced through ongoing literature reviews and rigorous attention to constructive reflections in my research journal.	
April 2016 onwards: As the coaching progressed, I became even more aware of the participants' perceptions of the link between their identifying their character strengths and using them on a daily basis through the self-observations and practices which I assigned in the coaching sessions but which they applied between sessions. Thus recognising how	Issues in coping with the external VUCA world. Having to make decisions 'on the run' without there being time to gather sufficient information, uncertainty. Challenges at work – generational differences, transition, burnout in their teams

Development phase of analytic framework	Explanation and description of resulting changes to the coding system
the strengths were playing out in the interactions with the external VUCA world, their roles at work and in their 'inner world's made me aware that their perceptions and stated changing interaction with all three worlds were producing patterns which they and I recognised. Thus the range of codes was thus again expanded and then synthesised forming clusters.	Inner world – identity, lack of confidence, burn-out, maintaining the present while building the future.
July 2016 onwards: At the conclusion of the field-work, for the next four months I continued to re-read the transcriptions and my reflective notes, open coding them, refining the themes as more patterns were recognised and this now constitutes the final coding scheme developed for this research.	Throughout, in line with qualitative research, my approach has remained flexible. As new descriptors emerged from the data, I added and modified. Conversely when descriptors no longer seemed to be serving a purpose, they became redundant.

Source: Adapted from the work of Bloomberg and Volpe (2012: 255-256)

Order of analysing data

i.   Starting at the left-hand top is the research question

ii.   This leads down to the relevance tree which has three branches, thus three sets of codes, total 32 codes

iii. There are linked to three outcomes each with a set of data. Interview guides and coaching provided 25 codes

iv.   The relevance tree (ii. above), interview and reflection codes (iii. above) are combined with four Integral and five emergent codes, totalling 66 codes

v.   These are clustered into six themes

vi.   The six themes were re-examined and restructured according to the three objectives
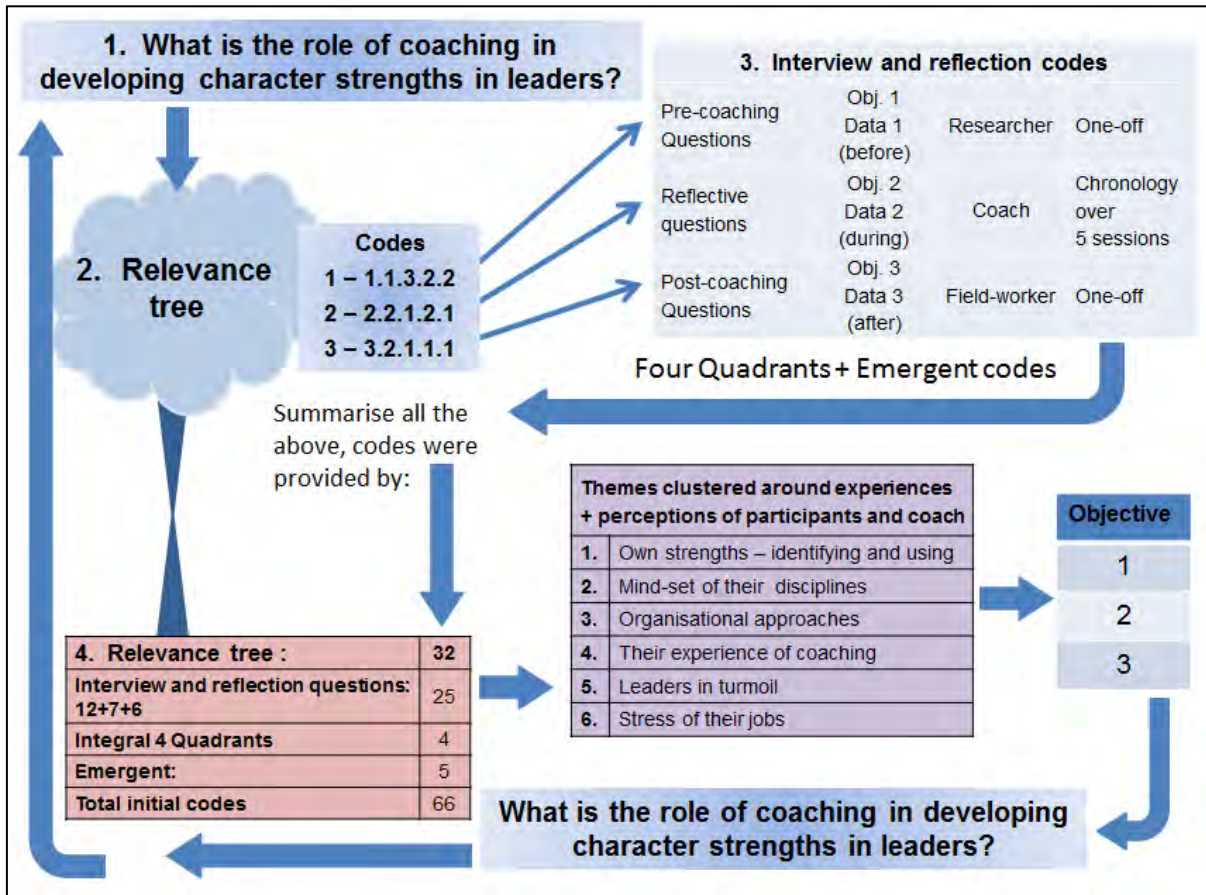
vii. And these themes link back to the research question

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Figure I.1: Order of Analysing the data

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1798 RESPONDENT: not...not just eight staff members

1800 N: Yes

1802 RESPONDENT: Which is...which made to the stress a bit...

1804 N: Um.

1806 RESPONDENT: because if it doesn't work.

1808 N: Yeah

1810 RESPONDENT: and I've got to let a staff member go.

1812 N: Yeah.

1814 RESPONDENT: that's a family I'm letting down, not a staff member

1816 N: Yeah

1818 RESPONDENT: So so I think that open mindedness, judgement... and unbias
1819 thinking right now!

1821 N: Um.

1823 RESPONDENT: is gonna be a...if it is correctly recorded as a strength.

1825 N: Um.

1827 RESPONDENT: it's gonna be something I need to... to harness.

1829 N: Yeah.

1831 RESPONDENT: quite substantially in the sort of six month period.

1833 N: Yeah. Yeah. Sure. Absolutely.

1835 RESPONDENT: Um and...and with that though with my social intelligence and
1836 kindness side...

1838 N: Um.

1840 RESPONDENT: can you to have to manage the process in people's lives.

1842 N: Um.

1844 RESPONDENT: And that's gonna involve different travelling routes, different
1845 um...um structures um and um and I have to be understanding of how that change is
1846 gonna have to be dealt with by the individuals

Figure I.2: Thematic Analysis: sample rough workings (a)

Figure I.3: Thematic Analysis: sample rough workings (b)

APPENDIX J:
CONFIDENTIALITY PLEDGE

The Role of Coaching in Developing Character Strengths in Leaders

Pledge of Confidentiality

I ___Nicholas Munro___, through my involvement with and work on The Role of Coaching in Developing Character Strengths in Leaders will have access to data which contains confidential information that respondents generally perceive as personal and private. I understand that access to this confidential information and data carries with it responsibility to guard against unauthorised use and to abide by the Ethical Considerations section in the research proposal and Information Sheet with Consent to Participate in the Research, copies of which have been given to me. To treat information as confidential means to not divulge it or make it accessible to anyone other than the researcher, Brenda Eckstein. Such a disclosure would violate the confidentiality promised to participants and would violate Stellenbosch University ethics policies.

I agree to fulfill my responsibilities on this project in accordance with the following:

1. I agree to not permit any person other than the researcher access to the data, either electronically, in hard copy or orally.
2. I agree to not attempt to identify individuals except where it is necessary in accordance with my role on the research project.
3. I agree that I will maintain the highest level of confidentiality.

Nicholas Munro
Name

[signature]
Signature

_30/6/16._
Date

APPENDIX K:

PERSONAL, PROFESSIONAL AND COACHING QUALIFICATIONS

CV - Brenda Eckstein

Trainer, Executive Coach, Speaker and Author
Phone: +27 (0)33 342 5432   Mobile: +27 (0)82 499 3311   Fax: +27 (0)86 518 8205
E-mail: brenda@strategy-leadership.com   Website: www.strategy-leadership.com

Academic and other qualifications

- Currently engaged in M Phil programme at Stellenbosch Business School (Management Coaching).
- PCC accreditation through the International Coach Federation (November 2015).
- UCT, Graduate School of Business, Centre for Coaching, PCC (2012).
- PSA (Professional Speakers Australia) – accredited with Professional Member Status (2009).
- Australian Qualifications Framework – Certificate IV in Training & Assessment (2012).
- ITC (International Training in Communication) - Awarded Distinguished Communicator Award in the International Accreditation Program (highest level).
- Services SETA – qualified as a Registered Assessor.
- BA degree from the University of Natal (Pietermaritzburg) – Economics and Psychology majors.
- Dale Carnegie: qualified as a Dale Carnegie instructor (International). Management Course.

Books, motivational speaking and training

- Author of 3 books: 'Networking Tactics: A guide to achieving success through personal networking', 'ABCs of Effective Networking' (2008) And "Flow – How to turn your stumbling blocks into stepping stones" (2016).
- Contributing author to 'The Global SME Business Toolkit' (Concise Version), RSA, 2008.
- Regularly has articles (mostly motivational) published in international and local magazines including Cosmopolitan, Oprah, Psychologies, Skyways and OfficeLife.
- International motivational speaker.
- Brenda has personally presented training in Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada (four cities), England, Greece, Holland, Iceland, Japan, New Zealand, Scotland, South Africa, Thailand, the USA (10 states) and Zimbabwe. Programmes include: Communication Skills, Enhance Your Executive Skills (EYES), Leading In Formation, Networking Tactics, Sustainable Customer Service Strategy, Effective Delegation, Giving Instructions and How to be Assertive, How To Get Your Point Across, Formula Five, Powerful Presentations, and Navigating Your Future.

Business and work experience

- Brenda Eckstein International specialises in strategy, leadership development, and training. In addition Brenda is an executive coach, speaker and author.
- Businesswoman. She and her husband, Edgar were joint managing directors of their group of 6 clothing stores in Pietermaritzburg, Republic of South Africa for 27 years, then established the training and coaching unit.
- Work experience. Speaker and trainer at International Conventions, Graduate Schools of Business, Chambers of Commerce and private sector.

Business and leadership positions and memberships

- Pietermaritzburg Chamber of Commerce and Industries - Past-President (President, February 1997 to February 1998). First woman to hold this position. During 6 years on the Executive Committee chaired various committees. Appointed Honorary Member of the Pietermaritzburg Chamber of Business (PCB), August 2011.
- ITC - a world-wide organization of non-profit clubs providing leadership development, communication and organisational skills and business meeting procedure. Past International President.
- Current Memberships includes International Coach Federation (ICF), Professional Speaking Member of Professional Speakers Australia (PSA), the Global Speakers Federation (GSF) and the Pietermaritzburg Chamber of Business (PCB).

Personal

- Born in Pietermaritzburg, Republic of South Africa and still lives there. Married to Edgar.
- Two children - Lara Turner and Gary Eckstein – both married and living in Sydney. Four grandchildren.

APPENDIX L:

CLASSIFICATION OF CHARACTER STRENGTHS

The VIA Classification of Character Strengths

1. Wisdom and Knowledge - Cognitive strengths that entail the acquisition and use of knowledge
• **Creativity** [originality, ingenuity]: Thinking of novel and productive ways to conceptualize and do things; includes artistic achievement but is not limited to it
• **Curiosity** [interest, novelty-seeking, openness to experience]: Taking an interest in ongoing experience for its own sake; finding subjects and topics fascinating; exploring and discovering
• **Judgment** [critical thinking]: Thinking things through and examining them from all sides; not jumping to conclusions; being able to change one's mind in light of evidence; weighing all evidence fairly
• **Love of Learning**: Mastering new skills, topics, and bodies of knowledge, whether on one's own or formally; obviously related to the strength of curiosity but goes beyond it to describe the tendency to add systematically to what one knows
• **Perspective** [wisdom]: Being able to provide wise counsel to others; having ways of looking at the world that make sense to oneself and to other people

2. Courage - Emotional strengths that involve the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, external or internal
• **Bravery** [valor]: Not shrinking from threat, challenge, difficulty, or pain; speaking up for what is right even if there is opposition; acting on convictions even if unpopular; includes physical bravery but is not limited to it
• **Perseverance** [persistence, industriousness]: Finishing what one starts; persisting in a course of action in spite of obstacles; "getting it out the door"; taking pleasure in completing tasks
• **Honesty** [authenticity, integrity]: Speaking the truth but more broadly presenting oneself in a genuine way and acting in a sincere way; being without pretense; taking responsibility for one's feelings and actions
• **Zest** [vitality, enthusiasm, vigor, energy]: Approaching life with excitement and energy; not doing things halfway or halfheartedly; living life as an adventure; feeling alive and activated

3. Humanity - Interpersonal strengths that involve tending and befriending others
• **Love**: Valuing close relations with others, in particular those in which sharing and caring are reciprocated; being close to people
• **Kindness** [generosity, nurturance, care, compassion, altruistic love, "niceness"]: Doing favors and good deeds for others; helping them; taking care of them
• **Social Intelligence** [emotional intelligence, personal intelligence]: Being aware of the motives and feelings of other people and oneself; knowing what to do to fit into different social situations; knowing what makes other people tick

4. Justice - Civic strengths that underlie healthy community life
• **Teamwork** [citizenship, social responsibility, loyalty]: Working well as a member of a group or team; being loyal to the group; doing one's share
• **Fairness**: Treating all people the same according to notions of fairness and justice; not letting personal feelings bias decisions about others; giving everyone a fair chance.
• **Leadership**: Encouraging a group of which one is a member to get things done and at the time maintain time good relations within the group; organizing group activities and seeing that they happen.

5. **Temperance** - Strengths that protect against excess
• **Forgiveness**: Forgiving those who have done wrong; accepting the shortcomings of others; giving people a second chance; not being vengeful
• **Humility**: Letting one's accomplishments speak for themselves; not regarding oneself as more special than one is
• **Prudence**: Being careful about one's choices; not taking undue risks; not saying or doing things that might later be regretted
• **Self-Regulation** [self-control]: Regulating what one feels and does; being disciplined; controlling one's appetites and emotions

6. **Transcendence** - Strengths that forge connections to the larger universe and provide meaning
• **Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence** [awe, wonder, elevation]: Noticing and appreciating beauty, excellence, and/or skilled performance in various domains of life, from nature to art to mathematics to science to everyday experience
• **Gratitude**: Being aware of and thankful for the good things that happen; taking time to express thanks
• **Hope** [optimism, future-mindedness, future orientation]: Expecting the best in the future and working to achieve it; believing that a good future is something that can be brought about
• **Humor** [playfulness]: Liking to laugh and tease; bringing smiles to other people; seeing the light side; making (not necessarily telling) jokes
• **Spirituality** [faith, purpose]: Having coherent beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of the universe; knowing where one fits within the larger scheme; having beliefs about the meaning of life that shape conduct and provide comfort