Using transformative transition coaching to support leaders during career transitions

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Abstract

Senior leadership transitions present daunting challenges. To promote inclusive development and comply with equal opportunity legislation, South African companies often fast-track careers of high-potential previously disadvantaged individuals. Organisations typically do not sufficiently support transitioning leaders, possibly acting unethically. The rate of failure is high with devastating effects for the individual and their organisation. The novel, empirically researched Transformative Transition Coaching (TTC) framework helps facilitate deep and lasting changes in meaning perspectives of transitioning leaders through coaching. The ability of the TTC framework to support transitioning leaders is presented in this article.

1. Introduction

Career transitions into a senior leadership position are complex and challenging (Charan *et al.*, 2011; Watkins, 2003). The incumbent has to deal with challenges such as showing immediate results; dealing with higher levels of complexity and uncertainty; exhibiting higher levels of emotional intelligence; working with longer time horizons; and stepping out of the comfort zone of a specialist to take on strategic challenges (Goleman, 1996; Jaques, 1996; Kaiser *et al.*, 2011; Kegan, 1994; Peltier, 2010; Sutton, 2008). By promoting someone, who is not well supported before and during the transition, organisations potentially set the individual up for failure with negative consequences for both the individual and the organisation (Avolio & Hannah, 2008; Watkins, 2009). Some estimates place the level of executive derailment at between 30% and 50% (Lombardo & Eichinger, 1995; Watkins, 2009) and under-performance at 46% (Sutton, 2008).

More than 20 years after the beginning of democracy, the face of corporate South Africa is still not representative of the demographics of the country. At top management level, Blacks, Coloureds and Indians comprise less than 30% of the workforce (Department of Labour, 2016). Attempts have been made to normalise the situation, mainly through legislation and policies, such as the Employment Equity Act 1998 and the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act 2003 (BBBEE) (Khunou, 2015). There is a shortage of suitable Black candidates for promotion into senior positions due to a number of factors including a historically poor education system, deliberate exclusion policies, lack of suitable management experience since 1994, lack of mentors and role models, and the global demand for talent (Cappelli, 2008; Jack, 2007; Kilian *et al.*, 2005; Wöcke & Sutherland, 2008). In order to promote inclusive development and to comply with legislation, corporates in South Africa have responded by fast tracking high-potential employment equity candidates through the leadership pipeline (Jack, 2007). This situation presents a potential ethical dilemma: Is it morally justifiable to risk the personal well-being and career success of high-potential individuals, who may not be ready for the transition in order to comply with legislation?

Companies do attempt to assist transitioning leader through strategies, models and frameworks that may help leaders to overcome their transition challenges (Bradford, 1995; Charan *et al.*, 2011; Dotlich *et al.*, 2004; Watkins, 2003). Transition coaching is one of the interventions increasingly used to support transitioning leaders (Sutton, 2008). Coaching in the business context is defined as a proven process that enhances high-potential executives and teams' awareness and behaviour to achieve business objectives for both the client and its organisation (WABC, 2011). Coaching may assist with charisma and inspiration, improved goal-setting and self-regard, aiding in skills transfer, positive peer perception of individual effectiveness, enhanced resilience, assisting in stress reduction and general higher workplace performance (Peltier, 2010). It would appear that coaching could be effective in helping senior leaders transition to the next level, but it seems from surveying the literature that very little empirical research has been conducted on transition coaching with only one study (Reynolds, 2011) found thus far.

This apparent gap in knowledge inspired research by the primary author that led to the creation of a novel approach to transition coaching called 'Transformative Transition Coaching' (TTC). TTC goes beyond defining a transition coaching approach by including the facilitation of transformative learning during the coaching process. Transformative learning theory (developed by Jack Mezirow since 1978) is a multidimensional and complex process of changing deep, structural premises of thought, action and feeling (Kitchenham, 2008). The TTC framework embeds elements of transformative learning in the coaching process with the aim of identifying problematic perspectives held by the transition leader and permanently transforming these perspectives. The focus of this article is to share the results of the first author applying the TTC framework in supporting transitioning leaders. The rationale for this investigation was to address the apparent lack of the application of transition coaching in corporate South Africa (Terblanche *et al.*, 2017) and to empower corporates to act in a more ethical manner by supporting transitioning leaders through a very challenging phase of their careers.

For South Africa to grow economically, to compete effectively on the international economic stage and to attain demographically representative senior leadership, it is imperative that organisations provide support to leaders when they transition into senior leadership roles. Not doing so may cause harm to individuals and could even be considered unethical. With this in mind, the research question, which guided this study and is reported in this article, was: *To what extent can the Transformative Transition Coaching (TTC) approach support transitioning leaders?*

2. Literature review

Leadership transition theory, transition coaching and transformative learning theory provide the theoretical background to this study. These concepts are elaborated on in this section.

2.1 Leadership transition theory

The first concept is that of leadership transition theory that forms part of the larger field of leadership development. Leadership transition has received much attention in the popular business and academic press with the often cited work of Charan *et al.* (2011). Their Leadership Pipeline model describes six leadership passages and the significant challenges faced during each stage. According to this model, leaders move through six stages: Managing self; Managing others; Managing managers; Functional manager; Business manager; and Enterprise manager. Freedman (2011) presents a similar model he calls "Pathways and Crossroads" which consists of a number of stages: Individual contributor, Supervising manager, Single business manager, Executive manager of several businesses and Institutional leader. The concept of a leadership progression suggests that changes are required in individuals in terms of their appearance, knowledge, behaviour, attitudes and values as they progress up the ladder (Kaiser *et al.*, 2011).

A different perspective on leadership levels is Jaques' Stratified Systems Theory that defines work in organisations in seven strata on a basis of decision-making complexity. Jaques (1996) revealed the time cut-off points of each stratum: three months for stratum one; one year for stratum two; two years for stratum three; five years for stratum four; ten years for stratum five; twenty years for stratum six; and fifty years and more for stratum seven. It is clear from the literature that when a leader is promoted, the leader will face challenges and needs to adapt to the new level.

The challenges faced during a career transition are significant and are described as "corner-office crucibles" by Watkins (2009:47). A review of the literature revealed five main groupings of challenges faced by transitioning leaders: cognitive, behavioural, interpersonal, psychological and systemic.

On a cognitive level transitioning leaders have to develop new thinking patterns and cognitive models; develop strategic thinking; and learn to deal with complexity and ambiguity (Avolio & Hannah, 2008; Bebb, 2009; Charan *et al.*, 2011; Freedman, 2011; Kaiser *et al.*, 2011; Watkins, 2003; Zaccaro, 2001).

On a behavioural level, new patterns are required including time management, driving for results, active listening, learning to communicate effectively and learning to rely on others (Bebb, 2009; Freedman, 2011; Martin, 2015; Mumford *et al.*, 2007; Zaccaro, 2001).

From an interpersonal perspective, transitioning leaders need to build new networks, learn to influence others, establish trust, build consensus and develop people (Freedman, 2011; Guillen & Ibarra, 2009; Hooijberg *et al.*, 1997; Lombardo & Eichinger, 2002; Manderscheid & Ardichvili, 2008; Martin, 2015).

Psychologically, they need to learn to deal with anxiety and loss of identity, foster self-awareness and increase their level of emotional intelligence (Argyris, 1991; Dotlich *et al.*, 2004; Elsner & Farrands, 2006; Goleman, 1996; Manderscheid & Ardichvili, 2008; Sutton, 2008).

Finally, on a systemic level transitioning leaders need to understand what the new job entails within the systemic context and organisational culture, and maintain a global perspective (Elsner & Farrands, 2006; Freedman, 2011; Kaiser *et al.*, 2011; Martin, 2015; Mumford *et al.*, 2000). The types of challenges faced by transitioning leaders are well documented and therefore one could reasonably assume that transition failures are preventable.

The reality is that transition failures occur far more often than they should. Several studies have tried to understand the dynamics of transition failure and derailment and the factors contributing to it (Lombardo & McCauley, 1988; Martin & Gentry, 2011; McCall & Lombardo, 1983; Van Velsor & Leslie, 1995). Consistently, prominent themes emerge from derailment research, including problems with interpersonal relationships, failure to meet business objectives, the inability to build and lead a team, the inability to develop or adapt including inability to think strategically and having an overly narrow functional orientation (Lombardo & McCauley, 1988; Martin & Gentry, 2011; McCall & Lombardo, 1983; Van Velsor & Leslie, 1995). Failure to transition successfully is costly. From a financial perspective, the cost of a derailed executive to the organisation can be several millions of dollars (Bunker *et al.*, 2002; Martin & Gentry, 2011) and as much as 24 times the leaders' annual salary (Manderscheid & Ardichvili, 2008). Apart from the direct financial impact, there are the emotional costs and decreased morale of people close to the derailed executive (Martin & Gentry, 2011).

2.2   Transition coaching

The second aspect, transition coaching, is a relatively new field of coaching. While coaching seems to have relevance to transition theories, very little empirical research has been conducted to understand the potential of coaching to support the individual career transition process (Bachkirova *et al.*, 2016). Transition coaching is a specialisation of executive coaching that aims to facilitate career transitions by helping leaders identify critical issues they face as a result of the transition; define the expectations of their stakeholders; gain an outside perspective on their new role; and communicate more effectively within the organisation. The basic aim of transition coaching is to help the

newly appointed leaders to become effective in their new role and at the same time to protect the organisation against the significant cost of leadership transition failure (Witherspoon & Cannon, 2004). This form of coaching has been shown to accelerate job transition, help leaders to overcome a sense of vulnerability, develop new personal, social and cognitive skills; and find new meaning and purpose in their lives (Reynolds, 2011; Sutton, 2008).

Recent research into transition coaching has shown that it is not used pro-actively in supporting transitioning leaders (Terblanche *et al.*, 2017). Terblanche *et al.* (2017) provide a set of recommendations for transition coaching including starting transition coaching as soon as the appointment is official; continuing for at least three years with a coaching session every two to three weeks for the first six months and a session every two to three months thereafter; providing the coachee with a number of coaching options; and allowing coaching to happen outside the office environment.

2.3   Transformative learning theory

At the heart of both coaching and leadership transitions is the process of learning. This introduces the third theoretical underpinning of this research: transformative learning. Transformative learning theory addresses the phenomenon of deep structural and permanent changes in adults and is a process by which previously uncritically assimilated assumptions, beliefs, values and perspectives are questioned and, thereby, become more open, permeable and subject to better validation (Cranton, 2005). Put differently, transformative learning is the process of 'meaning' becoming clarified through expanded awareness, critical reflection, validating discourse and reflective action as one moves towards a fuller realisation of agency (Mezirow, 2000).

Transformative learning theory holds that adults organise and interpret life's experiences through sets of filters. These filters are called 'meaning perspectives' or 'frames of reference' and they refer to a person's overall worldview consisting of structures of cultural and psychological assumptions (Mezirow, 1985). These meaning perspectives or frames of reference comprise habits of mind and are expressed as subsequent points of view. Habits of mind involve how one categorises experience, beliefs, people, events and oneself. They may involve the structures, rules, criteria, codes, schemata, standards, values, personality traits and dispositions upon which our thoughts, feelings and actions are based (Mezirow, 2008). Specific perspectives are underpinned by meaning schemes, which are sets of assumptions governing particular situations (Brookfield, 2012). Mezirow identified a number of meaning perspectives including sociolinguistic, moral-ethical, epistemic, philosophical, psychological, health, political and aesthetic (Mezirow, 2008).

Mezirow distinguishes between numbers of different learning mechanisms. When a person is faced with the need to learn, four options are possible. Firstly, learning within meaning schemes involves people working with what they already know by expanding, complementing and revising their present domain of knowledge. Secondly, people could learn new meaning schemes that are compatible with existing schemes within their meaning perspectives (Mezirow, 1997). Thirdly, learning can take place through

transformation of meaning schemes. This process requires "becoming aware of specific assumptions (schemata, criteria, rules, or repressions) on which a distorted or incomplete meaning scheme is based and, through a reorganization of meaning, transforming it" (Mezirow, 1985:23). Lastly, learning can take place through the transformation of meaning perspectives (Taylor, 1997).

The confluence of transition coaching, transformative learning theory and leadership transitions formed the background theoretical underpinning for my research to create a coaching framework that could facilitate transformative learning during career transitions. The culmination of this research resulted in the Transformative Transition Coaching (TTC) framework. The TTC framework consists of seven aspects to be taken into account when coaching a transitioning leader: (1) contextual (focusing on transition and transformational learning); (2) contractual (agreement between coach, transitioning leader and organisation on the expected outcomes); (3) anticipatory (setting coaching goals); (4) procedural (consisting of five TTC stages); (5) temporal (adhering to prescribed timing aspects of the coaching); (6) technical (using particular coaching techniques); and (7) efficacious (evaluating the level of transformative learning achieved).

The TTC framework operationalises aspects of Mezirow's transformative learning theory during the transition coaching process by identifying and transforming problematic perspectives held by the transitioning leader through a process of premise reflection and action learning. To assess the level of transformative learning, the three criteria of depth, breadth and relative stability proposed by Hoggan (2016) are used:

1. *Depth* signifies the magnitude of the impact of the change on the person's life. A minor change in the way a person interacts with the world cannot be considered transformative.

2. *Breadth* refers to the number of contexts in which a change is manifested. When learning is restricted to one aspect of a person's life, then regardless of the depth (significance), the change does not qualify as transformative.

3. *Relative stability* indicates that a change must be permanent in order to qualify as transformative.

This article presents the findings on the extent to which the TTC framework was able to support transitioning leaders by facilitating transformative learning.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

This research employed Canonical Action Research (CAR) to apply the TTC framework in real-life coaching sessions (conducted by the first author) with recently promoted senior managers, who had not received coaching. Action research (AR) is an approach to research that aims "both at taking action and creating knowledge or theory about that action" (Coughlan & Coghlan, 2002:220). The aim of AR is to solve a problem and

contribute to science (Gummesson, 2000) by helping resolve or improve the issue faced by the participants and at the same time to contribute to the existing body of knowledge (Reason, 1999).

CAR, the form of AR used in this research, is a popular form of AR developed by Susman and Evered (1978) and is used in social science research, hence the label 'canonical'. CAR consists of five cyclical steps: diagnosis, action planning, intervention, evaluation and reflection (Davison *et al.*, 2012). The specific appeal of CAR in this research was that it addresses a widely levelled criticism of AR: AR's lack of methodological rigour, inability to distinguish itself from consulting and the tendency to produce either "research with little action or action with little research" (Davison *et al.*, 2004:65). To address this critique, Davison *et al.* (2012) developed a set of independent principles and associated criteria specifically for CAR to assess rigour and relevancy; provide practical guidelines for implementing and monitoring the AR; and explicitly involve theory in the AR process.

Six senior managers who were promoted less than six months prior to the intervention (when the AR process started) and who had not received any coaching during the transition were identified via convenience sampling. Participants were sourced via the authors' network of HR practitioners in corporate South Africa. An attempt was made to include a diverse group of participants to cover aspects such as when they were promoted, the size of the team that reported to them and the size of the organisation where they worked.

3.2   Data collection

The six recently promoted transitioning managers (denoted TM1 to TM6) were coached by the primary author between five and seven sessions using the TTC framework and following a CAR process. A nested, iterative approach consisting of macro and micro cycles were followed (Terblanche, 2014). A macro cycle consisted of a series of six micro cycles where each micro cycle constituted an individual coaching session per transitioning manager (TM). Each TM was coached in sequential order. In other words, TM1 received his first coaching session followed by TM2 through to TM6. This sequence of six micro cycles constituted the end of the first macro cycle.

This was followed by the second set of six coaching sessions, one per TM, which constituted the second macro cycle etc. In total, there were five full macro cycles (implying each TM received at least five coaching sessions). TM3 and TM4 required two additional coaching sessions to complete the five TTC stages. Both the macro and micro cycles followed the plan->act->evaluate->reflect sequence prescribed by CAR. Data was captured throughout the macro and micro cycles in the form of researcher reflections in a research journal, field notes taken by the researcher during the coaching sessions, a structured reflective feedback form completed by the TM and the researcher after each coaching session and a post-coaching interview with each TM approximately two months after the coaching ended.

3.3   Data analysis

Data collected during the macro and micro AR cycles was continuously analysed during the various *reflection* steps of both cycles using qualitative content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). At the end of each micro cycle (individual coaching session), the structured feedback form (completed by both the TM and researcher) and the field notes captured during the coaching session were analysed for pointers as to the appropriateness of what was explored in that session, given the overarching *plan* for the current macro cycle. The reflection focused on what contributed and what detracted from the macro plan. TMs had to answer two questions: 'How did today's coaching session help me to become more successful in my new role (if at all)?'; and 'What did the coach do to facilitate this?' This two-pronged approach tried to ensure that the process stayed true to the AR philosophy of seeking to add knowledge via research and helping the client to improve their situation by facilitating change (Greenwood & Levin, 2007).

Data analysis on the macro level followed a similar approach, but with slightly different use of the data sources. At the end of each macro cycle, all the structured feedback forms and field notes were examined as a whole to identify potential trends or dominant themes that emerged from either personal reflections or the TM feedback. A set of focal and instrumental theories, as prescribed by the CAR process, guided the interpretation of the analysed data (Davison *et al.*, 2014).

3.4   Ethical considerations

A researcher's diary was kept to help keep track of the research process and to apply reflexivity. In addition, the diary was useful for reflection on possible bias due to the researcher also being the practitioner (coach), as is the convention in action research. This research received clearance from the University of Stellenbosch Business School's Ethics Committee. All participants signed informed consent documents in which they were made aware of their rights as research participants.

4.   Findings and discussion

The main objective of this research was to explore to what extent the Transformative Transition Coaching (TTC) framework could support transitioning leaders by facilitating transformative learning during a coaching intervention. Six recently promoted leaders were coached using the TTC framework following an action research approach. The TTC framework contains a procedural dimension consisting of five stages. These stages describe the progression of a transitioning leader when exposed to the TTC framework. The five stages are summarised in Table 1 and the discussion that follows details the experiences of the six TMs during the five stages. Emphasis is placed on the extent to which the TTC framework assisted the TMs to transform problematic perspectives that prevented them from being successful in their new roles.

Table 1: Five transformative transition stages of the TTC framework

TTC stage	Description
1. Initiate	• Define the context for the coaching. • Agree the contract. • Identify the most pressing challenges faced by the transitioning leader.
2. Understand	• Analyse the current perspectives held by the transitioning leader by using the perspectives questionnaire to assess their view on all eight of the Mezirow perspectives (Mezirow, 1994): sociolinguistic, moral-ethical, epistemic, philosophical, psychological, health, political, aesthetic.
3. Identify and design	• Identify the most problematic perspective from the list in the previous step. • Reflect on the reasons for and impact of this perspective on success in the new role using Mezirow's (1994) three levels of reflection (content, process, premise). • Conceptualise the desired new perspective. • Design a behavioural experiment in an attempt to change the problematic perspective.
4. Reflect and redesign	• Reflect on the progress with transforming the problematic perspective by using Hoggan's transformative learning criteria (Hoggan, 2016). • Design a new behavioural experiment to deepen the transformative process.
5. Complete	• This state is reached when the transitioning leader shows an acceptable level of perspective transformation according to Hoggan's criteria. • A strategy is defined to secure the transformation. • Stretch goals are set. • A decision is made to terminate the coaching or select a new problematic perspective to transform.

4.1   Initiate

This first stage focused on setting the coaching boundaries by establishing the coaching relationship, defining the coaching contract and identifying the most pressing challenges faced by each TM. Significant time was spent to understand both the personal and work context of the TMs by asking TMs to tell their life story and to draw a network diagram of their work context that shows their relationship with peers, subordinates, superiors and clients (internal and external). These stories and diagrams, together with the researcher sharing models and theories about career transitions, such as the Leadership Pipeline model (Charan *et al.*, 2011) and Stratified Systems Theory (Jaques, 1996), assisted both the TMs and researcher to have a clear picture of the context within which the new role is positioned and what the typical challenges of such roles are. The contracting focused on the agreement of confidentiality and was highlighted by all TMs in their feedback as an important aspect of this first phase. This is in line with findings from other research that highlight the importance of formal contracting (Kahn, 2011; Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011).

An important output of this initial stage of the TTC process was to elicit from all participants their most pressing challenges in their new roles. The challenges per TM and their predominant categorisations into one of cognitive, behavioural, interpersonal, psychological and systemic (Avolio & Hannah, 2008; Freedman, 2011; Goleman, 1996)

are illustrated in Table 2 and were used as a reference in identifying the problematic perspectives in Phase Two.

Table 2: Summary of challenges faced by TMs in their new positions

Transitioning manager	Current challenges (Category)
TM1	• Create a new brand strategy (cognitive) • Get people to buy into this new strategy (interpersonal) • How to influence people (interpersonal) • Time management (behavioural)
TM2	• How do I shift away from operating at my previous level? (behavioural) • How can I be more assertive? (behavioural) • How do I balance business needs with the need to optimise the technical environment? (cognitive)
TM3	• Effective time management (behavioural) • Have I stepped up to the plate in my new role in terms of performance? (behavioural) • Am I operating at a strategic level? (cognitive) • How do I increase my level of EQ? (psychological)
TM4	• How do I let go of my previous responsibilities and take on the new ones? (behavioural) • How do I become a credible member of the executive team? (interpersonal) • How do I turn strategy into execution? (systemic)
TM5	• How do I most effectively appoint new people into the team? (systemic) • How do I stay informed about what is happening in the organisation? (interpersonal) • Time management (behavioural)
TM6	• How do I manage the company in order to generate a profit? (systemic) • How do I put the best people in the most appropriate position? (systemic)

In total, 19 challenges were identified by TMs and the most prevalent challenge appeared to be in the behavioural category with seven occurrences.

The process of identifying current challenges in their new roles brought focus to the coaching process and is in line with the philosophy of the TTC framework that aims to narrow the field of enquiry to career transition and transformative learning. This focus seemed to resonate with the participant:

> As it was our initial session, I am not sure I can pinpoint anything yet, but I can add that the session helped me to identify 3 areas, which I would like to focus on in order to be more successful. So just the fact that I have three things down on paper is already a good start.
>
> (TM2)

It would appear from the results obtained after the first stage of the TTC process that the TTC framework is able to narrow the context of a coaching intervention to focus on the transition and transformation aspects. The TTC framework is also able to elicit challenges faced by TMs, in the process raising general awareness of the obstacles they need to overcome to succeed in their new role. The ability of the TTC framework to generate awareness as a precursor to finding a solution is in line with other coaching research that reports an increase in awareness as a result of coaching (Grant *et al.*, 2010).

4.2   Understand

The second stage of the TTC process introduced transformative learning by establishing the current views of the participants on Mezirow's eight perspectives: sociolinguistic, moral-ethical, epistemic, philosophical, psychological, health, political, aesthetic (Mezirow, 1994). Through a series of predefined questions, the participants established what perspectives they currently hold in each of the eight categories. Following this structured process seemed to be beneficial:

> *The tool the coach used enabled me to think about various aspects of my life, both work and personal. The coach would probe a bit and in two instances he also challenged my way of thinking, which led to some of the hidden barriers surfacing. I definitely would not have surfaced those barriers on my own and they would have remained 'hidden' for a very long time. I would also have focused on the wrong barriers.* (TM4)

Below are a few examples of problematic perspectives identified by the TMs.

> *It is wrong to play the political game. Working hard is sufficient to help me succeed.*
> TM2 (political perspective)

> *I need to be polite and likeable. I must avoid conflict and confrontation.*
> TM4 (sociolinguistic perspective)

> *I need to rescue people who are in distress.*   TM5 (psychological perspective)

At this stage of the TTC process, no effort was made to change the perspective, but merely identify all the perspectives and label which ones were considered problematic given the challenges faced by the TM.

The findings from the second stage of the TTC process indicate that transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1994) can be operationalised within the transition coaching process to create a deeper awareness of potential structural issues in the way the TM views their world. This increased awareness is an important precursor to change (Witherspoon & Cannon, 2004) and the identification of prevailing meaning perspectives is highlighted by Mezirow (1978) and Kitchenham (2008) as one of the necessary phases of transformative learning.

4.3   Identify and design

The third stage of the TTC process identified the single most problematic perspective held by each participant. This stage was achieved through a structured reflection activity, followed by designing an experiential learning process to challenge and change the perspective. The structured reflection used Mezirow's three levels of reflection (content, process and premise) in an attempt to deepen the reflection and ensure that the most problematic perspective surfaced. Mezirow considered critical reflection as an essential step in the transformative learning process to identify problematic idea, values and beliefs as a precursor to transforming them.

Experiential learning was employed for TMs to learn from and change the problematic perspective identified through the reflective process (Kolb, 2014). TMs were asked to design an action plan through which they could practice new behaviours aimed at changing their problematic perspective. The action plan was conceived on both a conceptual and practical level. An example of the output of this process is illustrated in Table 3 for TM2.

Table 3: Mapping of perspective transformation via reflection and active experimentation by TM2

| Old perspective | Reflection | | | New perspective | Active experiment to change old perspective |
	Content reflection (What was assumed?)	Process reflection (How did you come to hold this assumption?)	Premise reflection (Why does this assumption matter?)		
Politics: It is wrong to play the political game. Working hard is sufficient to help me succeed.	I don't need to play the political game at work since all my previous promotions "came to me".	As a child I was always told to mind my place.	I've observed that at senior levels, people manoeuvre and influence to get what they want. If I don't, then I'll get left behind, become frustrated and maybe quit my job.	I am naïve to think that politics are bad. Politics can expose me to influential people from whom I can learn, who I can influence and as a result grow my career.	**Conceptually:** • Connect with people who are active "politicians". • Be careful not to connect with the "wrong" politicians. • Read books on the topic of corporate politics. **Practically:** • Talk to my manager about incorporating another team into my team. • Ask my mentor to introduce me to his network. • Introduce myself to two influential business heads.

This example illustrates how the three levels of reflection led TM2 to a realisation that his current perspective on politics within the workplace is preventing him from fulfilling his highest potential. This insight led him to design an action plan, which could move him closer to his new ideal political perspective and, in the process, to become more successful in his new role. A mapping tool, such as illustrated in Table 3, was made for all TMs.

The results from this third TTC stage confirm the ability of the TTC framework to explicitly use transformative learning theory in the form of Mezirow's three levels of reflection (Mezirow, 1995) to gain deeper insight into blockages preventing success in the new role. The TTC framework also successfully combines experiential learning theory (Kolb, 2014) with the insights gained from the transformative learning dimension

to create a pragmatic approach to changing problematic perspectives that prevent TMs from being successful in their new roles. Critical reflection is considered the cornerstone of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1995), while coaching theory holds that reflection is a necessary step to raise self-awareness (Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011).

4.4   Reflect and redesign

Once the most problematic perspective was identified for each TM and active experiments designed, the TMs moved into a cycle of executing the actions and then reflecting on the outcome of the experiments in the next coaching session. This process essentially follows Kolb's experiential learning cycle (Kolb, 2014). TMs reflected on the outcome of their action experiments and together gauged the level of transformative learning they experienced as a result of the actions. If there was evidence of a sufficient level of transformative learning, the TM could move to the final stage of the TTC process. If not, the active experiment was redesigned and this current stage of reflect and redesign was repeated.

In order to evaluate the level of transformative learning, Hoggan's (2016) three criteria of transformative learning was applied: *depth* – is there evidence of deep impact of the perspective that is being changed; *breadth* – is there impact on multiple levels in the TM's life; *relative stability* – is there evidence that the change is not temporary. Applying Hoggan's three criteria to TM2 yielded the following results:

1. *Depth*: Yes, the impact of changing his political perspective would have a significant impact on his career and life. In his words, if he did not change this perspective he would "completely miss the bus".

2. *Breadth*: When probed as to whether there was evidence of an impact on multiple life contexts, he responded that, since his new awareness, he had started interacting differently with his 19-year old son. His son was unsure of which life direction to take after completing high school. TM2 had tried to overtly suggest options, but this was met with resistance by his son. By applying his new perspective on subtle influencing, he convinced his son through indirect hints and suggestions as opposed to direct instruction, to sign up for a course as a computer technician. There were therefore initial signs of his new perspective on politics and influencing playing out in multiple areas of his life.

3. *Relative stability*: At this point it was not possible to say whether the changes were only temporary. It was agreed to schedule the next coaching session one month later to assess the relative stability of the change.

In a similar manner, Hoggan's criteria were applied to all TMs. It must be noted that TMs progressed through the various TTC stages at different rates. Most TMs spent a number of sessions in this fourth stage where they repeated active experiments in order to change their problematic perspectives.

The findings from the fourth stage of the TTC process emphasise the importance of continual reflection and action learning to change deeply held perspectives. This process is aligned with Kolb's experiential learning theory (Kolb, 2014) and also relates to what Mezirow refers to as critical assessment of assumptions followed later by exploring of options for new roles, relationships and actions (Taylor, 1997). The TTC framework was able to hold the TMs engaged in the process of repeated reflection and action learning for as long as it took to transform a problematic perspective. In the process some of the stumbling blocks that prevented them from being successful in their new roles were removed.

4.5   Complete

The final TTC stage was reached when a TM fulfilled Hoggan's criteria for transformative learning. In this research, four of the six TMs (TM2, TM3, TM4, TM5) reached the final stage. TM2 and TM5 reached the final stage after five coaching sessions while TM3 and TM4 required two additional sessions. TM1 remained in stage four and TM6 remained in stage three after five coaching sessions and were not available for further participation in this research.

The post-coaching interviews that were conducted approximately two months after the final coaching session revealed that the four TMs that reached the final TTC stage still fulfilled Hoggan's three criteria for transformative learning. They also reported a higher level of engagement at work and felt more confident that they are more successful in their new roles. The conclusion from this data is that the TTC framework appears to have the ability to help identify and change deep-seated assumptions that could assist TMs to fully engage in their new roles and transition successfully.

One of the final steps in completing a transformative learning cycle is the reintegration into the person's life on the basis of the new perspectives held (Kitchenham, 2008; Mezirow, 1997). The TTC framework adheres to this reintegration aspect by insisting that the coaching continues until Hoggan's three criteria for transformative learning are achieved. By facilitating not only change, but change on a deep transformative level, the TTC framework helps ensure that the potentially hazardous event of a career transition is leveraged for positive gain.

5.   Concluding comments

The operationalisation of transformative learning in the transition coaching process to facilitate lasting changes in transitioning leaders may be of benefit to individuals and their organisations beyond their current transition process. The findings from this investigation into the extent to which the TTC framework can support transitioning leaders make contributions on a number of fronts:

- By incorporating theoretical models on career transitions and transformative learning explicitly, transitioning leaders and the organisation can be made aware of the typical pitfalls of the transition process.
- Using Mezirow's eight perspectives allows for a structured process to gain deep insight into underplaying problematic assumptions that may cause sub-optimal success in the new role.
- The application of a specific set of criteria to continuously evaluate the level of transformative learning provides a measure of the extent of transformation.
- The preliminary success of the TTC framework as applied to a small sample of transition leaders, provides a novel approach to organisations who wish to manage career transitions in a more ethical and moral manner with a novel approach.

Given the South African context, the application of the TTC framework may contribute to a more ethical, just and equal corporate world by facilitating the success of recently promoted senior corporate leaders who may not be ready for the complex challenges of a senior leadership position.

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