A Positive Psychology Coaching Programme to Develop Police Executives: A Realist Approach

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Candidate Declaration

I hereby declare that:

1. I have not been enrolled for another award of the University, or other academic or professional organisation, whilst undertaking my research degree.

2. None of the material contained in the thesis has been used in any other submission for an award.

3. I am aware of and understand the University's policy on plagiarism and certify that this thesis is my own work. The use of all published sources or other sources of materials consulted have been properly and fully acknowledged.

4. The work undertaken towards the thesis has been conducted in accordance with the SHU Principles of Integrity in Research and the SHU Research Ethics Policy.

5. The word count of the thesis is 87,160.

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Abstract

Positive psychology coaching has grown in popularity in the last 15 years. There are references in the positive psychology coaching literature to “what works”, but little evidence about how it might work when embedded in a coaching programme. This thesis, therefore, explores how, for whom and in what circumstances a positive psychology approach worked when senior leaders took part in an executive coaching programme in one UK police organisation.

The study used realist action research as its methodology. A new positive psychology executive coaching programme was theorised, designed and delivered. Based on twenty semi-structured interviews with fifteen participants including researcher observations, six programme resources were studied, namely positive psychology knowledge, understanding and skills; a positive coaching relationship; positive reframing; organisational support; positive psychology feedback; and positive learning. Personal, organisational and sectoral contexts enabled or constrained the effectiveness of these resources when coachees engaged in cognitive, emotional and behavioural reasoning, making decisions and taking actions leading to successful or less successful coaching outcomes. A refined programme theory was derived, modelled and used to inform future programmes. The study identified how the programme facilitated coachees’ personal change through the pursuance and achievement of coaching goals and, by doing so, how coachees contributed to the organisation’s leadership development culture.

The thesis’ major contribution is in the creation of new knowledge in the coaching psychology field. It sheds light on how and why this positive psychology coaching programme worked in the highly pressurised and stressful context of modern-day policing. It also makes other contributions to knowledge relating to coaching programme design and to the development of realist action research as a methodology for coaching enquiry. With implications for organisations, coaches and coachees working in policing and related settings, it could impact more widely on the development of coaching theory, policy, practice and coach education.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Chapter introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the thesis, set the scene, explain the rationale for the study and provide the reader with an explanatory guide to the structure of the document. It is intended to be a brief overview; the issues raised are developed in the chapters that follow.

1.2 The purpose of the thesis

This is an account of 'what works for whom, how and in what circumstances' in a positive psychology executive coaching programme set in a policing organisation in England and Wales. It responds to a perceived gap in the positive psychology coaching academic literature. It is particularly apt that I started to write my thesis in the 20th anniversary year of the "birth" of the positive psychology movement, which is the discipline from which positive psychology coaching has developed. In the course of the research, I explored how the claims made in the positive psychology coaching literature related to a programme for senior leaders in a UK policing setting that utilised positive psychology coaching principles to encourage participants to set, pursue and achieve personal and professional development objectives. Through a realist action research approach, I designed, delivered and studied the programme that is at the heart of this research and devised and refined its programme theory. The thesis also develops critical arguments relating to the utility of positive psychology executive coaching as an effective leadership development strategy.

1.3 The issue

Observations from my recent work experience, echoed in learning and development surveys such as those published by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (for example, CIPD, 2012; 2015), suggest that organisations are focusing more on equipping leaders to deal with changing organisational cultures through leadership development, especially in the public sector, and coaching is seen as an increasingly important development method. In the police service, pressures on senior leaders have increased as described in section 1.7, pages 20 to 28. This is largely due to budget cuts, increased demands for services from government and service users, more challenging cases and falling resources, leading to a perceived need for leaders to develop effective personal and professional leadership capabilities to succeed in an ever more politicised and complex environment. Formal leadership development programmes can be problematic and ineffective, as many adopt the same methods for everyone – the so-called “sheep dip” approach - and may not take individual needs into account (Burgoyne et al, 2004). Over the last 15 years, organisations have increased their use of coaching as a means of achieving more personalised and contextually relevant leadership development (Burgoyne et al, 2004; Grant et al, 2010; Peltier, 2011). This is particularly the case when leaders operate in complex environments (Turnbull James and Ladkin, 2008; Kovacs and Corrie, 2017a).

Academic interest in positive psychology as an approach to executive coaching has grown in recent years (Kauffman et al, 2015), borne out by a proliferation of books, articles and positive psychology coaching courses. In a survey of coaching

industry leaders conducted by *Coaching at Work*, a UK magazine for coaching and mentoring professionals, positive psychology coaching was named as the top coaching trend in the UK for 2018 (Hall, 2017). Claims have been made that positive psychology coaching provides additional benefits to those afforded by coaching alone, such as improved well-being, flourishing, engagement and performance (Green and Palmer, 2019).

There is evidence in the coaching and positive psychology coaching literature of "what works" to encourage coachees to achieve their personal and professional goals in organisations (Kombarakaran et al, 2008; Passmore and Fillery-Travis, 2011; Theeboom et al, 2014, Kauffman et al, 2015). There is little about *how* it works when embedded in coaching programmes and therefore this forms the issue addressed by my thesis. I describe the concepts of "what works" and "how they work" in more detail on pages 18 and 19 later in this chapter. In addition, traditional ways of researching these issues have tended to yield inconsistent results, a point to which I return on pages 74 to 79 in Chapter 2.

I secured an opportunity to conduct my research in a policing organisation, which enabled me to carry out the study in context. The organisation perceived that they lacked an individually tailored and contextualised executive coaching programme for its senior leaders compatible with their organisational change initiatives to promote the development of an open, transparent and learning leadership culture. I explore this in more detail in Chapter 4 (pp. 130-135). The opportunity allowed me to introduce a new positive psychology executive coaching programme in a naturalistic setting, and, working with a range of stakeholders, explore in depth *how, for whom, and in what circumstances* it might or might not work.

1.4 Personal context

My connection with executive coaching is long-standing, but the point at which it changed into a pivotal role in my career occurred some 13 years ago. Since that time I have worked for the Home Office, the National Policing Improvement Agency and the College of Policing, providing bespoke and individual executive coaching to the most senior police officers and police staff in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. I have conducted a range of coaching interventions with hundreds of clients, and I have developed my professional coaching knowledge and skills through qualification and experience. Latterly, I qualified and now practise as a coach supervisor with clients drawn mostly from the executive coaching community in the public sector. My previous roles have included human resource management in the finance sector, management consultancy and an academic career with several universities.

My academic background is in law and psychology. My career has combined these interests by focusing on leadership development, particularly in the criminal justice sector. The development of senior leaders has been a consistent academic interest. For example, the dissertation for my Masters' degree in applied psychology focused on the psychological implications of experiential learning in senior leadership, where the majority of the research participants worked for the emergency services. I developed a heuristic of the personal and social attributes that distinguished effective self-managed learners from their less successful peers (Stansfield, 1996).

My interest in positive psychology coaching

I have had a lifelong interest in psychology and I had the opportunity to study it as a part-time mature student mid-career in the early 1990s. I enjoyed my time as a psychology student; however, as the dominant discourse during my studies lay in clinical psychology, I became increasingly disappointed with its focus on deficit, i.e. concentrating on what the individual does not possess. I also felt restricted by the narrowness of psychology's preferred research methods, where studies were largely conducted "scientifically" and often in the absence of context. The rise of the positive psychology movement from around 2000 onwards seemed to provide an alternative discourse to this negativity by focusing on human flourishing rather than on survival and languishing.

I became interested in studying the effectiveness of positive psychology coaching programmes as I had had professional experience of working with gap analysis techniques (Jacques, 1996) and competency frameworks with my clients and obtaining mixed results. I read about the potentially demotivating effect on coachees of using such approaches, for example, where the achievement of objectives set according to deficit in a coaching engagement may not be optimised (Garvey and Williamson, 2002; Driver, 2011).

When I started to read around the subject, I realised that the positive psychology coaching field was very wide, so I decided to focus on one particular aspect, i.e. that of its use in coaching police executive leaders when developing their leadership capabilities. The police service, like many organisations in other sectors, tend to base their leadership development on deficit. By identifying and working on "gaps", this process is designed to "fix" the perceived deficit (Turnbull James and Ladkin, 2008). An alternative approach would be to focus on

identifying and building on the individual's strengths, a key feature of positive psychology coaching (Green and Palmer, 2019). This led me to consider how positive psychology executive coaching could make a difference to leadership development, particularly in the police service in England and Wales.

1.5 What is already known about the issue

By way of providing an early context for my research, this is a very brief summary of the positive psychology executive coaching literature, which I discuss in much more detail in Chapter 2. Positive psychology is a relatively recent discipline, originating in the late 1990's (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Gable and Haidt (2005, p.103) describe positive psychology as "the study of the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups, and institutions". Positive psychology coaching developed from positive psychology and coaching shortly afterwards; the term first appeared in an academic publication in 2004 (Kauffman and Scoular, 2004). Garvey et al (2018) suggest that positive psychology coaching is now acknowledged as belonging to a group of recent brands that form "distinct approaches to coaching" (p. 85).

There are many definitions of positive psychology coaching. One of the more comprehensive ones is provided by Passmore and Oades (2014), who describe positive psychology coaching as:

> "coaching approaches that seek to improve short-term well-being (i.e. hedonic well-being) and sustainable well-being (i.e. eudaimonic well-being) using evidence-based approaches from positive psychology and the science of well-being and enable the person to do this in an ongoing manner after coaching has completed" (p. 68).

Coaching is often criticised for lacking a theoretical underpinning (for example, Brunner, 1998; Garvey, 2011; Garvey, 2016). Several writers have suggested that positive psychology could fill that gap, for example, Linley and Harrington (2005), Seligman (2007), Kauffman and Scoular (2004), Kauffman (2006), and Biswas-Diener and Dean (2007). Positive psychology also has its criticisms, for example, accusations of a "Pollyanna"-like naivety that fails to address the full range and richness of human experience (Ehrenreich, 2010; Miller, 2008; Lazarus, 2003; Burkeman, 2012; Megginson, 2010). However, studies have produced evidence to suggest that the use of positive psychology interventions can result in beneficial effects, such as life-satisfaction and psychological well-being (Fredrickson, 2001). Donaldson et al (2019) show, via a systematic review and meta-analysis, that positive psychology interventions at work can produce positive effects on desirable work outcomes and reduce undesirable ones. Thus, I will argue that positive psychology might bring some theoretical and practical value to the study of executive coaching.

1.6 The "gap" in knowledge and understanding of the topic

Although conceptual and practitioner publications have burgeoned over the last 15 years, there is less available by way of primary research. As a relatively new field, Kauffman et al (2015) suggest that there is room for different kinds of research projects. They say that the "does it work?" question seems to have been addressed already, with the answer generally accepted as "yes". What is needed next, Kauffman et al (2015) propose, is more nuanced research – "in addition to establishing that coaching works, we also need to understand why it works" (p.

385). I will argue that it is even more important to establish *how* it works and to do so when situated in its context.

In this thesis, I make distinctions between the concepts of "what works" in coaching, "how" coaching works, and "what works for whom in what circumstances, in what respects and how" in coaching, as follows:

- The question "what works" in coaching relates to a body of research that strives to identify the factors that lead to successful outcomes, searching for outcome regularities and evidence in order to guide practice. Such endeavours tend to be conducted using positivist principles, seeking universal patterns of behaviour and with an emphasis on validity, reliability and generalisability. "What works" studies often control for contextual factors in order to identify statistical relationships that may or may not indicate causality.

- The question "how coaching works" focuses not just upon the "what" but also on explaining the processes that operate in coaching. This is not necessarily a realist question and many such process studies take a systemic approach.

- The more searching question of "what works for whom in what circumstances and in what respects, and how" in coaching is a realist one. The realist approach holds that not all programmes will work for everyone all of the time, even if the same programme is delivered in similar circumstances (Pawson and Tilley, 1997). This is at the heart of my thesis. A realist approach seeks to discover and explain generative causal

> relationships between a programme's mechanisms, contexts and outcomes, and often uses a range of methods by which to research them. It asks the question "what works for whom in what circumstances and in what respects, and how" to help to identify and explain how a programme works (Pawson and Tilley, 2004, p. 2).

I discuss and develop these distinctions on pages 74 to 79 in Chapter 2 and on pages 96 to 99 in Chapter 3.

Bennett (2006) identifies six themes where coaching research would be beneficial and where there are gaps to address, as follows:

1. The coach
2. The client
3. The relationship
4. Coaching tools, techniques and theory
5. Coaching outcomes, and
6. Organisational contexts.

My research is primarily positioned in theme number 4, i.e. coaching tools, techniques and theory. It also touches on number 3, the coach-coachee relationship; number 5, coaching outcomes; and number 6, the organisational context.

Whilst there is much published research that considers how different aspects of coaching work (Grant and O'Connor, 2019), there have been far fewer studies conducted in the context of whole programmes, especially those that cater for senior leadership populations and ones that research the topic from a realist perspective. To date and to my knowledge, there has been just one published

realist research study into executive coaching programmes in work organisations, that of Kovacs and Corrie (2016). Taking a realist approach, the study identifies generative mechanisms and contexts in order to improve the effectiveness of programmes when coaching for complexity in leadership. I have used a realist action research methodological orientation (Westhorp et al, 2016), discussed further in Chapter 3 (pp. 102 to 106), to study how a *positive psychology* executive coaching programme works, for whom and in what circumstances. This has not, to my knowledge, been done before, hence forming the lacuna that my study addresses.

1.7 The organisational context

The context for this research is the police service in the UK. By way of an introduction, the purpose of this section is to provide a brief overview of policing in England and Wales as it pertains to the research project.

There are 43 police forces in England and Wales, each of which is a separate entity. The governance of police forces before November 2012 was achieved through a tripartite arrangement between the force, its local police authority and the Home Office. The make-up of police authorities included a balance of representatives drawn from local government politicians from different parties, plus independent members drawn from the public. In November 2012, the governance arrangements changed following the abolition of the police authorities, which were replaced by a single elected police and crime commissioner for each force (Lister, 2013). In places where there was an elected mayor, the mayoral office undertook the role of the police and crime commissioner (Lister, 2013). The leadership of each force is now split, with

operational policing falling under the control of the chief constable, whilst the responsibility for the oversight of the force, the deployment of resources and, in some cases, the direct employment of non-warranted police staff lies with the police and crime commissioner (Lister, 2013). Subsequently, police and crime panels were established for each force to ensure that the police and crime commissioner discharges their duties in a proper manner (Lister, 2014). This has led, in effect, to a quadripartite governance arrangement consisting of the chief constable, the police and crime commissioner, the police and crime panel and the Home Office (Lister, 2013).

The splitting of responsibilities and the politicisation of the role of the police and crime commissioner has created many areas of conflict (Lister, 2013), a discussion of which is beyond the scope of this thesis. For current purposes, it is probably fair to say that these tensions have affected the nature of leadership within police forces, especially relating to senior leaders' role clarity and accountability.

The operating environment in policing has also changed dramatically in the last decade. The reasons are various, involving political, financial and societal factors. The global financial "crash" of the late 2000s led to a governmental policy of austerity in the UK, particularly affecting public services. As far as policing was concerned, as a result of the Comprehensive Spending Review (HM Treasury, 2010) forces suffered budget cuts that led to severe reductions in staffing whilst the public's demand for policing's services increased. Reports vary, but most estimate a 20% budget reduction and the loss of 20,000 police officers (Morse, 2015).

A general example of the strains these measures have placed on staffing is the substitution of double crewed patrols with single crews (Houdmont et al 2018), leading to increased stress and threats to safety when officers respond to emergencies. Another implication of the financial cuts is that forces have had to re-prioritise the nature of their response to certain types of crime, and, in some cases, provide no response at all (Thornton, 2018). A recently published report by the Police Federation in England and Wales, who represent police officers from constables to chief inspectors, described some of the pressures the police are facing due to rising demand and falling numbers (Elliott-Davies, 2019). 79% of officers who responded reported suffering from stress or anxiety in the last year, of whom 94% attributed this to their jobs. 90% had the opinion that there are insufficient officers to cope with the demands made on police forces, 60% had been involved in a trauma of some sort and 40% said their jobs were stressful. A recent National Audit Office report concluded:

> "While no police force has failed financially, there are signs emerging that forces are finding it harder to deliver an effective service" (National Audit Office, 2018, p. 8).

This current study focuses on the senior people who are attempting to lead and manage officers and staff in police forces day-to-day in the face of this worsening operating environment in UK policing. These are the members of the superintending ranks and their police staff equivalents, whose senior level job it is to head up key functions and large operational units, mostly reporting directly to the force's chief officers.

These roles come with a personal cost. The body that represents the superintending ranks, the Police Superintendents' Association of England and Wales, stated that senior leaders' mental health was being threatened by a

combination of new types of offending, rises in crime rates and cuts to officer and staff numbers (Donaldson-Fielder and Godfree, 2017). Following years of organisational rationalisation, there are now fewer senior managers in most forces; those that are still in rank are taking on greater responsibilities and working excessive hours on a long-term basis. In surveys, 50% of respondents reported that they experienced anxiety and 27% felt depressed (Gayle, 2017). The average working week at this level was found to be 50 to 60 hours. In particular, respondents reported that they were not taking the rest days or annual leave to which they were entitled and that their work regularly spilled over into their own time. This was affecting their health and wellbeing (Donaldson-Fielder and Godfree, 2017).

It is noted that in July 2019, the then new Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, announced a national campaign to recruit 20,000 new police officers to address the loss in numbers. As Dearden (2019) points out, the move has been generally well received by the police service but operationalising the announcement is likely to take several years and involve many logistical difficulties. The new measure is therefore unlikely to ease the leadership challenges outlined above in the short to medium term.

Police culture has also had an impact on the modern-day policing context. Loftus (2010) describes a dominant traditional cultural stereotype, which, despite the passage of time and many attempts at reform, she observes still holds true:

> "Police, it is said, have an exaggerated sense of mission toward their role and crave work that is crime orientated and promises excitement. They celebrate masculine exploits, show willingness to use force and engage in informal working practices. Officers are continually suspicious, lead socially isolated lives and display defensive solidarity with colleagues. They are mainly conservative

> in politics and morality, and their culture is marked by cynicism and pessimism" (Loftus, 2010, pp. 1-2).

Wellbeing has risen in importance as a topic on national policing agendas over recent years. This can be seen in key policy initiatives such as the Policing Vision 2025 published by the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC, 2016). This 10-year plan sets out the national strategic intent for policing and it recognises wellbeing's key role. Several national initiatives to improve workforce wellbeing have been established (College of Policing, 2018). The role of leadership in this endeavour has been noted, but it leaves the question as to who is supporting the leaders unaddressed. A new national policing well-being service, funded by the UK Government, was launched in 2019 as a response to increasing concerns in this area (Dodd, 2019). The chief executive of the College of Policing said at the release of the results of the Police Federation's Demand, Capacity and Welfare survey (Elliott-Davies, 2019):

> "Today's survey highlights police are doing an increasingly difficult job with fewer resources against a backdrop of greater responsibility for the most vulnerable in society and ever more sophisticated criminality" (Cunningham, 2019).

Valuable work has been done in some forces to address resilience and wellbeing in policing, some of which draws upon the discipline of positive psychology (Hesketh et al, 2019). Positive psychology coaching has been adopted in several police forces, although mostly for the benefit of police constables. To my knowledge, positive psychology has not been consistently applied in executive-level coaching in policing across England and Wales specifically to support those in senior leadership roles.

With positive psychology coaching claiming to have close links with wellbeing generally (Seligman, 2012), health and wellbeing (Reynolds et al, 2019) and resilience and wellbeing (Skews et al, 2019), it would seem to offer a particularly compatible approach to use in senior-level coaching in the context of the testing organisational circumstances under which this study was conducted. Could it provide a viable "antidote" to the stresses and strains of modern police leadership? I argue that this is an under-utilised and, in this context, under-researched approach that potentially could make a significant impact on police leadership development effectiveness.

The prevailing culture in policing also affects the nature of leadership in the service. Loftus (2010) comments that the tendency of police occupational culture to resist change endures despite "important developments within policing contexts, some of which could be expected to transform the cultural ethos that has long underpinned the police identity" (p 1). Loftus (2010) explains that this might be the case because the "basic pressures associated with the police role have not been removed" (p.1). Davis and Bailey (2018) similarly observed that police leadership remains command-led, management-orientated and driven by hierarchy and rank structures. In their single-organisation case study based on semi-structured interviews with police officers at chief inspector to chief officer levels, Davis and Bailey (2018) found that they used a command-and-control managerial discourse to express their understanding of police leadership. Key drivers for their approach were identified as the need to contain risk, present a favourable external impression in the face of increasing public and governmental scrutiny and maintain a task-orientated focus on the importance of "getting the job done" (Davis and Bailey, 2018, p. 20). These factors have influenced the

development of policing's leadership practices, suggest Davis and Bailey (2018), who observe that:

> "The paradox is therefore that, at a time when police leadership may need to become more innovative and people-focused, the pressures and complexities of contemporary policing mean that police officers retreat to leadership which is command led and driven by the primacy of effectiveness and efficiency" (p. 19).

When it comes to the issue of diversity amongst senior police leaders, a similar pattern seems to have occurred. Silvestri (2015) observes that gender diversity, which was thought might bring a different and improved approach to police leadership, has taken "two steps forward and one step back" (p. 56) in the last 20 years. Silvestri (2019) also notes the phenomenon of continuing female and BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) under-representation in police leadership, despite the large amount of academic critique, government exhortation and initiatives for change that have taken place over recent years.

Davis and Bailey (2018) call for police leadership to be developed via "legitimate, alternative leadership strategies that are relevant and applicable to the policing environment" (p.20). I argue that positive psychology coaching programmes can play a part in assisting with the modernisation and improvement of police leadership by helping senior police leaders challenge their own assumptions, develop their leadership capabilities and help move their organisations towards a more inclusive and enlightened leadership culture.

Whilst I argue that my research into positive psychology coaching at the executive level could be useful in any organisation or sector, I believe that it is most pressing in policing. My argument is based on the unique way in which leadership succession in the service operates. Except for a small minority of direct-entry

officers, most senior police officer succession occurs within a closed system and a short career lifespan. An officer, for example, can have served and risen through the ranks from probationer constable to chief constable and retire, all in the space of 30 years, compared to other sectors where careers can span 50 years. Although recent alterations in pension arrangements mean that the average length of a police officer's career will increase in the future, the police service still needs to develop the required executive capabilities in its workforce far more efficiently and quickly than might be the case in other settings. Government and national policing organisations agree that the service needs to adopt the most effective leadership development initiatives possible (College of Policing, 2015). Positive psychology executive coaching could offer an effective contribution to this endeavour. By situating my research in the police service, I intended to help it to determine how programmes work for whom and in what circumstances so it can deliver the best possible outcomes in optimum timeframes to the benefit of all stakeholders.

I set out looking for an existing positive psychology executive coaching programme in a UK police organisation to research. There was no such programme in the police service at the time, although coaching via a senior leadership development scheme had been provided nationally in the recent past through the Home Office-sponsored National Senior Careers Advisory Service, in which I had held a senior role. The provision was discontinued by central government in 2012 due to the then prevailing political environment of austerity. A new coaching programme would therefore have to be developed and implemented from scratch to form the basis for the research.

I held conversations with several police forces in England and Wales, all of whom, in theory, could have been potential hosts. I describe my sampling strategy in more detail in Chapter 4, pages 117 to 119 but, for the purposes of this brief introduction, I found a force where there was enough synergy between my academic intent and their senior leadership development ambitions for a useful research relationship to be formed. The organisation was looking for an academic partner to design, run and evaluate an executive coaching scheme using positive psychology principles to complement new leadership development initiatives they had just introduced. A mutual agreement was reached whereby I would design, deliver, study and refine a programme in partnership with the organisation at no cost to them, and the organisation would host the study.

Maintaining confidentiality for the organisation and the participants in my study was a strict organisational stipulation when I finalised the research agreement. I do not name the organisation, any participants or respondents in this thesis. I refer to the force throughout as “the organisation” and have anonymised all references to individual contributors in the data and in the thesis to the best of my ability.

1.8 The research question

I refer to my research question in greater detail in following chapters, particularly Chapters 3 (pp. 89 to 91), 4 (pp. 109 to 110) and 8 (pp. 286 to 287), but for the purpose of this introduction, I state it here. Arising from the gap I identified in the literature as described in section 1.6, I developed the research question as follows:

> “How can a positive psychology executive coaching programme work to support senior police leaders to set, pursue and achieve their personal and leadership development goals and contribute to the organisation’s leadership development culture?”

1.9 Why this research is important

I argue that my work makes an original knowledge contribution by explaining how a positive psychology coaching programme set at the executive level in a police organisation works. Seligman (2007) asserted that coaching lacks a clear theoretical base, and that positive psychology can provide theoretical and evidence-based “backbones”. There is little detailed research that demonstrates how this might actually work in the context of a coaching programme, which constitutes a knowledge gap. The research contributes new knowledge about positive psychology coaching programmes and develops the beginnings of a theoretical foundation for positive psychology coaching programme policy and practice. I believe this to be the first research project to use a realist approach to the study of positive psychology coaching programmes. It contributes to knowledge by building on the “what works” debate in an under-researched context, i.e. police leadership development. By applying programme theory in an organisational context, at the micro and meso levels the study uncovered the generative mechanisms, contexts and outcomes relating to the positive psychology coaching programme which impact on the organisation’s future leadership and organisational development policy. This has provided a pragmatic resolution to the organisation’s issue and has the potential to contribute to the development of national police leadership development policy at the macro level.

As an additional contribution, my study has provided a development of the realist approach to studying executive coaching programmes. Westhorp et al (2016) applied the first realist action research and co-design approach to the development of an existing welfare programme in Australia. To my knowledge, it has not been applied to new programme development in coaching before, or to UK policing. The study contributes to the current debate about extending the scope of realist research beyond the consideration of existing programmes. The realist approach to generalisability is to "cumulate" the results of individual studies with others on similar topics (Pawson and Tilley, 1997). The results of this current study could be cumulated with those of similar studies, past, present and future, thus contributing to the body of realist knowledge on the topic. A further contribution is the application of realist methods to the benefit of coaching programme design.

1.10 The realist approach to research

As already mentioned above, the approach I have taken to my research is a realist one, and I discuss this and my rationale for doing so more fully in Chapter 3 (pp. 89 to 91). For the purposes of this introduction, I include here a brief description of what I mean by the terms "realist approach to research" and "realist research approach" and how I have applied them, interchangeably, to my research.

There are several ways in which realism is represented in management research, for example, empirical realism and philosophical realism. The term "a realist approach" is used in this thesis in the sense of philosophical realism, in particular, a development from critical realism known as scientific realism. A working

definition of philosophical realism is that it is an approach that is based on an assumption of an objectivist ontology and a subjectivist epistemology that looks to explain generative causation by examining the workings of mechanisms in context (Maxwell, 2012). The main research methodological orientations that have sprung from this philosophical position and attributed to the development of "scientific realism" are those of realist review, realist synthesis and realist evaluation, which provide practical research opportunities to apply realist theory (Pawson and Tilley, 1997). However, the term "realist research" is applied to any research that adopts a realist philosophy, whether or not it is a realist review, a realist synthesis or a realist evaluation (Westhorp et al, 2016).

As discussed in Chapter 3, I adopt a realist action research methodology for my study. Whilst it is *informed* by the principles of realist review, realist synthesis and realist evaluation, it is none of those things in of itself, as I explain in Chapter 3 (pp. 102 to 106). Rather, it is an *exploratory* study that takes a realist research approach in its broader sense and applies the principles of realist research methodology in its execution. I explain in greater detail the philosophical realist assumptions that underpin my research and how I applied them as the thesis unfolds in the chapters that follow, in particular, Chapters 3 (pp. 102 to 106), 4 (pp. 109 to 115) and 5 (pp. 157 to 196).

1.11 The role of the researcher

In this research, I used a realist action research approach to create a programme to study and explore how it works. I was aware that acting as co-designer, coach and researcher in the same study could be problematic. The main objections could be to do with issues of bias and social desirability in respondents' accounts,

i.e. how can we be sure that respondents are telling the truth? I stress that the research was not intended to represent an evaluation but to explore and explain how it had worked.

The “insider/outsider” researcher distinction (Dalkin, 2016) can be useful here. The “insider” researcher is usually a member of the host organisation and has the advantage of being knowledgeable about the organisation and the programme. The “outsider” researcher is usually external to the organisation and has the advantage of, arguably, more objectivity. However, a criticism of the “insider” researcher is that they know all about the programme already, so why the need to ask questions; a criticism of the “outsider” researcher is that they don’t know anything about the programme and may not be that interested in it (Dalkin, 2016).

I saw it as an advantage not to be either of those things but to be a combination of them. I did not work for the host organisation, so to that extent I was an “outsider”. However, I work nationally in the sector and have a reputation for reliability and knowledge of the culture within policing. To that extent I was an “insider”, enough to build trust. As Loftus (2010) observes, trust is very important in policing and it is not easily won. As an organisational outsider, I argue that this gave me a degree of independence that might not have been afforded to a fully insider researcher. Throughout, I was aware that I held multiple roles and that there could be concerns over lack of objectivity and the potential for undue influence on respondents. Whilst I did not intend to take a formal ethnographic approach, I felt that the advantages of the opportunity to gather richer qualitative data (Geertz, 1973) through my involvement, the ability to maintain a consistency of approach throughout, the development of trust between coach and coachee, and – pragmatically – cost, outweighed the disadvantages. I discuss these issues

in greater detail in Chapter 4 (pp. 148 to 151) and the safeguards I included to mitigate potential undue bias in Chapter 9 (pp. 349 to 350).

1.12 Thesis structure

A very brief guide to the principal components of this thesis is as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction (this chapter) – this sets the scene for the thesis, introduces the topic, provides a rationale and a context for the study, introduces the main arguments and leads into the main body of the work.

Chapter 2: Literature review – this presents a realist-informed review of the current positive psychology coaching literature. Further references to the literature also appear elsewhere in the thesis; for example, I draw upon additional and topic-specific items of literature throughout Chapter 5, the realist theory-building chapter, as part of the justification for the initial programme theory.

Chapter 3: Methodology – in this chapter I articulate my philosophical commitments, methodology and orientation for the study and their justification.

Chapter 4: Realist action research – here I provide the detail of the research design, methods, data analysis strategy and analysis methods and their justifications.

Chapter 5: Building realist programme theory – in this chapter, I discuss and justify the building of an initial realist programme theory, upon which the empirical study was based.

Chapter 6: Findings – in this chapter I provide a detailed account of the data that was collected and analysed relating to the empirical study.

Chapter 7: Refining the realist programme theory – here I demonstrate how I refined the original programme theory in the light of the empirical findings to construct a new evidence-informed programme theory. I also present an integrated visual model that represents how the elements of the programme had worked together to produce the coaching outcomes.

Chapter 8: Discussion – in this chapter, I discuss the findings and theory refinement in detail at the programme level and also at the level of the six identified components and their interactions.

Chapter 9: Conclusions – I draw together the various strands of argument, make conclusions and discuss the contribution the study makes to knowledge, policy and practice. I also address issues of ethics, implications and limitations, and put forward recommendations as to how this research could be developed in the future.

Chapter 10: Reflexive Account – as I am an integral part of this research project not only as the researcher but also as a pro-active agent of change, in this chapter I provide an account of my role, my personal learning and change processes, the impact I have had on the research process and outcomes and other issues arising from the choices I made.

1.13 Chapter summary

In this chapter, I have set the backdrop to the research project and provided brief summaries of the purpose of the thesis, the issue, my personal context, my interest in the topic, what is already known, the "gap" to be addressed, the research questions, contribution, the nature of realist research and my role as

researcher. I have introduced the main arguments, which will be developed throughout the thesis, as follows:

1. A positive psychology approach may bring theoretical and practical value to the study and practice of executive coaching;

2. Positive psychology coaching, with its focus on well-being, may be an appropriate genre to employ in leadership development in the police service in England and Wales, particularly as an alternative to deficit-based coaching and bearing in mind the sector's challenging cultural context;

3. A gap in positive psychology coaching research has been identified to study not if positive psychology coaching works but how it works set in the context of whole coaching programmes, which this study is designed to address; and

4. A realist approach may provide an alternative and more nuanced discourse to positive psychology coaching programme research than more traditional approaches, which might be helpful in contributing both to existing knowledge and the development of practice.

I have also provided a reader's guide to the thesis' structure to explain the layout of the document at an early stage.

In the next chapter, I turn my attention to a realist-informed review of the literatures that underpin this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Chapter introduction

Having outlined the main features of my research in the Introduction in Chapter 1, the purpose of this chapter is to present a literature review for the topic. As a realist action research method was chosen for this study, and realist methodology encourages an iterative process where considerations of relevant theory and evidence are used at various stages in the research procedure where it is most appropriate (Wong et al, 2016), I also include additional short and topic-related segments of the literature throughout Chapter 5 to justify the decisions I made when building the original realist programme theory. This current chapter sets the overall scene and locates the study in its academic context.

The research question is the key underpinning to my literature review process. I introduced it in Chapter 1, and I re-state it here:

> "How can a positive psychology executive coaching programme work to support senior police leaders to set, pursue and achieve their personal and leadership development goals and contribute to the organisation's leadership development culture?"

This literature review reflects the main elements of the research question and develops the arguments introduced in Chapter 1. It is arranged as follows:

- Defining the field and background;
- A realist-informed approach to reviewing the positive psychology coaching core literature;

- Goals as programme outcomes: a realist-informed view of the literature; and
- Researching the “what works” literature in coaching: a realist view.

2.2 Defining the field and background

The main criteria I used to scope the relevant literature were that items should be major works by leading academics in the field, in the English language, set in the UK or in similar cultures and marking milestones in the development of the key areas that contribute to the topics of positive psychology coaching, positive psychology executive coaching and positive psychology coaching programmes. I restricted my search to items that were directly applicable to senior leadership development in work organisations. I conducted searches based on key words from my research question using literature-searching programmes, such as university library search facilities, Google Scholar, the National Police Library search service, and relevant databases such as ProQuest, Ebsco and Dawsonera.

Based on my own searches and informed by lists published by others, for example, Passmore and Oades (2014) and Green and Palmer (2019), I identified 21 key works. These spanned the period from 2004, the date upon which the first connection between positive psychology and executive coaching was published, to the present day. They form the core positive psychology coaching literature for the purposes of this thesis. They and the nature of their contribution are set out in Table 2.1:

Table 2.1: Positive psychology coaching core literature

Author(s) and Date	Title	Type	Contribution
Kauffman and Scoular (2004)	Toward a Positive Psychology of Executive Coaching	Book chapter; conceptual	First publication to link formally positive psychology with executive coaching
Linley and Harrington (2005)	Positive Psychology and Coaching Psychology: Perspectives on Integration	Journal article; conceptual	Early article on the synergies between positive psychology and coaching
Kauffman (2006)	Positive Psychology: The Science at the Heart of Coaching	Book chapter; conceptual	Detailed discussion of the contribution positive psychology can make to life and executive coaching
Seligman (2007)	Coaching and Positive Psychology	Journal article; conceptual	Argument of the value to coaching of positive psychology as theoretical and evidence-based "backbones"
Linley and Kauffman (2007)	Editorial – Positive Coaching Psychology: Integrating the Science of Positive Psychology with the Practice of Coaching Psychology	Journal editorial; conceptual	Early editorial on the synergies between positive psychology and coaching psychology
Biswas-Diener and Dean (2007)	Positive Psychology Coaching: Putting the Science of Happiness to Work for your Clients	Book; conceptual, practice-focused	Coined the phrase "positive psychology coaching"; relates positive psychology coaching to practice
Kauffman and Linley (2007)	The Meeting of the Minds: Positive Psychology and Coaching Psychology	Journal article; conceptual	Interviews with key figures in the emerging positive psychology coaching field
Biswas-Diener (2010)	Practicing Positive Psychology Coaching: Assessment, Diagnosis and Intervention	Book; practice-focused	First positive psychology coaching practitioner handbook, contains a wide range of tools and techniques based on positive psychology
Driver (2011)	Coaching Positively: Lessons for Coaches from Positive Psychology	Book; practice-focused	Practitioner text aimed at the UK coaching profession.
Hefferon (2011)	Positive Psychology	Book chapter; conceptual	Review of positive psychology coaching as evidence-based practice, identifies key positive psychology theory
Grant and Cavanagh (2011)	Coaching and Positive Psychology	Book chapter; conceptual, research orientated and practice-focused	Reviews coaching research and practice as contributors to the development of coaching psychology and positive psychology, the reverse position to other contributions in the positive psychology coaching debate
Green and Norrish (2013)	Enhancing Well-being in Adolescents: Positive Psychology and Coaching Psychology Interventions in Schools	Book chapter; conceptual	Provides useful descriptions of positive psychology coaching interventions and programmes; set in an educational context
Freire (2013)	Positive Psychology Approaches	Book chapter; conceptual	Discussion of positive psychology science application to coaching. Positive psychology as the "solution" to lack of coaching's theoretical framework.
Boniwell, Kauffman and Silberman (2014) now in 3rd edition (2018)	The Positive Psychology Approach to Coaching	Book chapter; conceptual	Provides an overview of the positive psychology coaching field, methods, techniques, applications in practice and evaluation
Passmore and Oades (2014)	Positive Psychology Coaching – A Model for Coaching Practice	Journal article; conceptual; practice-focused	Provides a succinct overview of positive psychology coaching, key theories, milestone text recommendations and coaching applications
Oades and Passmore (2014)	Positive Psychology Coaching	Book chapter; conceptual	Provision of theory and evidence underpinning positive psychology coaching, and a prototypical coaching process
Passmore and Oades (2015)	Positive Psychology Techniques – Positive Case Conceptualisation	Journal article; practice-focused	Brief article on positive case conceptualisation
Kauffman, Joseph and Scoular (2015)	Leadership Coaching and Positive Psychology	Book chapter; conceptual	Set in an executive/leadership coaching context

Sims (2017)	Second Wave Positive Psychology Coaching with Difficult Emotions	Journal article; conceptual; practice-focused	Presents a framework for coaching clients with negative issues to address as well as working with the positive
Burke (2018)	Conceptual Framework for a Positive Psychology Coaching Practice	Journal article; practice-based	First article to put forward a coherent whole intervention-focused framework
Green and Palmer (2019)	Positive Psychology Coaching in Practice	Book; conceptual; practice-focused	First academic text on integrating positive psychology and coaching psychology

As this thesis concerns a positive psychology approach to an executive coaching programme set in a leadership development context, I briefly consider the nature of coaching, leadership coaching and executive coaching before turning to the more specific topic of positive psychology coaching itself.

The modern concept of coaching in an organisational context is a relatively recent development (Garvey et al, 2018). The International Coaching Federation (ICF), one of the professional bodies representing coaches, defines coaching as:

> "Partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximise their personal and professional potential" (ICF website, accessed on the 29th January 2020).

Coaching embraces a wide spectrum of practices. As Garvey et al (2018) observe, there has been an increase in the range of coaching approaches that coaches offer, including life coaching, Gestalt coaching, narrative coaching, solution-focused coaching, leadership or executive coaching and latterly positive psychology coaching, all of which have their own set of principles, models and ways of working. A full discussion of these genres is beyond the scope of this thesis, but at this point it is useful to consider the nature of leadership and executive coaching as I combined them with positive psychology to form my approach in the current study. The terms "leadership coaching" and "executive coaching" are often used inter-changeably in the literature, but they are both

generally used to describe coaching that is aimed at developing a senior or management population in an organisation.

Leadership coaching is defined by Boniwell and Smith (2019) as:

> "Development of the self, with a focus primarily on gaining deeper awareness of self and improving performance (Barnard,1938 in Stokes and Jolly, 2014) to more effectively 'regulate and direct their interpersonal and intrapersonal resources to better attain their goals' (Grant, 2006: 153) and balance the tensions of co-operation and competition and the interests of the various and often many stakeholders within teams and organisations (Stokes and Jolly, 2014)" (p.160-161).

The classic definition of executive coaching was provided by Kilburg (1996) as follows:

> "A helping relationship formed between a client who has managerial authority and responsibility in an organization and a consultant who uses a wide variety of behavioral techniques and methods to help the client achieve a mutually agreed set of goals to improve his or her professional performance and personal satisfaction and, consequently, to improve the effectiveness of the client's organization within a formally defined coaching agreement" (p. 142).

Connections between executive or leadership coaching and positive psychology have been made in the positive psychology coaching literature. For example, in Kauffman et al's (2015) book chapter "Leadership Coaching and Positive Psychology", which, in a previous edition in 2004, had been called "Toward a Positive Psychology of Executive Coaching", note that in the last 10 years the worlds of leadership and coaching have become much more complex and demanding. Kauffman et al (2015) observe that "executive coaching and positive psychology are highly aligned" (p. 379). Kauffman et al (2015) highlight a paradox in that the driving forces behind why coachees want executive coaching in the first place often include increasing levels of negativity, toxicity and demands in

their leadership roles, yet they seek positive psychology coaching's ability to help them with these challenges. Kauffman et al (2015) also state:

> "Positive psychology is now a primary body of theory and research that informs the practice of leadership and executive coaching and can be integrated into other coaching approaches" (p. 377).

Kauffman et al (2015) point out that positive psychology executive coaching is now seen as a developmental activity rather than a remedial one, and that positive psychology executive coaching has developed a high degree of credibility in many organisations over the last decade or so.

Moving on to consider positive psychology coaching, there are many definitions in the published literature. For the purposes of this review, I chose to focus on a definition provided by Green and Palmer (2019), one of the most recent, in which they say that positive psychology coaching is:

> "Evidence-based coaching practice informed by the theories and research of positive psychology for the enhancement of resilience, achievement and wellbeing" (p. 10).

To provide the background for the realist-informed review, I summarise here the advantages and criticisms that writers have highlighted relating to the positive psychology approach to coaching. On the benefit side, Boniwell et al (2014, p.157) highlight that:

- Positive psychology coaching purports to be based on scientific principles, therefore enhancing its reputation and credibility;
- Coaches working in this paradigm consider the client as "whole";

- Positive psychology coaching focuses on “strengths, positive behaviours and purpose”, which can be very rewarding for the coach and coachee; and
- It can be used for development coaching and performance enhancement.

Biswas-Diener (2010) offers five basic ingredients that draw a distinction between positive psychology coaching and other forms of coaching, arguing that they offer advantages to the coach and coachee, as follows:

1. “Humans have an innate drive to grow, change, and overcome.
2. Focusing on strengths is as powerful, or more powerful, than focusing on weaknesses to achieve success.
3. Positivity – whether in the form of emotion or hope – is a powerful resource for facilitating change and achieving success.
4. Attention must be paid to both positive and negative aspects of life in order to address the complete client.
5. Scientifically derived knowledge and assessments give us unique ways of understanding clients and coaching” (p146).

These are wide-ranging claims to which I return in section 2.3. However, there have also been criticisms. For example, Boniwell et al (2014) speculate that the benefits of positive psychology coaching could be attributed to the coach being reassuring, caring and kind, as indeed any competent coach would be.

Criticisms made of positive psychology are also applicable to positive psychology coaching, such as its apparent lack of emotional balance and the ignoring of the negative and deeper underlying issues that people face in everyday life (Popovic and Boniwell, 2007). Lazarus (2003) stated that we cannot separate the positive and the negative, that they are two sides of the same coin; he argues that we

need bad things to appreciate the good, both are part of life, and positive psychology may be trying to swing the pendulum too far the other way.

The role of positive emotion has been emphasised in the positive psychology literature, defined as joy, gratitude, serenity, interest, hope, pride, amusement, inspiration, awe and love (Fredrickson, 2009) in response to criticism that positive psychology focuses too much on “the pursuit of happiness”. Snyder’s Hope Theory (2002) has been particularly linked to positive psychology coaching via the development of capability to engage in goal-focused behaviour to achieve desired outcomes through personal agency. The utility of positive psychology coaching techniques in negative situations such as the treatment of post-traumatic growth and resilience training (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004), and the benefits of finding meaning and positives in life (Baumeister and Vohs, 2002) have been highlighted.

Criticisms have also suggested that in the western world people are too focused on the individual and are therefore selfish, for example, Smith (2018). Another criticism suggests that the emphasis on the positive places the responsibility for happiness on the individuals themselves and this can lead to victim-blaming (Held, 1999) and to feelings of guilt (Beard, 2015). Ehrenreich (2010) wrote passionately about the effects of societal pressure to be positive in the case of serious illness. She argued that she felt she was made to think that if she was not recovering it was somehow her fault because she was not being positive enough. This led to calls for practitioners to apply positive psychology methods to individuals according to their need and circumstances and never to blame the victim (Boniwell et al, 2014). This also links to the argument in my current research that instead of searching for what works for everybody in coaching

research we should focus on what works for whom, when and in what circumstances, in order to establish what is most appropriate for different people in a range of different settings.

Both positive psychology and positive psychology coaching have matured from the new concepts that were introduced 20 and 15 years ago respectively. Acceptance has increased and benefits and criticisms have been synthesised. As Wong (2011), Lomas (2016) and Ivtzan et al (2016) point out, positive psychology appears to be entering a "second wave" or "PP2.0", one that integrates the "first wave" of recognizing the positive with a more nuanced bringing together of "old" and "new" ways of thinking in psychology. Freire (2013) expresses the opinion that positive psychology coaching is still at an early stage of its development as a concept. Positive psychology may be at a more advanced stage to that of positive psychology coaching, evidenced by the amount of academic attention and research activity it has attracted in the last 20 years, whilst positive psychology coaching research is still in its infancy. It may be that the pace of research in positive psychology coaching may not be keeping up with developments in its core theoretical discipline. As reported by several coaching psychology writers, prominent psychologist Shane Lopez worried that:

> "Positive psychology theory and research has a great deal to contribute to people living better lives. My concern about applying positive psychology to coaching is that only the best coaches take the time to learn in depth aspects of positive psychology science. Applying popularized notions of positive psychological principles do little to improve the lives of people" (cited in Freire, 2013, p.439, and in Kauffman and Linley, 2007, p.90).

Lopez's comments could have significance for the training, development and accreditation of positive psychology coaching practitioners. He does not,

however, define what he means by “the best coaches”. Several debates, however, are ongoing in the UK concerning the development of a coaching “profession”. Gray et al (2016) discuss the role of, and the competition between, different professional bodies on this point. Professional communities in psychology assert a dominant role for psychologists in coaching. For example, Lomas (2019) outlines the current debates on the professionalisation of coaching, coaching psychology and positive psychology coaching, in which some argue that the practice of positive psychology coaching should be restricted to qualified psychologists. Biswas-Diener (2010) called for coaches who wish to use positive psychology in their practice to be trained and accredited in both coaching and positive psychology. Whilst a full discussion of these issues is beyond the scope of this thesis, I return briefly to them in Chapter 9 (p. 345), offering comments on the impact my research could have on professional bodies as coaching stakeholders.

The emphasis on psychological accreditation as a requirement for coaching fits Western’s (2012) identification of the “Psy Expert” as one of four dominant discourses in coaching, alongside “Soul Guide”, “Managerialist” and “Network Coaching”. Western defines a discourse as:

> “an institutionalised or normative way of thinking that defines the ‘limits of acceptable speech’ (Butler, 2004:64). A discourse determines what can be said and also what cannot be said” (p.125).

Garvey (2017) observes that “discourses shape both theory and practice in coaching” (p. 680). Whilst discourses can be useful to identify schools of thought within a discipline, they can also serve to restrict the range of possible approaches to it. For example, positive psychology, as a currently prominent

contributor to one of the main discourses in coaching, Psy Expert, may exert a disproportionate influence over coaching thinking, practice, training and accreditation policy, and thereby serve to exclude other valid approaches. As Garvey (2017) says, dominant discourses "may not adequately reflect the coach's role and practice" (p. 680). According to Western (2012), coaching and mentoring bring together the "wounded self" (associated with therapy, identity, individualism, emotional self-help, having issues) and the "celebrated self" (associated with the happiness imperative, human potential, positive psychology and consumerist focus on material possessions). Positive psychology coaching could be seen to focus on the "celebrated self" and potentially create an imbalance in the coaching process. By studying positive psychology coaching in the context of a programme, I was able to explore the extent to which the use of positive psychology coaching served to contribute to or constrain the process in order to examine the claims as expressed by Biswas-Diener (2010) and detailed on page 42 above.

Section summary

Thinking in the positive psychology and positive psychology coaching disciplines has clearly developed a degree of nuance from the fervent stance it took at its inception. This supports my argument that positive psychology coaching may not work for everybody in all contexts, making it important to establish what is likely to work for whom, how and in what circumstances.

Having presented a brief background to the field, I move on to consider the core positive psychology coaching literature from a realist perspective.

2.3 A realist-informed approach to reviewing the positive psychology coaching core literature

The realist approach to literature review focuses on “providing an explanatory analysis aimed at discerning what works for whom, in what circumstances, in what respects and how” (Pawson et al, 2005, p. 21). It differs from a traditional literature review in that it attempts to identify programme theory from the literature in hand, i.e. the underlying assumptions that are made as to how a programme might work and the evidence to support, refute or modify that theory. Conducting a full-scale comprehensive realist review is an exacting and time-consuming process and in practice tends to constitute a whole study in its own right. My PhD study contains many elements, including primary data collection. In view of that, I have conducted a shorter and less comprehensive realist-*informed* review that explores how the positive psychology coaching literature has developed in order to provide an academic underpinning to my research project.

This review is not intended to comply with established publication standards for formal realist syntheses (Wong et al, 2013). My objective here is to explore the main literature and identify the implied contexts, mechanisms and outcomes, and the way in which they might interact, in the various theoretical positions put forward in writers’ explanations of how a positive psychology approach to coaching might work. By doing this, I establish in realist terms the contribution that the literature has made to knowledge to date before turning attention to my own study, which concerns how a specific positive psychology coaching programme actually worked within a senior policing environment. This part of the

review develops one of the key arguments that were highlighted in Chapter 1, namely:

> "Positive psychology coaching may bring theoretical and practical value to the study and practice of executive coaching".

As can be seen in Table 2:1 above, the literature is predominantly made up of books and book chapters that are by and large conceptual. Some of the literature draws upon empirical research, mostly from positive psychology. This has led to calls for more specific empirical research focused on positive psychology coaching, for example, from Kauffman et al, (2015).

My realist-informed review question was "how can positive psychology coaching work to provide an effective coaching approach?" I identified six main themes in the chosen literature that addressed this question as follows:

1. Positive psychology coaching works by offering a "healthier" approach to coaching;
2. Positive psychology coaching works by providing an egalitarian coaching relationship;
3. Positive psychology coaching works by bringing together theory and practice to overcome deficits in each;
4. Positive psychology coaching works by providing scientifically researched concepts, tools and techniques;
5. Positive psychology coaching works by leading to positive outcomes and well-being; and
6. Positive psychology coaching works by providing a coherent process that leads to successful coaching outcomes.

I examine each of these themes now in more detail.

Theme 1: A "healthier" approach to coaching

The literature suggests that positive psychology coaching works by providing a different approach to executive coaching to that of more traditional genres. Kauffman and Scoular (2004) put forward a notion that until a positive psychology approach to coaching came into being, the traditional theory behind executive coaching was a medical one:

> "… the underlying assumptions of executive coaching have been steeped in the medical model... a hierarchical relationship between a "well" coach and a presumably skilled, but "less well" client who receives individualized skills development training by the coach. The strengths-based and positive psychology perspectives pull from an entirely different model, one where the client is already "whole" and skilled... the coach functions as a catalyst to help the client access and develop his or her inherent strengths" (p. 287).

I applied realist thinking to their assertion by asking the question "what works for whom, when and in what circumstances" to the two positions they put forward. The medical model seems to assume that when a "well" coach coaches a "less well" client in a hierarchical relationship this could form the context of an intervention. The coaching process provides a resource mechanism, namely an opportunity for the client to develop their skills through tailored development training provided by the coach. A logical extension of this argument might be that the client then responds to the training, which could be said to be a reasoning mechanism. This results in the client becoming "more well" as an outcome. In contrast, Kauffman and Scoular (2004) say that the positive psychology coaching model is different. Putting their second position into realist terms, when a "whole"

client is coached by a “whole” coach as an equal partner (context) the coach provides an opportunity for the client to discover their strengths (resource mechanism). Again, it might logically follow that the client responds positively by being motivated to access and develop their strengths (reasoning mechanism) resulting in an implied outcome of becoming even “better”. Thus, positive psychology coaching opens up the possibility of achieving positive outcomes not only to clients who are “less well”, but also to those who are “whole” in the context of an egalitarian coaching relationship.

More recently, the perceived over-emphasis on the “positive” in positive psychology has been questioned, as I discussed in the previous section (pp. 43 to 44). Sims (2017) has developed a coaching approach to reflect the concept of the “second wave” that has developed in the positive psychology literature. In essence, this involves moving away from the idea of focusing predominantly on the positive and instead striking a balance between positive and negative emotion. This reflects a potential paradigm shift in positive psychology and positive psychology coaching thinking. Sims (2017) suggests that a positive psychology coaching approach can be taken where clients present with difficult emotions. I have interpreted her contribution in realist terms. In the context of working with a client experiencing difficult emotions, several mechanisms may come into play. These include the provision of space to allow free expression, acknowledging the positive and negative aspects of the client’s circumstances and taking joint decisions about the direction in which the coaching should go and the tools and techniques that should be employed. In relationship terms, a mechanism of care and consideration provided by the coach taking a client-centred approach to support and challenge may lead to the client building their

trust and working in a solution-focused way towards their co-determined coaching goals.

These developments have been echoed by Green and Palmer (2019), who claim to offer the first academic positive psychology coaching in practice book. It is an edited collection of contributions from a wide range of authors in the field. Whilst the book itself does not take an overtly realist perspective, it offers thoughts relating to those for whom positive psychology coaching might work and those for whom it might not. Green and Palmer (2019) suggest that in the main those who are “whole” would benefit most, despite the current debate around the use of positive psychology coaching for those who have mental health problems. An exception to this would be if the coach was also skilled in clinical psychology. They also suggest that, for development coaching, the subject of this thesis, positive psychology coaching might work well for those who are already flourishing and who seek coaching for excellence and quality in their work rather than for increasing quantity. Mechanisms are mentioned throughout their book and for the sake of brevity here I reserve references to them until Chapter 5 where I discuss brief topic-specific considerations of the literature to justify my theorising at various points. Whilst there are plenty of references to positive psychology interventions and aspects of coaching interventions throughout Green and Palmer’s (2019) book, there are few references to them in the context of whole positive psychology coaching programmes.

This focus on providing a healthier coaching model leads on to the second theme that I identified, that of the nature of the coaching relationship.

Theme 2: An egalitarian approach to coaching

Kauffman and Scoular (2004) claim that positive psychology coaching offers a more egalitarian relationship between the coach and coachee than other coaching approaches might do. Kauffman and Scoular (2004) suggest that the relationship rests on the notion of “co-active coaching” (Whitworth et al, 1998) and the “egalitarian” approach as seen in the solution-focused coaching model (Greene and Grant, 2003). As Freire (2013) proposes, the co-active approach posits that coach and client are equal partners in the coaching relationship. The coaching process follows five different points, which according to Freire are “listening, using intuition, forwarding/deepening, self-managing and expressing curiosity” (Freire, 2013, p. 432). These could be viewed in realist terms as mechanisms.

Grant and Cavanagh (2011) assert that the role of the coach is not to “teach” but to understand how to support and “scaffold” complexity in development coaching. To achieve this involves three processes. The first of these is to help clients to raise awareness and make new connections personally, interpersonally and organisationally. The second is to help the client with communication processes to support a sense of connectedness so that novel ideas can develop. The third is to help clients form and express goals and take action to realise the potential of the new thinking. Grant and Cavanagh (2011) suggest that positive psychology can play a helpful role by providing an opportunity to the client to explore meaning. In realist terms, the egalitarian coaching roles can be seen as providing opportunity mechanisms that can lead to successful coaching outcomes. Grant and Cavanagh (2011) suggest that this approach would be particularly suitable when the coach is engaged in development coaching that is designed to stretch

clients' thinking in respect to complex organisational issues, contrasting it with skill development and performance improvement coaching, where the objective is more focused on increasing capability within already defined parameters. This is a useful indication of context, suggesting that perhaps some approaches might work for some in certain situations but not necessarily for others, supporting my argument of the importance of identifying how positive psychology coaching might work, for whom and in what circumstances.

Theme 3: Theory and practice come together

In the earlier literature, from around 2004 onwards, there are several suggestions that centre around a strong theme of alignment. For example, and as mentioned previously, Kauffman (2006, p. 219) describes positive psychology as "the science at the heart of coaching" and Seligman (2007, p. 266) asserts that positive psychology could form the "scientific and theoretical backbone" for coaching. This echoes Western's (2012) Psy Expert discourse, one of the dominant ones in coaching. Seligman (2007) mentions the theories of positive emotion, engagement and of meaning, but is silent on how these might be incorporated into a coaching engagement or how they might work. Building on these ideas, Linley and Harrington (2005, p. 13) argue that positive psychology and coaching psychology integrate well, coalescing around themes of performance enhancement and well-being, positivity and strength. Kauffman and Linley (2007) echo these themes by commenting on the synergy of positive psychology and coaching psychology. Grant and Cavanagh (2011) also discuss the synergies between positive psychology and coaching, taking a different tack to other writers by considering what coaching can offer to positive psychology.

Grant and Cavanagh (2011) conclude that coaching can provide a much-needed means of developing an applied positive psychology and that both disciplines can benefit and learn from each other.

Funnelling down into how this might work in practice, Freire (2013) presents three models to demonstrate the synergy between positive psychology and coaching, connecting individual positive psychology concepts to coaching interventions. The first of these is Authentic Happiness Coaching, or "AHC", (Seligman, 2002). AHC acts to encourage happiness in coachees by thinking about positive emotions, intrinsic motivation and meaning making. In realist terms, this might entail mechanisms whereby the coach works with clients on their strengths to encourage a response of feeling increased positive emotion. When coachees do this whilst experiencing a state of flow and engagement, as conceptualised by Csikszentmihalyi (1990), they can achieve a sense of life-purpose by way of an outcome, says Freire (2013). The second process is flow itself; Freire (2013, p. 431) refers to a "flow-enhancing model of coaching", quoting Wesson and Boniwell (2007). In realist terms, this model might be said to represent a causal pathway, where a range of mechanisms are offered to the client, such as goal setting, goal congruence, challenge, skill development, receiving feedback and enhancing a sense of personal autonomy in order to develop their energy and time management capability as a coaching outcome. Variations in context can be derived from differences in the extent to which the coach can foster "goal-setting progressions" (Freire, 2013, p. 431) and the space for other agendas to be considered in order to optimise the coaching experience. I develop my consideration of the literature on goals in coaching in section 2.4. The third area is that of co-active coaching (Whitworth et al, 2007), which, as described above on pages 48 to 49, encompasses a positive psychology approach. These three

features could be seen by realist researchers as constituting resource and reasoning mechanisms.

Theme 4: Scientifically researched concepts, tools and techniques

Much of the detail in the literature concerns the wide variety of positive psychology concepts, tools and techniques that are potentially available to the coach and coachee in positive psychology coaching. The types of tools and techniques that are promoted across the literature are consistent. The main theme here is the scientific evidence-based positive psychology underpinning provided by rigorous research activity which, it is alleged, is lacking in coaching (Seligman, 2007). Linley and Kauffman (2007) hint at potential mechanisms that might be in play by referring to Seligman et al (2005)'s positive psychology intervention work as an example. This showed that, by using strengths in new ways and noticing "three good things" each day, greater happiness outcomes were observed when people were studied at the outset and again after six months. However, this study was not carried out in a coaching setting, although the technique could arguably have utility if it were to be included in a coaching engagement. Choong and Britton (2007) also identify a positive relationship between the Myers Briggs Type Inventory (MBTI) and the Values In Action (VIA) strengths inventory (Seligman et al (2005), which could be interpreted in realist terms as providing potential positive psychology coaching mechanisms. Other potential mechanisms mentioned include flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), self-concordance (Sheldon and Elliott, 1999) and optimism (Arakawa and Greenberg, 2007), but again none of these were studied in a coaching programme.

Kauffman and Linley (2007) hint at possible mechanisms underlying how positive psychology coaching might work, those of strengths, well-being and optimal performance. They quote from the interview they conducted for the special issue of the *International Coaching Psychology Review* with Robert Biswas-Diener, a key figure in positive psychology coaching. Biswas-Diener says that positive psychology is likely to move from being a basic science to an applied science and moving towards developing interventions. Biswas-Diener cautions against leaping from basic research on individual concepts such as strengths, happiness and optimism to assume they might produce interventions that would work in coaching. Kauffman and Lindley (2007) also quote from their interview with Stephen Joseph, another key writer in the field, for the same journal issue, who opens up the idea of considering for whom such coaching might work other than those who are already well. He asks what such coaching can offer to those not functioning so well, such as those in educational, clinical and health settings. Here are the beginnings of a realist consideration in this article. For example, Kauffman and Linley (2007) quote Biswas-Diener as calling for studies of interventions to understand how they might be applied to different client types or issues. Whilst the paper does not cover coaching programmes as such, it mentions several “interventions”, such as mindfulness meditation, novel applications of strengths, learned optimism and gratitude exercises. Biswas-Diener expresses support for the notion that the coaching session structure could be seen as an intervention in itself, where coaches and coachees can discuss strengths in a safe way. This paper is useful in that it demonstrates a move towards holistic programme-level thinking about positive psychology coaching.

More support for the tools and techniques theme comes from Hefferon’s article in 2011, in which she talks about the kinds of positive psychology interventions a

coach might include in their practice. Hefferon (2011) does not address the interventions explicitly as being part of a coaching programme. Again, possible positive psychology mechanisms mentioned, but not referred to as such, include "positive emotions, resilience, strengths, optimism, hope, goals, meaning and flow" (p. 21-22). An identified outcome is the flourishing of the client. Mechanisms might include experiencing pleasure, seeing meaning in life and experiencing flow. Hefferon (2011) highlights happiness, positive emotion, resilience, strengths and flow as important positive psychology processes, linking them to suggestions as to what coaches might do to help their clients develop in these areas. This has taken the development of positive psychology coaching forward in a practical way.

Hefferon's (2011) work suggests to the realist researcher a number of possible generative causal chains that might achieve desirable positive psychology coaching outcomes. When working to develop feelings of well-being, mechanisms such as feedback from positive psychology measures, asking the client to consider what activities increase feelings of happiness and focusing on positive aspects might lead to favourable results. For positive emotion, potential mechanisms include working with clients on their positivity ratios, i.e. the ratio of positive to negative emotion; using gratitude exercises such as "3 good things", which is an exercise on noticing three things that have gone well during one's day; writing about intensely positive experiences ("IPE"s); and carrying out random acts of kindness. Hefferon (2011) suggests that a key pathway to resilience is developing an "optimistic explanatory style" (p. 24). Mechanisms here include re-framing and challenging negative thoughts. Setting small goals or splitting larger ones into several more achievable ones are suggested, together with positive visioning activity for the future. Hefferon (2011) covers the topic of

strengths and hints at the motivational mechanisms at play when people identify and use their “top five” strengths. Outcomes include increased happiness, success and a sense of fulfilment.

The last potential mechanism Hefferon (2011) mentions is the concept of flow: she argues that it works by providing structured activities containing challenges and requiring the use of skills. The process involves goal achievement and feedback necessitating total concentration and experiences of losing self-awareness and time. Reasoning can include heightened feelings of intrinsic motivation and engagement. Outcomes of greater performance as a result of attaining a state of flow have been reported (Csikszentmihalyi, 2009).

Hefferon (2011) has made a valuable contribution in clarifying in practical terms how the synergy between positive psychology and coaching might work. Whilst she hints at programme mechanisms and outcomes, a criticism might be that she is silent on context. She does not, for example, indicate whether or not she thinks these measures would work with some people in some sets of circumstances but not in others.

The role of goals in coaching is an important concept (Clutterbuck and Spence, 2017), and I provide a critique in section 2.4. It also features in the positive psychology coaching literature in the context of pursuing outcomes of resilience, achievement and wellbeing in the Resilience-Achievement-Wellbeing (RAW) Model of Flourishing (Green and Palmer, 2019, p. 10). Green and Norrish (2013) hint at goal pursuance as a possible positive psychology coaching mechanism and, although their work is set in education, their argument could be applied in a leadership environment. They suggest that goals could be established and pursued relating to any positive psychology intervention, such as strengths,

gratitude or kindness. In this way, the concepts would derive from positive psychology whilst the methods of goal setting and pursuance would come from evidence-based coaching. In realist terms, the mechanism could be said to be the provision of knowledge and skills relating to the particular positive psychology topic leading to the coachee engaging in meaning-making and feeling motivated to set and strive towards their coaching goals. Green and Norrish (2013) also hint at context, suggesting that where positive psychology coaching is used for both students and staff in educational settings, it would work best if a consistent approach is used in respect of both types of intervention. This observation could transfer into any organisational coaching setting.

Echoing Theme 1 above and taking a "whole" client perspective, Boniwell et al (2014) consider positive psychology coaching's tools, techniques and processes. They contend that:

> "The PPC [positive psychology coaching] orientation suggests that the coach view the client as 'whole' and that the coach focus on strengths, positive behaviours and purpose. These, in turn, are used as building blocks and leverage points for coachee development and performance improvement" (p. 157).

A realist view might regard the coach viewing the clients as whole as the context, the focus on positive psychology coaching activities and the responses of the client as mechanisms, and coachee development and performance improvement as outcomes, suggesting a high-level generative causal pathway. In common with other positive psychology coaching publications, Boniwell et al (2014) point out the importance of working with the foundational concepts of change, positive emotion and strengths in coaching in order to enhance well-being. In realist terms, the context could be said to be coaches and coachees working together

in a positive psychology coaching paradigm, the mechanisms could be the creation of a positive environment leading to client responses of capacity broadening and building, wider thinking and creativity and the outcomes could be the achievement of goals and increased effectiveness. Boniwell et al (2014) suggest that this process could act like a spiral leading the coachee to greater levels of life satisfaction and effectiveness. Similar pathways are identified for strengths and change, which I discuss in more detail in Chapter 4 (pp. 145 to 146). Boniwell et al (2014) also make reference to what could be interpreted from a realist standpoint as a point of context. They say that positive psychology coaching may not work for everyone and hint at some of the circumstances in which that might be the case:

> "For some people who face trying circumstances, it may be feasible to apply the tools of positive psychology in order to improve psychological well-being. For others, doing so is simply infeasible. It is crucial that coaches do not imply, even unintentionally, any culpability in those whose circumstances have made it difficult to achieve lasting happiness" (p. 167).

Boniwell et al (2104) call for a balanced approach, which reflects the view expressed in the "Positive Psychology 2.0" literature, for example, that of Wong (2011), and discussed on page 44 above.

Other prominent writers support the "concept, tools and techniques" theme. For example, Passmore and Oades (2014) reinforce the views of others mentioned in this review that strengths, positive emotion and well-being are important mechanisms in positive psychology coaching. They add Self-determination Theory (Deci and Ryan, 2000), mentioned in section 2.4 (pp. 71-72), to this list. They are, however, largely silent on how these interventions might work. Kauffman et al (2015) assert that positive psychology executive coaching works

by having the goal of optimising the client's potential by helping them enhance their strengths and "positive vision" through an equal and co-active relationship (p. 379). From a realist's standpoint, Kauffman et al (2015) make a valuable observation:

> "the most pertinent question for most coaches is what works most effectively for whom… in addition to establishing that coaching works, we also need to understand why it works" (p. 385).

Quoting Kauffman and Bachkirova (2009), Kauffman et al (2015) state that little is known about the tools, techniques and processes that work in executive coaching to promote coachee well-being. They do not, however, provide any answers, apart from making the ubiquitous call for more research.

The core literature is consistent in the detail of this theme with the same concepts, psychological tools and techniques appearing in most accounts. It chimes with Western's (2012) Psy Expert discourse. However, Kilburg (2004) and de Haan and Duckworth (2012) have challenged the role of tools and techniques in coaching, arguing that the working relationship between coach and coachee may be more important.

Theme 5: Positive outcomes and well-being

Much of the earlier positive psychology coaching literature focuses on its aim to promote well-being. As an example, Linley and Harrington (2005) argue that both positive psychology and coaching psychology aim to enrich performance and well-being and focus on the positive side of human nature rather than on its failings. Positive psychology though, Linley and Harrington (2005) say, places more of an emphasis on strengths than perhaps coaching psychology might do

and it is this feature that offers much to coaching. Linley and Harrington's (2005) thoughts on why this should be the case can also be explained in realist terms; for example, when coaches who challenge their deeply-held assumptions to see the best side of people and focus on what is good about them and work with coachees (context), the outcomes that result are the "enhancement of performance and wellbeing" and the promotion of "optimal functioning" (p. 13). The mechanisms that enable this to happen do so by providing coachees with the opportunity to flourish by focusing on the positive side of human nature (resource mechanism) so they recognise and are willing to work with their strengths (reasoning mechanism).

This is consistent with the wellbeing theme in Green and Palmer's (2019) "RAW" model of flourishing mentioned on page 58 above. Whilst there have been few indications of the kinds of specific contexts in which such an approach might work, the emphasis on wellbeing suggests that positive psychology coaching could be particularly suited to coachees working in environments of high stress, relentless demand and challenges to personal psychological resources, such as in senior police leadership. This literature is particularly relevant in developing my argument that positive psychology coaching, with its focus on well-being, may be an appropriate genre to employ in leadership development in the police service bearing in mind its challenging cultural context.

Theme 6: Coherent process

The earlier positive psychology coaching literature addressed the subject of positive psychology coaching as a coherent process, for example, by way of new coaching frameworks and programmes, but in a limited way. Kauffman (2006)

suggests some potential mechanisms that might be in play in the process of positive psychology coaching. These include using “the language of strength and vision rather than weakness and pain” as the foundation of the coaching (p. 220). This echoes Western’s (2012) concepts of the “celebrated self” and the “wounded self”, and recommending coaches use the language of the former. Kauffman (2006) says that coaches need to take a positive orientation towards “what energizes and pulls people forward” (p. 220), which in realist mechanism terms could be seen as facilitating positive motivation and a future focus in coachees. Kauffman asserts that the body of positive psychology research can provide explanations of coaching effectiveness. Such research lies in the areas of measurement instruments and classifications of strengths, virtues, optimism, hope, well-being, life satisfaction and many others. Kauffman describes the concepts and research outputs individually but does not address how they might work when placed in the context of a whole coaching programme.

A turning point in the development of a coherent process was provided by Biswas-Diener and Dean (2007) and Biswas-Diener (2010), who made huge contributions to practice by describing a more coherent way of using positive psychology in coaching interventions. Biswas-Diener and Dean (2007) suggest that higher levels of happiness lead to a longer lifespan, the formation of stable and longer relationships, doing better in work, getting paid more, being valued more and achieving higher status, establishing stronger relationships and achieving higher levels of altruism and creativity. I took Biswas-Diener’s (2010) recommendations about the constituent parts of a positive psychology coaching programme into account when I designed the positive psychology coaching approach for the programme in my study, and I cover this in more detail in Chapter 4 (pp. 126 to 129).

Adding to the growing process literature, Oades and Passmore (2014) provide a useful set of characteristics of a positive psychology coaching framework that I discuss in more detail when describing programme design in Chapter 4 (pp. 126 to 129). Oades and Passmore (2014) also endorse the role of positive emotion, strengths and flow in the positive psychology coaching process. Oades and Passmore (2014) present a realist perspective without referring to it as such by observing, "the question should no longer be 'does PPC work?' Rather a better question is 'for whom is PPC most beneficial, and when?'" (p. 35). Oades and Passmore (2014) suggest that in order for the process to work successfully, and:

> "to be able to employ growth and approach motivation approaches, they [coachees] need to have a certain level of stability, psychological assets and not be overwhelmed by negative affect and distress when they embark upon growth-based approaches" (p. 35).

Positive indicators that the positive psychology coaching process might work well include the coach and coachee holding positive views of human nature, believing in human agency and being prepared to work on growth and meaning making, which, Oades and Passmore (2014) say, do not always sit well with those who hold alternative philosophical views.

A very recent and helpful contribution to the development of the positive psychology coaching process was provided by Burke (2018). She observes that, despite the increase in articles on positive psychology coaching which apply the findings of positive psychology studies to coaching, the discipline lacks a systematic approach to positive psychology coaching practice. Burke (2018) also states that most positive psychology coaching papers relate to the application of single aspects of positive psychology and "lack a coherent application of positive

psychology in coaching" (p. 16) such as that required for the creation of a positive psychology coaching programme. Burke (2018) introduces a conceptual framework to help fill this gap. I discuss this framework in more detail in Chapter 4 (pp. 126 to 129) in respect of its influence on the programme design that I used in my study. However, I offer here a realist interpretation of Burke's (2018) contribution to the literature. The framework includes six potential mechanisms:

1. Knowledge;
2. Strengths;
3. Positive diagnosis;
4. Optimal-functioning goals;
5. Positive psychology interventions; and
6. Positive measures.

Taken together, Burke (2018) suggests, these elements encourage clients to develop towards their "optimal human functioning" (p. 17). In realist terms, this could be seen as an outcome in its own right. Burke (2018), however, says little about context, other than recommending the framework be used in all positive psychology coaching engagements; she does not proffer a view on who might benefit most in what circumstances, or for whom such an approach might not work.

Section summary

The positive psychology coaching literature is relatively recent, appearing from 2004 onwards. As discussed above, it consists mostly of conceptual pieces in books, book chapters and practitioner-orientated articles. The systematic

scientific evidence relating to positive psychology and its application to coaching relates mostly to individual positive psychology elements, and little exists currently that examines the evidence in the context of positive psychology coaching programmes as a whole.

The authors reviewed make a series of arguments in favour of positive psychology coaching. The earlier literature in the 2000s focused on themes concerning the perceived synergies between positive psychology as an academic discipline and coaching as a practice. This then developed into considerations of which positive psychology concepts and research might be useful to the emerging practice of positive psychology coaching, moving only latterly towards positive psychology coaching processes. The integration of “Positive Psychology 2.0” into earlier positive psychology coaching thinking in the late 2010s prompted some consideration of holistic approaches, but no known studies focus on whole programme research. None of the works appear to have taken an overtly realist perspective, although there have been several calls for research into how positive psychology coaching works and what works for whom in what circumstances. These are realist questions. I have attempted to apply a realist interpretation to the literature in order to speculate on the underlying assumptions behind the various viewpoints. On the whole, though, the existing literature has been largely silent on the issue of context.

This review has achieved two main purposes as a prelude to my research. The first was to establish the suggestions that have already been made as to how positive psychology coaching might work, the feasibility of which I have then explored in my study. The second was to establish that the current literature has not yet produced a holistic response set in the context of whole positive

psychology coaching programmes. I argue that a realist research approach addresses this issue. I also argue that this brief realist-informed analysis of the main positive psychology coaching literature provides an appropriate realist backdrop to the research study, which aims to contribute to knowledge by uncovering how whole programmes might work, for whom and in what circumstances, in the context of senior police leadership.

2.4 Goals as programme outcomes: A realist-informed view of the literature

My study explores the role of positive psychology executive coaching programmes in supporting coachees in their personal and professional goal activity, and how by doing so they advance the organisation's leadership development intentions. As described in Chapter 4, pages 130 to 135, goal setting and pursuance was central to the programme as the organisation wanted to encourage such behaviour in their senior leaders as part of their organisational development initiatives. In realist terms, programmes work when the context is such that allows the programme mechanisms to "fire", or activate, and produce successful programme outcomes. The setting, pursuing and achieving of goals formed the primary programme outcomes, and therefore they are an important ingredient in my study. As Clutterbuck and Spence (2017) point out, "goals and goal constructs have been a central feature of the coaching literature for almost all of its scholarly history" (p. 218). By way of illustration of the centrality of goals to executive coaching, Hall et al (1999) describe executive coaching as:

> "a practical goal-focused form of personal, one-on-one learning for busy executives and may be used to improve performance or executive behaviour, enhance a career or prevent derailment, and work through organisational issues or change initiatives" (p.40).

Whilst at first sight this looks fairly straightforward, as David et al (2013) observe, the role of goals in coaching can be complex and nuanced. My study tries to capture some of that complexity in the ways in which the programme works with coachees in relation to their goal-orientated endeavours and the way they feed into organisational development.

Locke and Latham (2009) define a goal as “a regulatory mechanism for monitoring, evaluating and adjusting one’s behaviour” (p.19). This study asks how that mechanism works in a coaching programme in a realist sense. As Ibarra (2013) points out, goals are both necessary and unnecessary in coaching; necessary on the one hand as a means of getting going in a coaching engagement and on the other hand unnecessary, as the process of goal setting can often assume that the environment remains fixed after the goal has been set. Ibarra (2013) asserts that goals can change as the context of the situation and we ourselves change. Ibarra (2013) observes that one of the main problems with goal setting is that coachees often come to coaching with no clear idea of what it is that they want to achieve. Even when they do engage in goal setting, it can be in terms of vague yearnings of wanting to be “better” at something or in some role.

In their paper “Goals Gone Wild”, Ordóñez et al (2009) criticise the traditional approach to goal setting, suggesting that it has been “over-subscribed” in organisations and that it should be carefully considered and tailored to the needs of the individual and the organisation. Specifying goals too narrowly, setting challenges too high, failing to consider goal ownership, ignoring time scales, not taking into account individual differences, ignoring the power of intrinsic

motivation and failing to recognise the difference between learning and performance goals can lead to increased risk-taking, unethical behaviour, de-motivated staff and negative effects on organisational culture.

Whilst traditionally, personal and professional development have been intimately linked with the setting of and achieving goals in coaching, David et al (2013) assert that evidence shows that it is not always essential to have defined goals from the beginning of a coaching engagement. Sometimes the aim of the coaching itself can be to explore and develop goals, working in an iterative and emergent way. David et al (2013) observe that often the coachee is less concerned about the need for closely defined goals than the coach, or indeed the sponsoring organisation itself. The conclusion drawn in David et al's book (2013) is that the "role and nature of goal management in coaching and mentoring vary significantly depending on the kind of goal being pursued, and the purpose in pursuing it" (p. xxv). The role of goals in coaching and how people are motivated to set and pursue them may therefore not be as simple as they might seem.

There are several indications in the vast literature on goals that coaching, goal setting and goal pursuance behaviours may be linked. Locke and Latham (1990) proposed three perspectives on how goals act to motivate an individual which, in realist terms, might be regarded as mechanisms: first, to expend effort to meet the needs of the enterprise, second, to continue effort over time, and third, to focus our attention on the behaviours and results needed to accomplish the task. Bright and Pryor (2013) describe the setting and achieving of goals as the "*sine qua non*" (or "the essential condition or thing that is absolutely necessary", Oxford English Dictionary) of change – a key outcome of any coaching endeavour. Bright and Pryor (2013) contend that rigid thinking on goal focus can be counter-

productive; they state that goals should not be too constraining as coachees increasingly need to find a method of dealing with chaotic circumstances in an increasingly complex world. Bright and Prior's (2013) Chaos Theory of Careers emphasises the important role of feedback, the need to seek and heed it and the need to remain open to rapidly changing contexts and environments. This would suggest a need for a degree of goal fluidity in coaching; in realist terms, not everything will work for everybody all of the time.

Goal setting, goal directed behaviours and positive psychology coaching are also linked. Richard Boyatzis' theory of Intentional Change (Boyatzis and Howard, 2013) is closely allied to positive psychology and is particularly of interest to this study. It is allied to Self-determination Theory (Deci and Ryan, 1990; see pages 71 to 72). Purposefulness has long been of interest and was important to McClelland's seminal work on motivation in the 1980s (McClelland, 1985). These theories belong to a genre of motivation theories in psychology that explain the need for, and the benefit of, intentionality. In Intentional Change Theory (Boyatzis, 2008), it is posited that, when setting goals, it should be done on the basis of what is most important to the "ideal self" and personal vision. Change is then brought about through intrinsic rather than extrinsic motivation and takes into account meaning, belief in possibilities and "personal passions". It is suggested that when this is the basis for change, people's development work is more sustained and vigorous (Boyatzis, 2008). Determining our own goals can be positively arousing, referred to as the "positive emotional attractor", whilst when the process is mandated a "negative emotional attractor" is triggered. Boyatzis (2008) argues that goal pursuance and achievement is more likely to happen when they are based on positive emotional attractors. Spiegel et al (2004) found that motivation whilst pursuing goals was increased when engaging with the "ideal self". French

(2001), however, found that engaging with the "real self", i.e. how we think we are in real life and from which we need to "improve" leads to an adaptive response. Boyatzis (2008) contends that tapping into our ideal selves leads to positive motivation, whilst focusing on our real selves tends to invoke negative motivation. To the realist researcher, these observations point to important mechanisms and contexts in coaching programmes.

Values and vision appear to have key roles in goal setting; for example, Boyatzis (2008) suggested that if our values and vision are not aligned with our goals, and instead we set goals based on what we think we ought to be doing, the goal setting process will be counter-productive. Likewise, Kolb (1984) emphasised the importance of alignment with one's learning style and McKee et al (2008) suggested a similar effect may be obtained when working in tune with one's planning style. Of particular interest to this study in which strengths play a major role, Boyatzis and Howard (2013) make a connection between strengths and intentional change theory:

> "the learning agenda… is enabled by the Ideal Self and personal vision and informed assessment of strengths that can be leveraged to build positive, sustained change – while also working to reduce identified gaps…. People are motivated, persistent and lively when they set vision-centred learning goals – even if they face difficult challenges" (p. 215).

Spence and Deci (2013) write about self-determination theory in coaching and this concept features significantly in positive psychology and positive psychology coaching. Spence and Deci (2013) say:

> "Coaching is an activity that is inherently motivational as it deals with the process of facilitating goal setting… and strengthening motives that are linked to effective functioning and well-being" (p. 86).

In the context of team executive coaching, Hawkins (2008) says that the coach "needs to help the team analyse their current collective strengths and weaknesses, map out their collective developmental journey" (p. 36). Spence and Deci (2013) emphasise that coaching should focus on "optimal functioning" (p. 88). Self-determination theory hints at a combination of realist mechanisms and context. Spence and Deci (2013) say the theory:

> "has an extensive evidence base that can be readily adapted to specify interpersonal conditions (viz. coaches' orientations, behaviours and supports) that facilitate coachees' sustained change toward optimal motivation, effective life goals, high quality performance and healthy functioning" (p. 89.)

In brief, self-determination theory propounds four key elements as follows, all of which echo positive psychology coaching principles:

1. "The development of conditions that support greater self-reliance, vitality, task engagement and effective learning;
2. The motivational (i.e. regulatory) processes that underlie and organise these indicators of optimal functioning
3. The life goals whose pursuit and attainment are more aligned with achieving the outcomes; and
4. The human psychological needs that energise the motivated activity and goal pursuits that have been shown empirically in many studies across multiple domains to yield the desired life experiences, affects, persistence, willingness and accomplishment" (Spence and Deci, 2013, p 88.)

Another key concept that appears in both goal theory and in positive psychology coaching is that of goal self-concordance (Sheldon and Elliott, 1999). This theory proposes that there are three phases involved in motivation: “goal inception”, “pursuit” and “attainment”. Self-concordant goals are those that are congruent with one’s values and interests. Using strengths to guide goal activity implies self-concordance, suggest Linley et al (2010). Sheldon and Kasser (1998) demonstrate that pursuing goals that are not one’s own leads to poorer outcomes on wellbeing measures than those when pursuing self-concordant ones. Moreover, a recent study by Ehrlich (2018) provides evidence that if people at work set positive goals, defined as enjoyable or helpful to others, they experience greater levels of engagement and happiness. Again, in realist terms, these observations suggest mechanisms and contexts that, when embedded in a coaching programme, might lead to successful outcomes.

Section summary

It can be seen that the role of goals in any form of coaching, including positive psychology executive coaching, is contested ground. Goal setting and goal pursuance, however, can form useful mechanisms for focusing intentions and purposeful change if addressed flexibly and with attention paid to the needs and individual characteristics of the coachee. This again chimes with the main argument of this thesis, that effective positive psychology executive coaching programmes rely on exploring what works for whom in what circumstances and tailoring accordingly. This takes me to the final section of this general review, to consider the study of what works, how and for whom in positive psychology executive coaching programmes.

2.5 Researching the "what works" literature in coaching: a realist view

I now turn to another argument introduced in Chapter 1, which is as follows:

> "A realist approach may provide an alternative and more nuanced discourse to positive psychology coaching research than more traditional approaches, which might be helpful in contributing both to existing knowledge and to practice" (p. 35).

As Garvey et al (2018) observe, Biswas-Diener and Dean (2007) promote the use of research from positive psychology in coaching practice and claim it has led to new thinking in coaching research. Kauffman (2006) states that "it is our belief that positive psychology theory and research will provide the scientific legs upon which the field of coaching can firmly stand" (p. 221).

Myers (2017) identifies "two 'hot topics' in coaching research. The first is whether coaching works and the second is how coaching might work" (p. 589). The question "what works" has been debated extensively in the context of coaching generally (for example, Grant and Cavanagh, 2007; Theeboom et al, 2014; Lai and McDowall, 2014; Jones et al, 2015; and Sonesh et al (2015); in executive coaching (Page and de Haan, 2014); and in positive psychology coaching (Kauffman et al, 2015). Stober (2010) argues that, as an emerging profession, coaching should develop its practice based on evidence. Briner (2012) criticises the quality and lack of research evidence in coaching psychology by stating it is aimed at a professional psychologist audience, and Gray et al (2016) also take a critical view of coaching research, pointing out its paucity. In particular, Briner's (2012) criticism related to an apparent lack of the use of randomised controlled trials in coaching psychology research. Fillery-Travis and Cox (2014) point out

that studies of coaching interventions have typically been conducted using positivist methods focusing on outcomes and narrowly defined variables.

As also criticised in the context of executive coaching by Kilburg (2004) and in the context of programme evaluation by Pawson et al (2005), such approaches have habitually produced inconclusive or conflicting results, generating repeated calls over the years for the need for more research. Others argue for a wider range of research approaches that can be illuminating and useful to both the academic and the practitioner audiences. For example, Ellam-Dyson (2012) responded to the call to use more randomised controlled trials in coaching research by acknowledging that they are regarded in many scientific fields as the optimum way of conducting empirical research but asserting that there can be huge difficulties in doing so in applied social psychology settings. Ellam-Dyson (2012) argues that researchers should be free to use a range of alternative and robust types of research methods and be respected. Shoukry and Cox (2018) assert that coaching is a social process and that it should be studied critically and in its context. Furthermore, limited research at the whole coaching programme level has been conducted. I argue, therefore, that more coaching research is needed, utilising a range of research approaches and studying coaching in the wider social contexts in which it occurs.

As several studies appear to have established that coaching in general “works”, I did not set out to respond to the “what works” question. I took as my starting point the second ‘hot topic’ (Myers, 2017) of *how* coaching might work as applied to the genre of positive psychology coaching. Two key issues in my research were first, how, for whom and in what circumstances would the programme work,

and second, how the claims made for the efficacy of positive psychology coaching would hold up when embedded in a programme set in an executive context.

Asking the questions “what works” or “how it works” implies the need for an evaluation of some sort, and, in my study, I have used the principles of the realist evaluation method to explore the “how might it work” question. I discuss these principles in more detail in Chapter 3 (pp. 96 to 99). As I mentioned in Chapter 1, page 13, the question of “what works in coaching?”, has been debated extensively in the literature with the conclusion that, on balance, coaching probably “works”. Stern and Stout-Rostron (2013) concluded that research had moved on from asking “what works” to looking at more directed research areas. As Kauffman et al (2015) highlight, Theeboom et al’s (2014) meta-analytic study mentioned above suggests that coaching leads to greater goal-focused self-regulation, better attitudes to work, well-being, coping, performance and skill-levels. Kauffman et al (2015) observe that these studies have focused on individuals and that “more research is needed to see how this translates into wider impact in an organization” (p. 384). Of particular interest to this study, Kauffman et al (2015) specifically mention the importance of the roles in the coaching relationship, goal setting, and solution-focused coaching. These figure largely in my programme design, which I discuss in detail in Chapter 4 (pp. 139 to 143). As Stokes and Jolly (2014) suggest, asking “what works” is too broad a question, and looking towards researching how executive coaching works for whom in what circumstances may be a more appropriate line of enquiry. As Kauffman et al (2015) point out, “in addition to establishing that coaching works, we also need to understand why it works” (p. 385). This approach might be particularly appropriate for “whole programme” process studies such as this current one. As Fillery-Travis and Cox (2014) point out, there are so many

aspects going on in coaching that can affect the outcomes that positivist methods such as randomised controlled trials struggle to capture the complexity.

There are examples in the literature of some alternative approaches. Bachkirova et al (2015) employ a mixed-method approach, although their study focuses more on the “what works” question rather than the “how”. Fillery-Travis and Cox (2014) refer to two examples where researchers have used in-depth case study and action research methods, namely the studies of Cook (2013) and McLaughlin (2013), and where qualitative approaches have been preferred in order to reflect the rich picture that such holistic process studies require. Even so, at the whole coaching programme level, and as mentioned in Chapter 1 (pp. 19-20), I only found one such study (Kovacs and Corrie, 2016) that focuses on how an executive coaching programme works. Kovacs and Corrie’s 2016 study adopts a realist research approach. I have found no whole-programme studies at all that are set in a positive psychology executive coaching context.

Kovacs and Corrie’s original paper in 2016 provided a sound rationale for the use of a realist approach in coaching psychology as part of a range of “relevant, meaningful and rigorous methods of evaluation” (p. 59) in the quest to establish a solid evidence base. Kovacs and Corrie (2016) describe realist research as “an approach that can add substantial value to the investigations undertaken by coaching practitioners who seek to understand more about what makes coaching effective, in what circumstances and for whom” (p. 59). Kovacs and Corrie (2016) acknowledge that positivism and quantitative methods are privileged at present in the coaching psychology field, pointing to the needs of coaching practitioners and increasing complexity in the leadership world as reasons for broadening the diversity of research methods, including realist research approaches. The

mentoring literature also offers a range of alternative approaches to studying the effectiveness of programmes, for example, action research (Akhurst and Lawson, 2013), realist evaluation methodology (Lawson, 2017) and theory of change (Chadwick-Coule and Garvey, 2009).

In Chapter 3 (pp. 89-91), I argue that a more appropriate strategy for researching positive psychology coaching programmes should involve a less rigid view than that afforded by strictly positivist approaches. A realist research approach may go some way towards addressing these criticisms. It offers an alternative to conventional ways of reviewing the effectiveness of programmes (Pawson et al, 2005). Providing richness of detail combined with context and scientific rigour (Pawson and Tilley, 1997), it deals with the questions of what works for whom, in what circumstances and how, rather than searching for what works for everyone.

Section summary

By adopting a realist action research approach, I was able to draw upon a range of appropriate sources of evidence using several qualitative methods and basic quantitative ones in a rigorous way so that a richer, more holistic view could be obtained. In particular, realist research approaches focus on the "what works for whom" question, rather than attempting to isolate individual factors that work for everyone in a context-controlled environment, which, for some writers, for example, Pawson and Tilley, (1997), constitutes a futile endeavour. My study involves the design and refinement of a coaching programme. Westhorp et al (2016) developed the realist action research approach specifically to address the re-design of a social programme that combined a capacity to deal with

complexity, an ability to distinguish what works for whom, how and in what circumstances with scientific rigour. I was therefore attracted to that approach as I could see its direct relevance to my own project. I describe this process in detail in Chapter 3 (pp. 102 to 106).

2.6 Chapter conclusions

Throughout this review, the central consideration has been to ask how positive psychology coaching could contribute to the effectiveness of the executive coaching programme that was the subject of my research. The conclusion I came to is that the last 15 years have produced a literature with some evidence to suggest that the use of positive psychology coaching interventions to increase coachees' senses of well-being can have a range of beneficial effects, such as increased life-satisfaction and psychological well-being, as well as helping them to achieve their coaching intentions.

Thus it may be argued that the positive psychology coaching literature has contributed conceptual thinking and some research effort to the contemporary discussion. They redress a perceived imbalance in psychology's privileged emphasis on treating deficit and applying clinical models to the human condition. Whilst they need to be viewed in the context of living lives and with a degree of informed caution, they seem to have stimulated enough interest and debate to move the discipline towards taking a more balanced view. For example, in coaching, the arguments seem to have prompted a useful paradigm shift in thinking and practice by moving them from a problem-solving orientation towards a more constructive solution-focused approach (Berg and Szabó, 2005). It is for these reasons that I believe that, by incorporating positive psychology coaching

into my study of an organisational executive coaching programme and examining the extent to which it provides appropriate theoretical and practical underpinnings, it can make a useful contribution to the existing coaching literature.

2.7 Chapter summary

In this chapter, I have reviewed the literatures pertinent to my research question. I have briefly defined the field and its background and taken a realist-informed approach to reviewing the positive psychology coaching, goal and "what works and how in coaching" literatures. I have considered the dominant research approaches in this field and the unsatisfactory outcomes that sometimes stem from the studies that have been conducted so far. The conclusion in the literature is that the research question needs to move on from "what works" to exploring "how" positive psychology coaching works. In response to this observation, I put forward a case for the use of an alternative methodology, that of realist action research, which I address in more detail in Chapter 3.

In Chapter 1, I introduced four key arguments that run throughout this thesis:

1. A positive psychology coaching approach may bring theoretical and practical value to the study and practice of executive coaching;
2. Positive psychology coaching, with its focus on well-being, may be an appropriate genre to employ in leadership development in the police service in England and Wales, particularly as an alternative to deficit-

based coaching and bearing in mind the sector's challenging cultural context;

3. A gap in positive psychology coaching research has been identified to study not whether positive psychology coaching works but how it works set in the context of whole coaching programmes, which this study is designed to address; and
4. A realist approach may provide an alternative and more nuanced discourse to positive psychology coaching programme research than more traditional approaches, which might be helpful in contributing both to existing knowledge and the development of practice.

In this chapter, I have developed all four arguments by considering their theoretical and research-based roots.

I now turn to Chapter 3, which deals with the topic of methodology.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Chapter introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss critically the philosophical commitments and the concept of “truth” as they relate to this thesis. I then discuss the concepts of realism, critical realism and scientific realism as they apply to my approach to research. I also delineate where my research is located in terms of these philosophical traditions and discuss my methodological orientation.

3.2 Philosophical commitments and the concept of truth

I commence this section by critically discussing the background to the philosophical positioning for my research, starting with the concept of “truth”. Truth in management research depends on what is and what is not regarded as “warranted knowledge”, i.e. knowledge upon which we can depend to be true. To make decisions relating to those distinctions for the purposes of my research I examined my approach to ontology, epistemology and axiology. Building on the work of Blaikie (1993), I define ontology as the basis of truth and the nature of reality, referring to one’s belief of what reality is, and what one determines to be real and not real, what exists and what does not. Ontology can be based on either objectivist or subjectivist assumptions (Johnson and Duberley, 2000). An objectivist view is that the world exists independently from us and that we can access it objectively; there is a world “out there”. A subjectivist view is that nothing exists that is external to us as human beings, and reality is constructed by how we perceive things, create meaning and share it.

Building on Johnson and Duberley's (2000) work, I define epistemology as describing how we go about obtaining knowledge about reality and discriminating between warranted and unwarranted knowledge, i.e. asking upon what can we rely as "truth"? Again, epistemology can be based on either objectivist or subjectivist assumptions (Johnson and Duberley, 2000).

As my work involves action research, I was also cognisant of axiology. This is defined by Ruona and Lynham (2004) as follows:

> "Axiology (sometimes referred to as ethics), a third component of philosophy, is concerned with action. It is normative, speaking to issues of ethics, what is good and what ought to be done. In other words, it indicates how one should *act* in inquiry and practice, and the extent to which this action should be, and is, congruent with ontological and epistemological aims and ideals" (p. 156).

These ontological and epistemological positions have led to the development of a number of theories of truth. For the purposes of developing my argument, the main theories, as proposed in Darwin's (2004) concept of "alethic pluralism", are as follows:

- In Correspondence Theory, "what is truth" depends on the extent to which knowledge reflects the world and describes it correctly i.e. it corresponds with the world. The search is for facts and testable laws (pp. 45-48);
- In Coherence Theory, "what is truth" depends on how statements or beliefs connect with each other, the "consistency between propositions and the degree to which they fit with belief systems and values" (pp. 45-48);
- In Consensus Theory, the truth relies on whether the members of a scientific community agree on shared values, language and worldviews (pp. 45-48); and

- In Pragmatism Theory, the truth relies on the utility of the knowledge and its “functional fit” (pp. 45-48).

It is the fourth of these positions, pragmatism (Dewey, 1910/2011), that has most relevance to my research. Driven by the nature of my research question concerning “what works and how?” my study focuses on how useful the new knowledge will be to policy determination and practice in positive psychology executive coaching, fitting with its role and function in the organisation and people’s personal and professional lives.

In determining my ontology and epistemology, I referred to Johnson and Duberley (2000), who identify four main positions as shown in the following diagram:

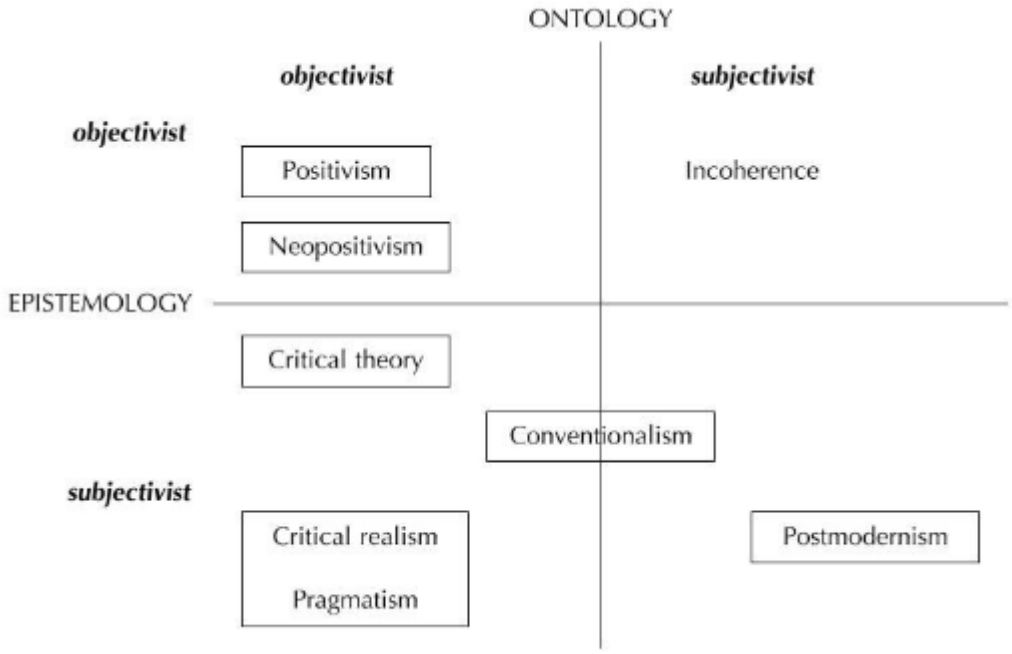

Figure 3.1: Reflexivity and management research (Johnson and Duberley, 2000). Reproduced with the kind permission of Sage Publishing

Johnson and Duberley (2000) designate the position of a subjectivist ontology with an objectivist epistemology as incoherent. I therefore considered each of remaining three positions in relation to my beliefs, the nature of my research and

the types of “truth claims” I might want to make. I now briefly discuss my approach.

The first of these approaches is positivism. Based on an objectivist ontology and an objectivist epistemology, positivism’s position on truth is that there is a reality “out there” and is independent of the knower. There are causal laws in natural and social science that can be “discovered” and be described in “neutral language”. Positivism is nomothetic; truth claims are based on correspondence theory and knowledge is derived from systematic observations in controlled conditions, testing hypotheses rigorously to uncover laws that hold in all contexts, typified in the so-called “scientific method”. The role of theory is privileged, and the main methods involve experiments, quasi-experiments and the collection of quantitative data. My main criticisms of this approach are its rigidity and lack of context, focusing on the quest for causality to the detriment of meaning. The researcher remains detached and independent from the researched, and research is encouraged to be as value-free as possible. I would have found this position difficult to maintain, given the high degree of personal involvement that I wanted to have in the design and delivery of the coaching programme and researching it. There is also an assumption that human behaviour is consistent and therefore predictable. I find this position difficult, too, due to the concept of human agency. Although positivism has held a privileged position in the natural sciences for many centuries and latterly in the social sciences, particularly so in psychology and management research, the approach would have matched my view of the nature of reality but not how we can access it.

An alternative might have been afforded to me by adopting a subjectivist ontology and a subjectivist epistemology, as in post-modernism, which encompasses

approaches such as social constructionism, social constructivism and symbolic interactionism. In post-modernist approaches, there is no external reality that can be discovered by rational or empirical means (Derrida, 1973); it is believed that we socially create reality via a consensus theory of truth. This approach highlights the importance of language in that everyone has their own version of the "truth" about a given phenomenon, and through language a common understanding of the "truth" is socially constructed. Claims in post-modernism accept that there are multiple truths, that the world is ambiguous and fluid. It does not acknowledge that it is possible to present a single view of the world (Lyotard, 1984) and instead one makes sense of one's world through one's own frameworks (Derrida, 1976). Postmodernism does not seek to provide solutions or unitary laws, instead, it "looks for a plausible interpretation" (Gilligan, 2017). Knowledge is "partial and value-laden" (Johnson and Duberley, 2000), and the researcher is an integral part of the process of social construction, rather than an independent observer.

The main criticisms of post-modernism include its relativism, that meaning can change over time and in different circumstances. Because it is ideographic and recognises the possibility of multiple truths, my main concern about postmodernism as an approach for my study is its lack of utility, as it is not possible to generalise the research findings into different situations. Moreover, the role of theory in post-modern approaches is not privileged, and my preference was to begin my research from a position of what was already known about the topic. Post-modernism has made its mark in the social sciences, particularly in sociology, but has only recently begun to gain limited traction in psychology and management research, and only in some sub-disciplines. I considered that this might present a potential credibility barrier, bearing in mind that my topic is

situated partly in the coaching psychology field, where the dominant approach is positivism.

With an objective ontology and a subjective epistemology, critical approaches such as critical theory (for example, Habermas, 1987), critical realism (for example, Bhaskar, 1975) and pragmatism (for example, Sayer, 1992) offer an alternative to positivism and post-modernism, in that they acknowledge that there is a reality “out there” but that to access it one must do so through the experiences of other people. This seemed to match my own beliefs about reality and the ways in which it can be accessed. These approaches tend to view “the truth” as discoverable through a plurality of methods, involving the collection of different types of data. The underpinning principles of truth in critical approaches include the expression of power relations both in societal and historical terms, that the subjective nature of awareness of reality depends on language, that there are different privileged groups resulting in oppression of one or more of those groups, and that traditional management research and teaching endorses and preserves the social order (Johnson and Duberley, 2000; Grey and Mitev, 1995). There is an element of striving for emancipation in critical approaches (Habermas, 1987). These issues have not been of concern directly in positive psychology nor in positive psychology coaching. As Becker and Maracek (2008, p. 591) observed, positive psychology tends to have been focused on individual flourishing rather than considering “the total social environment and an ethical stance that takes in social engagement and activism”. There are signs of a shift towards the latter position, however, in the notion of “second-wave” positive psychology (Lomas and Ivtzan, 2016), where the opening up of the debate to include such critical issues is advocated.

According to Blaikie (1993, pp. 58-62) and building on the work of Bhaskar (1975), critical realism is based on an objectivist ontology in that reality exists independently and is "out there" at three levels: "empirical", i.e. that which can be observed; "actual", i.e. events that may or may not be seen; and "real", i.e. processes that generate events, or "mechanisms", that can remain unseen. This leads to a "depth ontology" in the sense that interpretative processes may be required to uncover the generative mechanisms that form the basis of science. Critical realism rejects positivism's quest of searching for constant conjunction and causal laws in favour of identifying *patterns* of events, or "demi-regularities". It takes the Popperian view that future knowledge is unknown until it becomes known (Popper, 1957). Knowledge is therefore always partial, because knowledge is likely to develop over time as we continue to discover new things (Popper, 1957; Pawson and Tilley,1997). Knowledge is therefore in a state of constant change, and the best that can be done is to establish its best current state and to move forward. Truth is therefore always provisional, and the claim to it in critical realism adopts a position between the absolute truth sought by positivism and the relativism of post-modernism by separating ontology and epistemology from each other (Johnson and Duberley, 2000).

There are differences between the conceptualisation of "truth" in critical theory and critical realism. According to McAuley and Ridley-Duff (2017), critical theory is based on a consensus theory of truth, whereas critical realism is more predicated on a pragmatic theory of truth. This latter observation is of particular relevance to my own research, which has been conducted from the viewpoint of pragmatism embodied in its search for what works for whom and how. In critical realism, say McAuley and Ridley-Duff (2017):

> "truth can only be discovered in practice when a theoretically informed action is tested in the 'real' world. Truth is more than consensus: it depends on validating that an idea is both useful to its user and reliable in practice" (p. 10).

I am aware that some criticisms of critical approaches include a lack of consistency between their ontological and epistemological positions. Both positivists and post-modernists might argue that it is not compatible to conduct research using subjectivist methods whilst underpinning it with an objectivist ontology. The positivist might argue that a positivist ontology logically demands a positivist epistemology, and post-modernists might argue for a subjectivist epistemology when one is assuming a subjectivist ontology. However, I find Johnson and Duberley's (2000) argument that suggests that a constructivist epistemology can also stem from an objective ontology, more persuasive. Drawn from the work of Habermas (1987), the argument fits my own beliefs and experience in that I believe it is possible for different people to perceive the same objects or events in different ways depending on a range of personal, cognitive and contextual factors, yet that object or event exists independently "out there". It was this argument that led me to adopt a realist research approach in this current project.

Having discussed the theoretical influences on my study, I now turn to how I have applied these principles to my own research.

Ontological and epistemological choices for my Study

To re-cap on the research question to put this chapter into context, it is:

> "How can a positive psychology executive coaching programme work to support senior police leaders to set, pursue and achieve their personal and leadership development goals and contribute to the organisation's leadership development culture?"

As well as looking for an approach that fitted my worldview, the other driver behind my choice of epistemology was the nature of the research question. This was not asking whether positive psychology coaching works or not, but *how* it works, for whom and in what circumstances. I considered the range of possible approaches. I was sceptical about the appropriateness of transferring the principles of the physical sciences to the social sciences. As Bhaskar (1979) observed, human beings are more than physical or chemical objects that can be studied under controlled experimental conditions to discover fixed laws and consistent patterns of behaviour. I concluded that strictly positivist methods in themselves would have provided insufficient richness, nuance and complexity to satisfy the demands of my study. I therefore rejected this option.

Alternatively, qualitative approaches can be appropriate when relatively little is known about the topic under review. Kauffman et al (2015) suggest that, because of the relatively undeveloped state of coaching research, small exploratory studies can be helpful. Some of the more unstructured phenomenological approaches, as mentioned above, have been criticised for their lack of rigour, validity, reliability and generalisability, most of which are positivist constructs. However, for this study, constructivism in itself would not offer a complete explanation. If, for this purpose, positivism and constructivism can be seen as two opposite ends on a continuum, then the needs of the study's objectives would fall somewhere in between, in an attempt to combine the benefits of rich detail with

scientific rigour. Guided by Johnson and Duberley's (2000) typology in Figure 3.1. above, I chose realist action research, a research approach that is grounded in scientific realism and related philosophically to critical realism and pragmatism in that it adopts a positivist ontology and a subjective epistemology.

Whilst it is vital to choose a research approach that best addresses the research question, it is also important to understand and recognise the influence of one's own personal factors as a researcher. I discuss this in detail in my reflexive account in Chapter 10 (pp. 357 to 368). In the interests of transparency, however, I offer a brief summary here. I considered the impact my personal preferences and background might have on my research positioning and choice of research methods. I concluded that I was looking for a strategic yet pragmatic approach, combining structure and rigour, with the capacity to capture and analyse rich data, in which I played an active rather than a passive part. This further supported my choice.

The location of my research topic within philosophical traditions

My research topic lies at the intersection between coaching, psychology, leadership development and programme development. I could see that there could be ontological and epistemological tensions between the various philosophies and traditions in these fields. For example, coaching consists of a variety of academic and practitioner communities. There is a degree of competition amongst the field's professional bodies, each of which have different philosophical research traditions and quality criteria. This has implications for my choice of academic and practitioner audiences, as I discuss below.

One of the key players is the coaching community, largely comprised of multi-disciplinary coaches utilising a range of coaching approaches and practices. They are represented by a number of professional organisations such as the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC) and the Association for Coaching. Another player is the human resource management community with whom many coaches identify, represented in the main by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD). The CIPD also competes for professional recognition in this space. Other coaches identify with the psychological community, represented by the British Psychological Society (BPS). The BPS also competes to be recognised as the professional body for coaching (for example, Stopforth, 2019) and arguably give themselves a perceived privilege by asserting that psychology is the underpinning scientific discipline of coaching. Examples of this, and already mentioned (pp. 16 to 17), are the claims that positive psychology provides the “backbones” of theory and practice for coaching (Seligman, 2007). Social programme research has largely grown as an academic discipline in the fields of health and education. To date, whilst there have been a number of studies reported in the coaching and coaching psychology literature relating to various aspects of coaching efficacy, there is little research specifically aimed at programme development in coaching.

One of the reasons for highlighting these differences is that there are varied views as to what constitutes “knowledge” in each of these academic and practice communities. Coaching research is in its infancy, and, as Garvey et al (2009) observe, whilst the more established body of knowledge in mentoring tends towards a positivist approach, in coaching, there is no such tradition. Instead, it is disjointed and largely based on practitioner accounts, although in a recent debate, Cox (2013) and Bachkirova et al (2017) have argued that pragmatism

and constructivism provide credible alternatives to both modernist and post-modernist approaches. In the coaching and human resource development (HRD) literatures, a range of positivist and interpretivist perspectives are represented, including examples of critical writing (Garvey et al, 2018, and Western, 2012, in coaching; Sambrook, 2002 in HRD).

Psychology and coaching psychology, including the recently developed discipline of positive psychology, are largely predicated on a long and strongly held positivist foundation. There appears to be a difference, however, depending on which branch of psychology is being studied. There is a greater devotion to positivism in psychology generally and in positive psychology, whereas there seems to be at least the stirrings of a more pluralist representation in the coaching psychology literature. A glimmer of evidence of an embryonic acceptance of a broader range of research methods in respect of psychology in general was indicated in the May 2018 edition of the British Psychological Society's professional journal *The Psychologist.* It noted that the Society had expressed its concern at reports that some scientific journals allied to the psychology field, for example, the *Journal of Child and Family Studies* and the *British Medical Journal,* had decided not to accept qualitative research papers. They said, "qualitative research is now widely recognised as an important aspect of scientific work" (British Psychological Society, 2018, p.17). However, most of the psychological research that appears in higher-rated journals continues to be conducted in the positivist tradition.

HRD, however, the field in which leadership development is arguably situated:

> "has no dominant paradigm, at least in the UK. There is no single lens for viewing HRD and indeed there are many voices articulating particular perspectives" (McGoldrick et al, 2002, p 14.)

The social programme development and evaluation field, especially in health and education, has been mostly positivist in its thinking for many years, holding the randomised controlled trial research method as its “gold standard”. Randomised controlled trials can be difficult and expensive to set up and apply. Relying as they do on the use of experimental and control groups, affording a treatment to one group and denying it to the other, they can pose some difficult ethical problems. The results from such trials can often be contradictory or inconclusive (Pawson and Tilley, 1997). In some areas, the field has recently begun to recognise alternative research methods based on the concept of scientific realism, in the form of realist evaluation and realist review (Pawson and Tilley, 1997) and latterly realist action research (Westhorp et al, 2016).

There is, therefore, little ontological and epistemological consistency in the fields in which my research is located. This is both a disadvantage and an opportunity. It may be that to make a contribution to knowledge in the psychology/coaching psychology field could initially be more difficult, but possibly more impactful because of the potential mismatch between the dominant paradigm and my own position. However, Kovacs and Corrie (2016, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c) published a series of articles in coaching psychology journals based on one study that was the first to use a realist approach in coaching research and mentioned in Chapter 1 (pp. 19 to 20). This could indicate that the door may be ajar for others. The coaching and leadership development audiences may be more open to such an approach, as its traditions are less defined than those in psychology and, arguably, more amenable to a subjectivist epistemology. My research addresses the coaching psychology and the coaching/leadership development audiences, whilst remaining mindful of the dynamics between their respective philosophical approaches and my adopted position.

Section summary

As I have described above, my research commitments include an objectivist ontology, in that I see the world as external and independent, and a subjectivist epistemology, in that I believe that knowledge of it is only accessible through our subjective experience. My approach is therefore located in the critical theory/critical realism/pragmatism quadrant of Johnson and Duberley's (2000) reflexivity diagram as shown in Figure 3.1 above. My research question asks, "what works for whom, how and in what circumstances", which is also congruent with this philosophical position, in particular with the concept of pragmatism. The choice of research methodology and methods adopted in my project were therefore profoundly influenced by realist principles, which are discussed in the next section (pp. 96 to 99).

Maintaining congruence between personal beliefs and assumptions, research philosophies and research design is also important (Bristow and Saunders, 2015). I argue that congruence can also extend to the philosophical assumptions made by the research topic itself. Whilst scientific realism does not hold emancipatory ambitions to the same extent as those of critical realism, in my research there are common threads of emancipatory intent set in historical and political contexts that are similar to those called for in critical theory, such as my motivation as a coach to encourage clients to reframe their understanding of their circumstances to develop themselves to the best they can be. These threads run through my personal beliefs, my research commitments, the research methodology and methods I have chosen and the subject-matter of positive psychology coaching itself.

Having discussed the general philosophical principles as relevant to my thesis, I now consider how they feed forward into my methodological approach.

3.3 Methodological orientation

As there are several schools of realist thought, in this section I consider concepts and terms upon which I have drawn extensively in my research. In particular, whilst critical realism and scientific realism share some similarities, they also differ in several respects.

Pawson and Tilley (1997) make the case for scientific realism as critical realism operationalised through realist evaluation, based on the philosophy of realism represented in the work of Bhaskar (1975), Hesse (1974), Harré (1972; 1986), Lakatos (1970), Archer (1995) and Sayer (1984 and 1992). However, scientific realism has closer relationships with the earlier writings of Popper (1959) and Campbell (1988). Critical realism has been seen as a “philosophy in search of a method” and not necessarily intervention-based, whereas scientific realism, especially as espoused by Pawson and Tilley (1997), has tended to be more applied in the way it studies interventions in context (Jagosh, 2018).

Drawing on the work of Bhaskar (1975) and Sayer (2010), Jagosh (2018) identified five key principles in realist philosophy, which are important in my research and shared by both critical realism and scientific realism. They are explored in more detail in later sections and chapters, especially in Chapter 5 (pp. 157 to 165). It is useful to note them here:

1. The first principle is that the world is “mind-independent”, i.e. it exists independently of our perception of it. Reality is “out there”, but we are

limited in the ways in which we can apprehend it. Evidence for its existence goes beyond what we can see. Critical realism holds that universal truths exist, but we have difficulty in accessing them. We socially construct that reality through our senses and emotions;

2. The second principle is that feelings and thoughts can be real in the sense that they have “objective” effects that can be observed, studied and understood;
3. The third principle is that reality exists in layers and has “ontological depth”;
4. The fourth principle concerns generative causality; a realist philosophy holds that mechanisms that may be hidden from view, latent or dormant cause outcomes to happen, and explain how outcomes come to be the way they are; and
5. The final principle is that mechanisms that are latent, i.e. not apparent or obvious, can also form reality.

There is a distinction made in the literature between philosophical realism, as discussed above, and empirical realism. The latter term tends to be used to mean that research should be based on the gathering of objective, observable evidence (Trigg, 1980). This can sometimes be difficult to achieve without relying on subjective methods, as in critical and scientific realism. Jagosh (2018) argues that in order to answer complex problems we need to make abstract concepts concrete; scientific realism does this by constructing and testing programme theory.

Where scientific realism and critical realism depart from other approaches to enquiry is in the use of the concepts of context, mechanisms and outcomes in

combination in order to explain realist causation. As Greenhalgh et al (2017, p. 2) assert, a “successionist” view of causation, favoured by positivists, would ask “does X lead to Y?”, whereas a realist approach, adopting a generative view of causation would ask “what is it about X that results in Y?” The roles of context, mechanisms and outcomes can therefore be explained as asking “what it is about X (context) that gives rise to a causal pathway (mechanism) which leads to Y (outcome?)” (Greenhalgh et al, 2017, p. 2).

Realist research concerns the application of scientific realism to explain how intervention through social programmes brings about change and to refine it; it asks not what works but what works for whom, in what circumstances and why (Pawson and Tilley, 2004). They say that change is achieved through a programme’s theory of what it is that creates change, the fact that programmes are active, relying on participants’ reasoning and agency, operating as an open not a closed system. They define the concept of mechanism as being two-fold: programmes provide resources to participants, referred to in my study as “resource mechanisms”. Participants must use their reasoning to interpret and act upon the resource mechanisms to achieve outcomes. This process is referred to in my research as “reasoning mechanisms”. This concept is what makes programmes “work” and its discovery is at the heart of realist research. The context is crucial, as not all programmes will work for everyone all of the time. As Pawson and Tilley (2004) suggest, studying the context will focus on the circumstances under which a programme will work and for whom. Some contexts will act for some as enablers and for some as disablers; through realist research we are able to distinguish one from the other. Pawson and Tilley (2004) suggest that outcomes can vary; some of them will be intended and some unintended. Pawson and Tilley (2004) say that realist research “does not rely on a single

outcome measure to deliver a pass/fail verdict on a programme" (p. 8). Instead of focusing exclusively on performance outcomes, realist researchers consider "outcome patterns" to facilitate a more subtle and nuanced view. Realist research uses the notion of context-mechanism-outcome configurations, or "CMOcs" for short, to discover the combination of factors that generates outcomes.

Key influences in my methodological decision-making: The marrying of realist evaluation and action research to form realist action research

My decision to adopt a realist action research approach as a methodological orientation for my research was influenced by three key sources. The first was the work of Pawson and Tilley (1997). I was particularly struck by the way they take the abstract philosophical concepts of critical realism and, through the notion of scientific realism, develop them into a realist methodology capable of studying what works for whom and in what circumstances in complex social programmes. In their text, Pawson and Tilley (1997) are explicit about the ontology and epistemology of realist evaluation approaches, i.e. an objectivist ontology with a subjectivist epistemology. Realist research methods can be pluralist, and this is in fact to be encouraged (Pawson and Tilley, 2001, p. 323). According to Gray (2014), this means that "nothing is ruled out, with methods being used according to opportunity and need" (p. 26). This latter point suggests a pragmatic view of truth that fits with one of my key personal drivers, that is, that knowledge needs to be useful as well as having merit in its own right. In terms of axiology, the academic community that aligns itself with realist research approaches has well-developed "codes of practice" which have been published in sets of reporting standards (for example, Wong et al, 2016). There is a strong sense in the

community of what constitutes “good” realist research, with a keen focus on its ontological and epistemological foundations. Echoing its methodological pluralism, any research method can be employed in a realist research approach as long as it is appropriate to the type of data sought and does not conflict with the realist philosophical position (Westhorp et al, 2016).

The second main source was Kovacs and Corrie (2016). As already mentioned above and in Chapter 1 (p. 19 to 20), this was the first paper based on a realist approach to coaching to be published in the coaching psychology press and followed up with others by the same authors (Kovacs and Corrie, 2017a; Kovacs and Corrie, 2017b; Kovacs and Corrie, 2017c). These papers offer an alternative methodology to the dominant positivist paradigm in coaching psychology. The original paper provides a sound rationale for the use of a realist approach in studying coaching psychology as part of a range of “relevant, meaningful and rigorous methods of evaluation” (p. 59) and in the quest to establish a solid evidence base. They describe realist evaluation as “an approach that can add substantial value” (p. 59), indicating that they consider a realist approach not as the only single version of truth (positivism) but as one version amongst others (subjectivity). The authors acknowledge that positivism and quantitative methods are privileged at present in the coaching psychology field. They point to the differing needs of coaching practitioners and the increasing levels of complexity in the world as reasons for broadening the diversity of research methods and to include a realist approach. The paper is clear in its axiology; it provides a detailed description of the action that was taken and the realist evaluation principles that were used to underpin the study. The authors make their truth claims in realist terms, i.e. discovering the generative mechanisms and contexts that work to create outcomes, with the capacity to add to what is already known about how

complex coaching interventions work by way of the process of cumulation. They recognise a pragmatic notion of truth:

> "If realist evaluation is to have a significant impact on coaching psychology research it will ultimately need to demonstrate how it fares in comparison to other approaches…both in terms of methodological rigour and utility" (Kovacs and Corrie, 2016, p. 64).

The paper includes a helpful analysis of the benefits, which they say are "providing a bridge between research and practice" (p. 64), recognising the challenges of researching complex programmes in context and using realism's capacity to both generate and deal with detailed multi-faceted data.

The third source of influence was a paper by Westhorp et al (2016), who describe realist evaluation, realist reviews and other applications, such as the design and development of programmes, as "realist approaches" (p. 362), a helpful term that I have adopted in this thesis. Westhorp et al's (2016) paper achieves two purposes; one, to introduce a new variant into the realist research "family", that of "realist action research", and second, to describe a study that utilised this approach practically to aid service re-design. This paper spoke directly to my preferred philosophical and methodological position and also to the possibility of an application to my own research, as the study in question focused on achieving programme development via action-orientated inclusive methods. As this was the first published article to advocate this new approach, it provided a great deal of discussion about the ontologies and epistemologies of both realist approaches and action research, bringing them together in a plausible theoretical synthesis and applying it to an organisational setting. Westhorp et al (2016) take great care to explore the philosophical foundations of realist action research. They draw on the writings on action research of Davison et al (2004) and the work on realist

approaches of Maxwell (2012) and Sayer (1992) to demonstrate how each approach brings strengths to the enquiry and how the combination enriches the outcomes without presenting incompatibilities in either ontological or epistemological terms. The paper also included, helpfully, the researchers' reflections on their approach and application from a realist perspective, concluding that bringing together realist principles and action research was not only possible in theory but also proved to be desirable in practice. This influenced me to adopt and adapt the combined realist action research approach into my own research design in order to address my research question.

Realist action research

Having described how I reached the decision to adopt a realist approach to my methodology, it is useful at this point to go into greater detail about the features of realist action research as they relate to my study.

As I have mentioned above, I sought a theory-driven approach that could accommodate a subjectivist approach to data collection and interpretation, whilst also being capable of responding to the nature of my research question. Realist action research is a combination of action research, which I use in my study as a *method* of enquiry, and the principles of realist evaluation (Pawson and Tilley, 1997), with its roots in scientific and critical realism, as a *logic* of enquiry (Pawson, 2006). My research is not, strictly speaking, an evaluation study; rather, it is an initial exploration of how a positive psychology coaching programme works. The principles of realist evaluation have shaped my realist thinking. Westhorp et al (2016) argued that the combination of action research and realist research is appropriate for the realist study of programme development:

> "Ever since the seminal text *Realistic Evaluation* (Pawson and Tilley, 1997) was published, it has been acknowledged that realist approaches could be used in the development of policies and programs and not just in their evaluation. Literature about methods for using realist principles in planning and development has, however, been limited" (p.361).

As Wong (2018) argues, realist research as a logic of enquiry is also appropriate when studying complex interventions:

> "….programmes and interventions are complex because of volitions - people make choices; implementation chains – these are often long and tortuous; context – there are many from micro to macro levels; time – programmes originate from somewhere; outcomes – these are multiple, intended, more proximal and so on; and emergence – programmes change with time and when they are implemented" (p. 110).

Moreover, Kovacs and Corrie (2016) describe the increasing complexity involved in executive coaching programmes in their study as follows:

> "Executive coaching is enacted within business environments that are highly complex and unpredictable…a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world…but do not necessarily regard themselves as well-equipped to deal with the levels of complexity… As coaching in organisations has become a mainstream form of leadership development (Grant et al, 2010) coaches are increasingly required to support executives in developing their ability to manage situations for which there can be no simple solution" (p.74).

Kovacs and Corrie (2016) also endorse the desirability of realist research approaches in the study of how executive coaching programmes work. I would argue that the executive coaching programme I am studying is complex in the ways that Wong (2018) and Kovacs and Corrie (2016) describe, and that this further justifies my adoption of a realist approach.

Whilst the realist research approach provided the *logic* of my enquiry, action research was my main *method* of enquiry. Rapoport (1970) defined action research as:

> "action research aims to contribute both to the concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation and to the goals of social science by joint collaboration within a mutually acceptable ethical framework" (p. 499).

Gray (2014) draws attention to the close association between the researcher and the researched and the "democratic partnership" between them in action research. Gray (2014) also emphasises the role of change as a key intention in action research and the importance of studying the research participants' lived experience. I wanted not only to research my topic in an organisation but also to be an integral part of the coaching process. The action research approach fitted with the overall cultural change aspirations of my host organisation and with my style of engaging with participants and other stakeholders. It also supported my methods of gathering research data through working directly with participants and seeking the accounts of participants' and stakeholders' experience.

Whilst I acknowledge that realist action research principally draws upon scientific realism, Houston (2010) identified critical realism, which is allied to it, and action research as a philosophically compatible combination in social research, thus adding to the validity of the approach. Houston (2010) says:

> "Critical realism enables the researcher to get into the 'black box' of an intervention or programme and identify how and why interventions work in particular circumstances. Action research offers opportunities here to canvass the views of stakeholders… as to why programme effectiveness may vary. Linked to the critical realist paradigm, it has a central role as part of an eclectic assembly of methods and approaches that capture the rich ontology of social life" (p.89).

Realist research, too, is concerned with the inner workings of the “black box” that act to turn inputs into outcomes in social programmes (Manzano, 2016; Dalkin et al, 2016). Scientific realism, however, focuses on how programmes achieve their intended outcomes without necessarily being driven by values (Jagosh, 2018). Negative intent could well form the basis of an intervention and on this the approach is neutral in its stance. Whilst I can appreciate that value-driven outcomes are not necessarily of primary interest in realist evaluation, I feel uncomfortable with this position. Both critical realism and action research place an emphasis on emancipation as an outcome. As the general intentions of positive psychology coaching are to produce beneficial outcomes for a range of stakeholders, I argue that the act of combining action research and realist research methods supports the value-based aspirations both of critical realism and positive psychology coaching. This arguably provides a balance to the lack of recognition that social programmes ought to achieve positive social outcomes that currently exists in realist research. Moreover, French and Bell (1999) have criticised action research for being too focused on action and not enough on theory. Since realist approaches are theory-driven (Pawson and Manzano-Santaella, 2012), I argue that, by combining both methodological approaches, realist action research provides a complementary balance of both theory and action.

As my project focuses on a single organisation, it could be classed as a case study. There are several reasons to conclude that case study methodology, realist approaches and action research might be compatible with each other. Gill and Johnson (2010) observe that case studies are often used in research that

combines different data collection methods. These can use a range of data including those gleaned from interviews and direct and participant observation:

> "a good case study will use as many different sources as possible collected via different appropriate means" (p. 225).

Therefore, my methodological approach of realist action research uses a case study context to enrich the quality and range of data collection methods upon which the study is underpinned.

Criteriology

An important aspect of making methodological choices is to be alert to the criteria that may be used by others to measure the success of the research. Gill and Johnson (2010) argue that the dominant discourse in management and organisational research is that of positivism. The criteria for success, therefore, tend to be based on those of positivism, namely validity, reliability and generalisability. However, these criteria may not be suitable for research designs that involve qualitative methods, as in my research. Johnson et al (2006) argue for an alternative, contingent criteriology for qualitative research. When considering critical theory research, they draw on the work of Kincheloe and McLaren (1998) to produce five alternative criteria, all contributing to an overarching notion of "critical trustworthiness", against which the quality of research should be judged. The criteria are:

> ***1 Reflexivity:*** the extent to which the researcher engages in a critical examination of their assumptions, values and interests;

2 Critical interpretation: the extent to which the political and emancipatory aspects are considered in the interpretation of the research;

3 Democratic research design: the extent to which the researcher works with and involves the stakeholders at every stage in the research;

4 Anticipatory accommodation: this principle is similar to the traditional notion of generalisability and is explained below;

5 Catalytic validity: the extent to which the research experience moves participants towards a better understanding of themselves and their circumstances to challenge previously held assumptions and lead to change. I comment on this, also below.

All of the criteria are pertinent to my research approach, but the fourth and fifth have a particular relevance that would be useful to explain here. The principle of "anticipatory accommodation" is preferred to the positivist notion of generalisability when working with qualitative research methods. In realist research, this is achieved through the notion of "cumulation" (Pawson and Tilley, 1997). By focusing on middle range programme theory (Merton, 1968) based on the identification of the demi-regularity of generative causation patterns, mechanisms and contexts, much can be learned about how programmes work more generally beyond the circumstances of the specific programme under study. In relation to catalytic validity, I argue that positive psychology coaching aims to emancipate and bring about change in those who engage with it.

These are the criteria I have adopted in order to guide my study, and to which I return in Chapter 9 (pp. 351 to 353) where I consider the advantages and limitations of my research approach.

3.4 Chapter summary

In this chapter, I have provided a brief discussion of the philosophical position and concept of “truth” that underpins this study. I have stated the justification for its ontological and epistemological commitments. I have also explained the distinctions between realism, critical realism and scientific realism as they apply to the study’s methodological orientation and justified its choice.

In Chapter 1, I introduced the argument that a realist approach may provide an alternative and more nuanced discourse to positive psychology coaching research than more traditional approaches which might be helpful in contributing both to existing knowledge and to practice. I developed this argument in Chapter 2 by discussing the literature relating to research approaches in coaching psychology. In this chapter, I have developed it further by discussing critically how the realist approach is appropriate for this study in philosophical and methodological terms.

The thesis now moves on to Chapter 4, which describes and critically discusses the project’s design and realist action research phases.

Chapter 4: Realist Action Research

4.1 Chapter introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide details of the research design and its rationale, and to outline the realist action research I undertook to design, deliver and explore a positive psychology executive coaching programme.

Whilst I mention the initial programme theory building phase (Phase 2 in Figure 4:1, p. 111) briefly in this chapter, the detail of it is the focus of Chapter 5; as it represents a major step in the research process it warrants separate consideration. I adopt a similar approach to the related programme theory refinement phase (Phase 6 in Figure 4:1), which is mentioned briefly in this chapter but where the details are presented separately in Chapter 7.

4.2 Research design

According to Bryman (2012), “a research design provides a framework for the collection and analysis of data” (p. 46). What follow, therefore, are the key aspects of my research framework. The purpose of this section is to describe the development of an appropriate research design for my study based on the decision to adopt a realist philosophy and methodological orientation underpinned by scientific realism and expressed as realist action research.

The design was based on the research question, which is:

> “How can a positive psychology executive coaching programme work to support senior police leaders to set, pursue and achieve

their personal and leadership development goals and contribute to the organisation's leadership development culture?"

The realist action research design

The main research activities that I discuss in this chapter, such as the situation analysis, delivery of the coaching programme, research interviews and organisational consultations, took place on site in the police service, at locations of the participants' choosing. The whole research project took place within the lifetime of my PhD studies, and I was the sole researcher. The programme design, delivery, exploration and further programme development took place over a period of 3 years.

The following is an overview of the research design, with more in-depth details provided as the chapter proceeds. The design was based on realist action research methodology, and was conducted in seven distinct realist action research phases as follows:

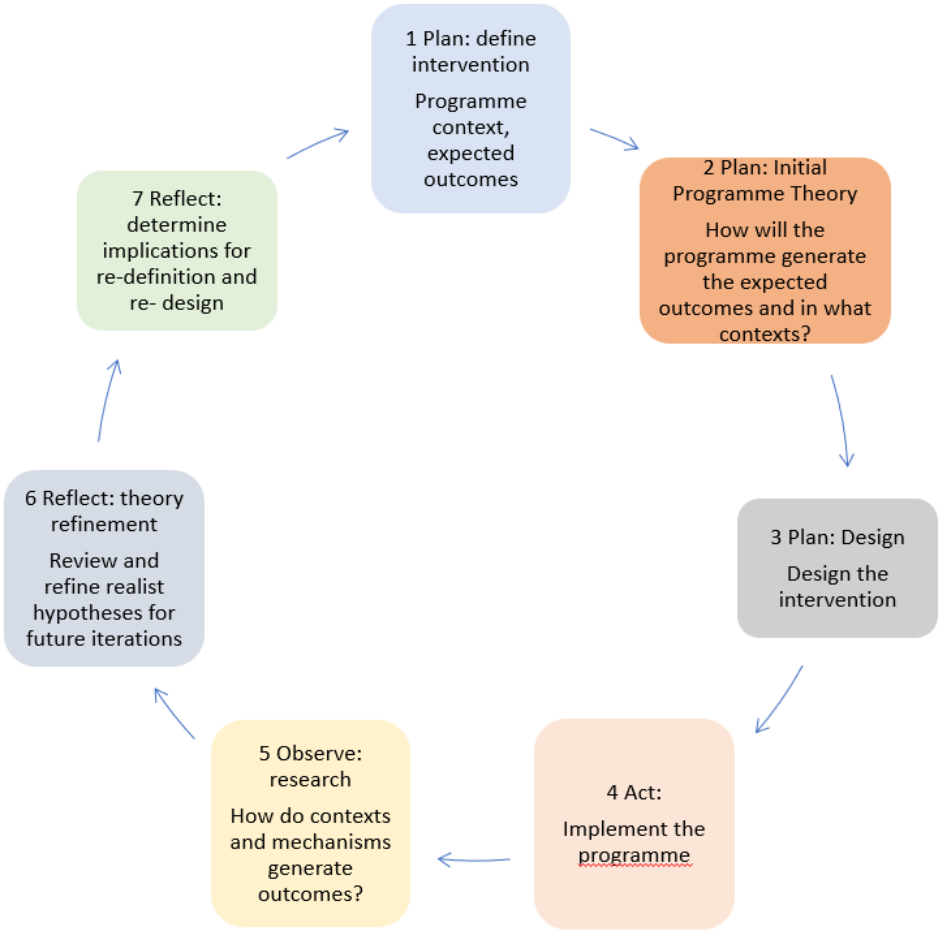

Figure 4.1: Realist action research design framework

I developed my approach by synthesising several models drawn from the action research and realist research literature, for example, the “realist evaluation cycle” proposed by Pawson and Tilley, (1997). This is a four-stage cyclical model, as shown in Figure 4.2:

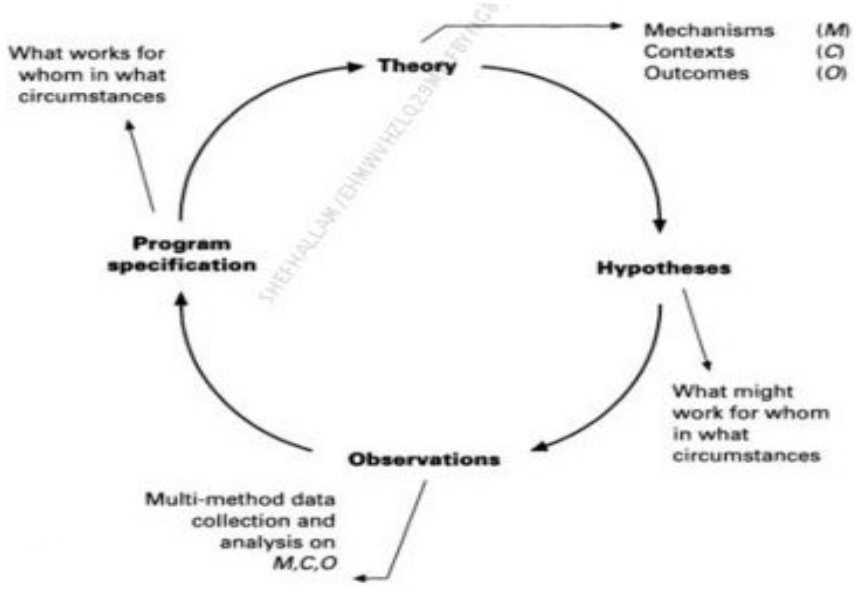

Figure 4.2: The realist evaluation cycle (Pawson and Tilley, 1997). Reproduced with the kind permission of Sage Publishing

The first stage, “theory”, includes identifying the mechanisms, contexts and outcomes that might occur in the programme. The second, “hypotheses”, stage asks “what might work for whom in what circumstances”. The third stage of “observations” uses multi-method data collection and analysis of the data relating to the contexts, mechanisms and outcomes. The fourth stage of “program specification” involves using the new knowledge about what works for whom in what circumstances when specifying the programme for future iterations.

There are several features that make this approach a realist one. First, in realist terms, theory is primarily concerned with understanding how mechanisms are fired, or activated, in different contexts in order to lead generatively to outcomes. Second, hypothesising consists of the conceptualisation of a detailed picture in terms of the contexts and the mechanisms that might work for different people and circumstances that might produce change as an outcome from the implementation of a particular programme or intervention. Third, the observations phase consists of data collection and analysis in order to explore the hypotheses. As the realist approach accommodates different types of research methods so

long as they do not contradict the realist philosophy (Westhorp et al, 2016), studies can be “multi-method” and tailored for their purposes (Pawson and Tilley, 1997). Last, in realist terms, evidence seeks to “specify” rather than “generalise” the observed patterns, so that specific knowledge of “what works for whom and in what circumstances” informs theory and the future planning and implementation of programmes rather than adopting a binary position of them “working” or not. Rather than looking for lasting “universal truths”, the realist approach seeks to express the current state of knowledge in given sets of circumstances. The cumulation of results from several evaluations can accommodate a version of “generalisation” over time through the formulation and transfer of findings to other settings by working with theory in the middle range. Scientific realism acknowledges the “temporary” nature of knowledge as proposed by Popper (1959).

For the purposes of my study, I was keen to find an adaptation of Pawson and Tilley’s 1997 framework to reflect my immersion in the action-orientated aspects to create my own framework that would be suitable for *ab initio* programme development. Action research adopts another four-stage cycle consisting of “plan” (develop a potential solution to an issue); “act” (try it); “observe” (assess what happened); and “reflect” (adjust and change the proposed solution in the light of experience) (Lewin, 1946). The cycle begins again, this time with the focus on the amended “solution”. Westhorp et al (2016) provided such an adaptation by combining the action research approach with realist evaluation to form a realist action research approach to programme re-design. This resonated with my preferred style and suited my research question, although my study involved initial design rather than re-design. Westhorp et al (2016) put forward an integrated framework as follows:

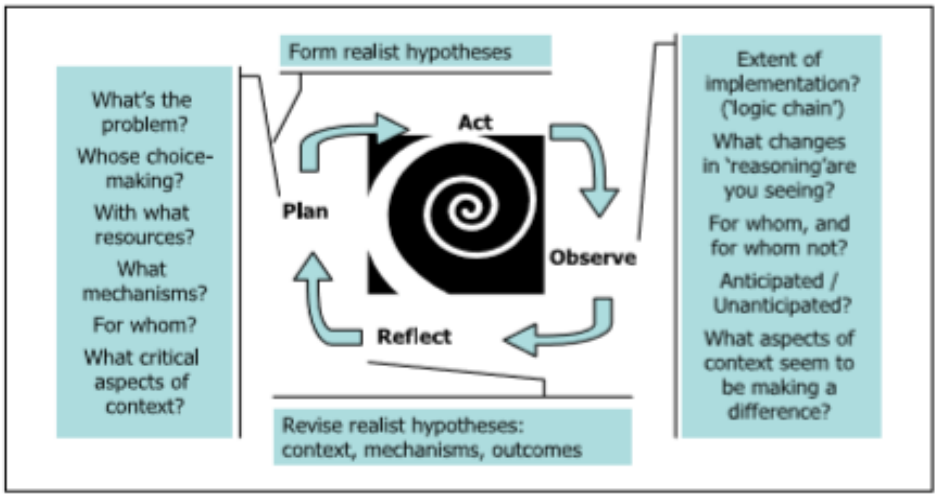

Figure 4.3: The realist action research cycle (Westhorp et al, 2016). Reproduced with the kind permission of Sage Publishing

The action research "plan" phase is adapted to incorporate the realist principles of defining an initial programme theory, expressed in terms of context, mechanisms and outcomes. The "act" and "observe" phases now include the realist concepts of reasoning, "for whom/not", intended and unintended outcomes and context. The "reflect" phase includes the realist step of refining the initial hypotheses. In developing my own approach, I moved on from this four-stage process towards a seven-stage one as shown in figure 4.1 to accommodate the definition and design of a programme from first principles, moving from initial theorising through action and exploration to programme theory re-definition, all conducted within a realist paradigm. Whilst planning my research, components such as determining the problem, theorising and design emerged as three major elements in their own right within the "planning" stage. I felt they were each too large and complex to be incorporated into just one phase. I have therefore separated out the "planning" stage into three phases; first, the defining of the intervention, second, the building of an initial realist programme theory against

which the programme was eventually explored, and third, the designing of the programme. To deal with the re-definition of the initial programme theory and to account for its impact on future iterations of the programme, I included two "reflecting" steps instead of one, step 6 to refine the programme theory and step 7 to determine the implications of the revised theory for programme re-definition and re-design. The cycle then feeds forward to provide the opening structure for future cycles of the re-designed programme.

Whilst a realist research approach is not prescriptive as to the methods that should be employed, Jagosh (2017a), based on the work of Pawson and Tilley (1997), recommends the adoption of five key steps when undertaking a realist study. I have used these steps to underpin the procedures I undertook. The steps are as follows:

1. Identify the programme to be researched and establish the review questions (completed in Phase 1 of my realist action research design)
2. Establish/construct "candidate" (i.e. not yet explored) programme theories and possible middle-range theories (completed in Phase 2)
3. Develop protocols for data collection (completed in Phase 5)
4. Collect data and analyse it using Context-Mechanism-Outcome configurations (completed in Phase 5)
5. Produce refined evidence-informed programme and middle-range theories to answer the question: what works, for whom, under what circumstances, how and why? (completed in Phase 6).

Research methods and data collection - overview

I used theory-driven semi-structured interviews and researcher observation as the primary data collection methods based on the initial programme theory expressed as context, mechanism and outcome configurations or CMOCs (Pawson, 1996; Manzano, 2016). These were used in set-up meetings, research interviews with participants, and academic consultations, both for theory gleaning and theory refinement. Semi-structured interviews are often used in realist research as they are "suitable for testing programme theories through people's subjective experiences and insights" (Jagosh, 2017b). I held twenty interviews with fifteen participants, one of which comprised an exercise that I in my role as researcher completed based on the notes from my observations and addressing the same questions as I posed to the other participants. Some participants were interviewed more than once where appropriate, such as for clarification purposes, gleaning further information or because they were involved in more than one phase of the research, as noted in the overview of the action research cycle's phases on pages 120 to 121 later in this chapter.

I also used basic quantitative methods commensurate with the small scale of the study, and document and literature reviews.

Data collection was achieved through voice-recordings, transcripts and written records of interviews, and full member-checking took place. Researcher observations were recorded in writing immediately after the coaching meetings. Data analysis comprised of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) and matrices specifically developed for realist research purposes. These procedures are described more fully in Phase 5 on pages 152 to 154 later in this chapter.

Sampling

A purposive theoretical sampling strategy was employed to select a policing organisation to host the study and the participants. I set out my rationale for choosing to situate my research in the police service in my introduction in Chapter 1 (pp. 20 to 28). In essence, I could see that there was a specific need in the police service due to the strains on leadership succession and increased demands on the service from the observations I had made in my senior national role over many years.

In realist research approaches, sampling strategies are theory-led and purposive, designed to explore programme contexts, generative mechanisms and outcomes (Emmel, 2013). There are 43 police forces in England and Wales. My criteria focused on finding a force in England and Wales that had a leadership development strategy and approach that were compatible with the aims of the study. On ethical grounds, I ruled out my local police force to avoid any potential conflict of interest.

Participants are recruited to a realist research study on the basis of who would be useful for theory gleaning and theory testing, as per Manzano (2016), and for "who knows what" (Pawson and Tilley, 1997, p. 159). I applied these realist principles and recruited respondents as follows:

Programme architects: representatives from the organisation who are involved in the development of this coaching programme;

Programme practitioners: members of the organisation's executive who are the line managers of the coachees, and/or who are the managers of the business;

Programme recipients: the population of potential coachees was identified, i.e. the senior leadership cadre sitting directly beneath the executive. This is a group of senior managers, both police officers and police staff. I adopted a non-probabilistic self-selection approach. I asked the organisation to run a recruitment campaign to seek volunteers independently of me as the researcher. Six volunteers came forward and all six were accepted onto the programme by the organisation.

I am aware of the notion of volunteer bias and that it could be of concern to those who prefer to work in the positivist tradition. However, I felt it was more naturalistic to seek volunteers than to impose the programme onto a defined population, as generally, in practice and in my own experience, coachees at this level tend to come to executive coaching on a voluntary basis. This is supported in the executive coaching literature; for example, Kiel et al (1996) found that few executive coachees come to coaching in order to address deficits; most were already succeeding and were seeking coaching to help them progress even further. Executive coaching aims to build on success rather than to serve remedial purposes (Kilburg, 1996). Following Gill and Johnson (2010, p.216), I would argue that this strategy constitutes a degree of ecological validity. Whilst it may reduce population validity, i.e. how much we can generalise from the findings, I argue that my approach is appropriate for a small-scale exploratory study conducted in a realist paradigm.

Academic/practitioner experts: to bring an external and specialised perspective to the study, I recruited a small group of academics and practitioners, with whom I held semi-structured interviews, to provide an expert viewpoint.

Researcher: as coach/researcher, I also contributed data on the basis of my coaching process observations gathered throughout the programme.

Participants

Fifteen respondents took part in the study; eleven from the organisation and four external participants, including me as the coach/researcher. All of the eleven internal participants were in the superintending ranks, chief officers or equivalent members of police staff. They comprised of two groups. The first group comprised five organisational stakeholders: two “programme architects” and three “programme practitioners”. The second group comprised of six “programme recipients”, i.e. coachees. Of the eleven internal participants, six were police officers, five police staff; three were male and eight female. Of the five organisational stakeholders, all were either at superintending rank, chief officer or police staff equivalent. Of the six coachees, three were police officers and three were police staff; two were male and four were female. All of the coachees were in the superintending ranks or police staff equivalent. Participants in the superintending ranks or police staff equivalent headed up large functions in the organisation, whilst chief officers held top roles spanning the whole force.

The four external participants included three subject-matter experts and me as coach/researcher. The three experts included a coaching practitioner and a coaching psychologist, both of whom were experienced in coaching in the policing sector, and a coaching academic/practitioner. Of the four external contributors, three were male and one female. Of the fifteen respondents, six were male and nine female.

Overview of the realist action research phases

The purpose of this section is to provide a brief overview of the research design phases, identifying participant involvement and the number of research interviews held. Full details of the realist action research procedures follow later in this chapter on pages 122 to 156.

Phase 1 – Plan; define intervention: I interviewed one organisational stakeholder, a programme architect, in a set-up meeting. I interviewed the same person plus two more organisational stakeholders, programme practitioners, who were all at superintending to chief officer rank or police staff equivalent, in order to plan the research and define the issues to be addressed in the coaching programme (4 research interviews).

Phase 2 – Plan; initial programme theory: I undertook this phase mostly alone and apart from frequent consultations with organisational stakeholders as I developed the theory, no formal research interviews were held.

Phase 3 – Plan; design the intervention: this phase was conducted principally by me in consultation with organisational stakeholders, and no formal research interviews took place.

Phase 4 – Act: this phase formed the delivery and the basis of the exploratory research exercise in Phase 5. Six volunteer coachees took part, who were all in the superintending ranks or police staff equivalent. I delivered the coaching and noted aspects of process by way of researcher observation after each coaching meeting. Research interviews were held separately from coaching meetings.

Phase 5 – Observe; research: this was achieved through interviews with the six coachee participants as programme recipients, three organisational stakeholders, three experts and the researcher. For two of these interviewees two separate interviews were held, the second one in each case for clarification purposes or to glean additional information. One of the organisational stakeholders had been involved in other research interviews in previous phases (fifteen research interviews).

Phase 6 – Reflect; theory refinement: as in Phase 2, I developed the programme theory, consulting with organisational stakeholders. No research interviews were held during this phase.

Phase 7 – Reflect; determine implications for re-definition and re-design: I interviewed two stakeholders at the same time, who had both been interviewed before for different purposes in a previous phase (one research interview).

Inductive, deductive, retroductive/abductive design strategies

In realist approaches, relying on experimental evidence alone is regarded as insufficient; potential underlying mechanisms need to be studied, which are not always observable (Bhaskar, 1975). The use of conjecture when building theory is also encouraged (Jagosh, 2016). My research design therefore contained elements of induction, deduction, retroduction (Bhaskar, 1975) and Peirce's notion of abduction (Tavory and Timmermans, 2014). Gold et al (2011) observe that abductive theorising can be helpful when theorising complex problems such as those found in the field of HRD. This point is relevant to my study of coaching, one of the disciplines closely allied to HRD, which also deals with complex issues that often do not have straightforward solutions.

Examples of how I have employed these strategies include the initial programme theory building in Phase 2 where I used induction as a starting point, taking existing literature, views of the organisation, my own views as the researcher and those of subject-matter experts into account. I then utilised retroduction to go beneath what could be observed to look for a “depth ontology” of what was really going on. I have used abduction to include a logic of reasoning that might not necessarily be evidence-based, for example, when making use of hunches in theorising in Phase 2. In Phase 5, which comprised a realist-informed examination of the coaching programme, a theory-led deductive strategy was employed, using the theoretical framework developed in Phase 2 to guide interview questions, analyse data, and seek evidence to support, refute or refine the initial programme theory. In Phase 6, which focuses on theory refinement based on the results from Phase 5, an inductive approach was used to develop enhanced theory based on the data.

4.3 The Realist Action Research Cycle

Having presented a brief overview, I now present a detailed description of the realist action research phases that I conducted.

Phase 1: Plan - situation analysis

The purpose of this phase was to plan and define the intervention, determining the programme context and expected outcomes. In this section, I cover four aspects of the planning and situation analysis phase, namely the initial planning

of the coaching and research project, the determination of a positive psychology approach to coaching, an investigation of the issue that the organization wished to address through the coaching programme, and the development of an initial "theory of change" via the development of a programme logic chain.

Initial coaching and research project planning

As mentioned in Chapter 1 above (pp. 27-28), an agreement was reached with a police force in England and Wales to host the research. The terms of this agreement were embodied in a Memorandum of Understanding signed by both the organisation and the university. At the very beginning of the study, I held a project set-up meeting (stage 1 in Figure 4.4) with a senior stakeholder from the organisation's human resources team. The key issues agreed at this meeting included the practical administrative details such as project management, ethics, ways of working, stakeholder identification, recruitment of volunteer coachees and timelines. From this, bearing in mind the organisation's wish to commence the coaching programme as soon as possible and to give all parties a sense of tentative reference points before the detailed programme design had been completed, I constructed an outline of key steps and a timeline for the proposed coaching and research project. The project was comprised of the coaching programme itself, the main research data collection points and key organisational meetings. I present here a diagram and brief overview of the project in order to provide clarity and points of reference for the rest of the thesis:

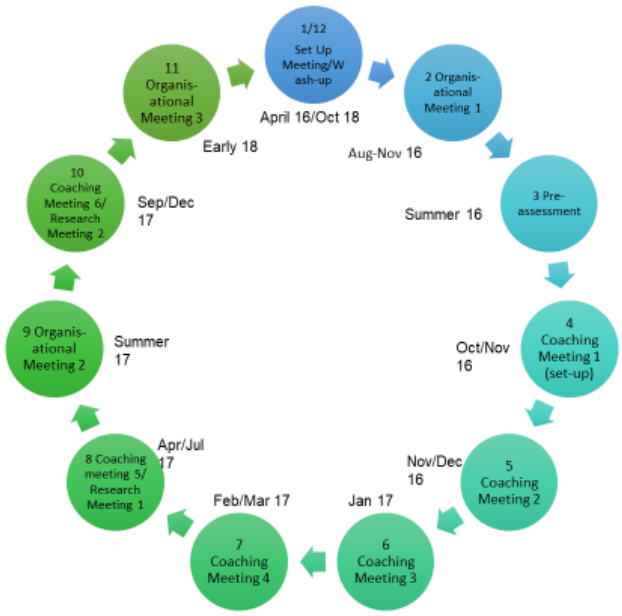

Figure 4.4: Positive psychology executive coaching project

The project was designed to run over a 2-and-a-half-year period, from April 2016 to October 2018. Suitable time gaps were left between stages to allow for design and data analysis, for coaching to take place, for coachees to reflect and take action and to accommodate the maturation process expected to occur in the coachees' learning processes.

Stage 1 comprised of the project set-up meeting. In Stage 2, I held the first of three formal meetings with the organisation's key stakeholders. The purpose of this meeting was to determine the organisation's expectations and agree the principles that would guide the design of the coaching programme. During this period, the organisation advertised internally and secured six volunteer coachees. Stage 3 concerned psychometric pre-coaching assessment for the volunteer coachees. The organisation had recently invested heavily in introducing psychometric assessment for all senior staff as part of a leadership development initiative and they required the measures to be incorporated into the coaching

programme. In the period between the first organisational meeting and the first coaching meeting, all volunteers for the research programme were asked to complete an MBTI Step I assessment and a 360-degree feedback measure if they had not already done so in the previous twelve months.

The coaching itself started in Stage 4. All coaching consisted of individual one-to-one meetings between coachees and coach. The first meeting had a triple purpose, namely the communication of information about the coaching engagement and the research study, the provision of a contracting opportunity for both the coaching and the research study and the conduct of the first coaching meeting. Stages 5 to 7 comprised of coaching meetings 2 to 4, which were held every one to two months. Stage 8 comprised of coaching meeting 5. This longer meeting incorporated two elements, a conventional coaching meeting and a research interview. At the end of the coaching half of the meeting and after a short break, I conducted a research interview with each participant. I carried out a member check with each participant by sending them the transcript of their own research interview, giving them the chance to comment and suggest changes to anything that they thought had been inaccurately reflected.

After Stage 8 and having received the feedback from the participants' member checking exercise, I conducted an initial analysis of the interview data. I wrote an interim report, member-checked it with the volunteers, then met with the organisational stakeholders in the second organisational meeting (Stage 9) to discuss the report, the findings, initial ideas relating to refinements to the programme theory and determine the next steps in the project.

In recognition of the fact that learning as a result of coaching can take some time to develop (Spence et al, 2019), I included a longitudinal aspect, in that I

conducted the final coaching meeting six months after the completion of the fifth coaching meeting. This constituted Stage 10. After the final coaching with each participant, I reviewed their own interview transcripts and noted any additional observations, particularly on their reflections on the coaching programme, the coaching methods, and their longer-term learning and personal change.

I conducted a further analysis of the research data including the data collected from the follow-up meetings. I wrote a second interim report, member-checked it, then met with the organisation's key stakeholders (Stage 11) in order to discuss the longer-term findings, the refinement of the programme theory, the implications for future programmes of the identified mechanisms, context and outcomes and to agree any next steps.

Having completed my data analysis and drawn conclusions, I wrote a final report, member-checked it and met with senior members of the human resources and leadership teams to review the project's process, identify strengths, learning and any next steps (Stage 12).

Having provided a brief overview of the coaching and research project, I now turn to the identification of the issues that the coaching programme was required to address. An early task in this phase was to determine the positive psychology coaching approach that would underpin the programme, and I consider this next.

Determining a positive psychology coaching approach and framework

There is some support in the literature for the notion that positive psychology coaching is distinctive from other coaching approaches (Green and Palmer, 2019). However, as discussed in Chapter 2 (pp. 64-65), according to Burke

(2018), positive psychology coaching has offered little by way of a practical coaching framework. Burke (2018) highlights the work of Passmore and Oades (2014), who propose a positive psychology coaching model based on four positive psychology theories, those of strengths theory (Proctor et al, 2011), broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 2009), self-determination theory (Spence and Oades, 2011) and well-being theory (Seligman, 2011). Passmore and Oades' (2014) work, however, does not constitute a coaching framework as such. Burke (2018) put forward a comprehensive positive psychology coaching framework, which included six essential elements as mentioned in Chapter 2 (p. 64-65). These elements comprise:

1. The use of positive and coaching psychology knowledge in the coaching activity;
2. The inclusion of a strengths-based model, such as the VIA classification of strengths (Peterson and Seligman, 2004);
3. The utilisation of positive diagnosis techniques;
4. The encouragement of the setting and achievement of optimal-functioning goals;
5. The inclusion of appropriate positive psychology interventions; and
6. The application of positive psychology measures.

As a starting point for my research, which occurred before Burke's (2018) paper had been published, I synthesised and adapted three models that were available to me at that time, those of Oades and Passmore (2014), Kauffman (2006) and Biswas-Diener (2010). I developed a positive psychology approach to guide the coaching programme. I was able to use Burke's (2018) framework, which was published after the coaching had been delivered, as *post hoc* validation.

My synthesis included a fourth source, that of “co-active coaching”. This concept was introduced by Whitworth and colleagues (Kimsey-House et al, 2011) and, in essence, incorporates three principles:

1. That coachees are whole, resourceful and creative;
2. The coach and coachee work together as equals; and
3. Learning and action drive change.

I chose this element as its features are similar to the notion of “collaborative working alliance” mentioned by Oades and Passmore (2014) in their conceptualisation, but, in my view, it more accurately reflects the intentions of equality and wholeness as proposed in the original concept of positive psychology (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

I also included an additional element, that of positively oriented learning. It was clear from the literature review that learning was largely absent in the published positive psychology coaching literature. It nonetheless plays an important part in generative causal pathways to successful coaching outcomes, as discussed in Chapter 8 (pp. 301-303). The importance of learning in the coaching process is recognised, however, in the general coaching literature. As Garvey et al (2018) suggest:

> “at the heart of both coaching and mentoring is support for individuals to learn in context things of relevance to themselves by drawing on their own resourcefulness in times of transition and change” (p. 109).

The guiding framework I developed for the programme was therefore as follows:

Table 4.1: A synthesised positive psychology coaching approach
(Sources: Oades and Passmore, 2014; Kauffman, 2006; Biswas-Diener, 2010; Kimsey-House et al, 2011 and personal research)

The coaching programme needs to offer:	**Manifested by:**
Opportunity-focused coaching	Making use of the opportunities that arise in the normal course of our lives rather than a deficit approach, recognising the need to seek out the many situational factors that will help us to thrive
Positively oriented coaching	Focusing on the positive aspects during the coaching, on strengths, positive emotion, flow, mind-set and resources, using positive language. Not ignoring the negatives, but having regard to maximising the coachee's strengths and available resources
Positive motivation-focused coaching	Focusing on the future forward, and on what energises the coachee; encouraging coachees to approach their issues positively rather than avoiding them
Growth-focused coaching	Focusing on development, stretch, futures and hope; encourage through coaching a growth mind-set and not over-focusing on deficit
Co-active coaching	Coachee and coach work together as equals in the joint coaching enterprise, rather than according to teacher/pupil or doctor/patient approaches: decisions relating to choices of focus and coaching activities made jointly
Evidence-based coaching	Ensuring that the coaching approach, tools and techniques that are used are grounded in scientific evidence; use of positive diagnosis and assessment
Value-oriented coaching	Coaching conversations and decision-making underpinned by the beliefs and standards of both coachee and organisation
Positively oriented learning	Coach and coachee work together to develop and engage in an effective reflexive learning process to optimise the learning opportunities available through the coaching intervention

Having arrived at a general orientation for my positive psychology coaching approach, I now turn to the specific organisational issues that informed the coaching programme's objectives.

Issues analysis

Over the course of the study, and in order to design, deliver, explore and refine an executive coaching programme based on positive psychology coaching, I worked with a range of stakeholders, including senior members of the organisation's human resources and leadership teams and existing executive leaders. There was no programme in existence in the organisation before the study started, therefore one of the first priorities was to obtain as much information as possible about the organisation's circumstances and needs in order to create one from first principles. It was also necessary to determine at an early stage the ways in which a positive psychology executive programme would differ from any other kind of executive coaching intervention.

Pawson (2017) recommends that a realist diagnostic evaluation of the problem should be conducted before studying the intervention in question. A full realist diagnostic evaluation would have involved the conduct of a realist synthesis exercise, which, as it would comprise a comprehensive literature review and the application of realist principles to it, would require a large amount of time and resources. Indeed, it alone could have formed the subject of a PhD study in its own right. I therefore took a pragmatic approach to this recommendation by conducting a realist-*informed* issues analysis along similar, but less detailed, lines with three senior organisational stakeholders. In Organisational Meeting 1,

I asked the realist question “for whom, in what circumstances, in what respects, how and why” in respect of the issues that the organisation wished to address through the introduction of a positive psychology executive coaching programme. Harris (2017) suggests that, before developing new programmes, the questions to be asked should be “what are the problems?”, “who sees them as problems?”, “in what circumstances” and “given the range of problems, what are the possible solutions?” Using these principles, I devised a topic guide, which appears in Appendix 1, containing questions to ask of the organisational stakeholders. I took notes of the responses, wrote them up, and carried out a member check on the accuracy of the accounts with the stakeholders (Interviews 6, 11 and 12). I then conducted a thematic analysis of each of the accounts. The amalgamated outcomes of this analysis are summarised in the table on the next page, with the realist aspects of the questions indicated in italics:

Table 4.2: Realist-informed issues analysis outcomes

Question	Response
1 What is the context of the coaching programme? *(Context)*	The organisation's vision is to become an empowered organization with devolved decision-making. It wishes to create a culture of development to develop confident, thoughtful leaders who have a positive impact on service delivery by ensuring their officers and staff thrive, not just survive. The coaching programme will be part of the organisation's leadership approach as part of the HR strategy. There has been an organisational intention to develop a coaching culture for some time. The organisation sees the development of the cohort of senior leaders just below the executive level as key to its future success. Another coaching initiative already exists, but at more junior levels and it is not based on positive psychology principles. If the positive psychology executive coaching programme is successful, the approach could be rolled out across all levels. The organisation is facing unprecedented pressures to change to meet contemporary and future demands. Internally there have been changes in the very top team of leaders and through a recent organisational reorganization, adding to the pressures.
2 What is the state of affairs that the organisation thinks this coaching programme could address? *(Context, who sees this as a problem)*	There is a perceived coaching gap at this level. The executive team is attracted to promoting a positive, solution-focused approach with senior leaders through coaching rather than focusing on problem-solving. They do not see any particular issues that need addressing but have a general feeling that more could be done. The coaching would fulfil an educational objective, to encourage senior leaders to focus on their leadership development positively and seek to set and achieve goals of their choice. It is hoped that this will sow the seeds of cultural change by promoting a positive and developmental attitude across the organisation. The focus should be on senior leaders and staff taking responsibility for their own actions, "getting things right first time", and improving an already-identified communications gap between the executive and this cohort.

3 How does this coaching programme fit with other organisational aims and objectives? *(Context)*	A positive psychology coaching approach would fit with other organisational development initiatives and also with national workforce development thinking, such as professionalising policing and continuous professional development. The organisation regards itself as an early adopter of national workforce development strategies, with which the proposed coaching programme would be compatible. It also fits with HR strategy and local crime plans, their general leadership approach and other initiatives such as well-being, performance management, change management and communication strategies. The programme could formalise several informal coaching and mentoring arrangements that already exist and in doing so promote fairer access.
4 Will the participants/organisation have done something similar before and, if so, what happened? *(Context)*	The organisation has not done anything like this before in an official capacity, although some individuals may have experienced coaching via informal arrangements or via national leadership development initiatives.
5 What do we hope to achieve through this programme? *(Outcomes, possible solutions, possible mechanisms)*	That the senior leaders who volunteer for this programme take control of their own development and take responsibility for it. The immediate outcomes need to be that volunteer coachees set and achieve personal and professional development goals. If those goals also link to service delivery improvement objectives, then that would be a desirable outcome. Possible mechanisms might include raising self-awareness, team effectiveness and playing to strengths, also raising understanding of coaching, development of openness to coaching and acting as role models for others. The coaching may also lead to career and professional development.
6 How do you think participants' work will be different once the	This might include behaviour change towards a more positive approach to leadership, a more positive orientation towards issues, a move towards a solution-based focus and greater understanding in working relationships. Senior leaders should create an environment where their

programme is implemented? *(Outcomes)*	people thrive and therefore deliver a great service to the public. There should also be differences in participants' confidence and ways of working. The executive team is expecting the coaching to provide benefits for all, i.e. for the participants, their teams and the organisation at large.
7 Is this new programme going to work for everyone? *(For whom, in what circumstances, how and why?)*	It is unlikely to work for everyone. Some people will be more open to coaching than others. That they will be volunteers might help, as some people may self-deselect if they think it is not for them. Working with strengths is expected to work better than dwelling on weaknesses. People with different personalities might respond better than others. People who have experienced coaching already might respond differently than those who have not had the chance to do so before. Ambitious people and senior professionals are likely to come forward. It may not work for all; it depends on their levels of expectation and commitment.
8 What types of people and places do you think it might be more effective? *(For whom, in what circumstances, how and why?)*	Where people come from in terms of area or department might have an impact, and also individual differences. Probably no geographical differences, but there could be some cultural differences, for example, between professional backgrounds or between police officers and police staff.

The outcomes of this diagnostic exercise were taken forward to the second phase of the realist action research cycle, together with the theory of change and initial logic chain that are described next, in order to inform the construction of an initial programme theory. The process of building the initial programme theory is mentioned briefly in Phase 2 (pp. 138 to 139), whilst the detail appears in Chapter 5.

Development of the "theory of change" and initial logic chain

I worked with the key stakeholders to identify a "theory of change" that would underpin the new executive coaching programme. Chadwick-Coule and Garvey (2009) point out that studying the effectiveness of a social programme relies on the identification of such a theory of change, which can be expressed in the form of a programme logic chain. This framework spells out the inputs to a programme, the activities that might take place during the programme and the changes by way of outputs, outcomes and impact that might flow from them. Furthermore, Pawson and Tilley (1997) recommends that such theories of change can be useful when determining realist programme theories, which, in their view, form an essential basis for robust realist research.

When studying existing social programmes, sources may already exist from which a logic chain can be identified, such as programme documentation, that may give information about the programme's original intentions and the experience of the programme architects, deliverers and consumers. In the case of this current study, as it involved the creation of a brand-new programme, no such documentation or experience existed in the organisation. As an early step in the project, I therefore worked with the senior stakeholder group to identify the key inputs, activities and outputs that the programme was likely to involve. We

identified the following potential factors that might impact on the context in which the programme might operate:

- ***At the micro level (individual/interpersonal):*** coach/coachee relationship, coachee openness to coaching, coach and coachee motivations, expectations and individual differences;
- ***At the meso level (institutional):*** force policy, organisational culture and climate, competing demands on participants, organisational encouragement and support for personal and professional development; and
- ***At the macro level (infrastructural):*** government policy, professional body orientation, national initiatives, funding.

I then devised and verified with the stakeholders an initial logic chain for the programme in order to crystallise the organisation's thinking and to inform the ensuing design. The initial logic chain is shown in Figure 4.5 below:

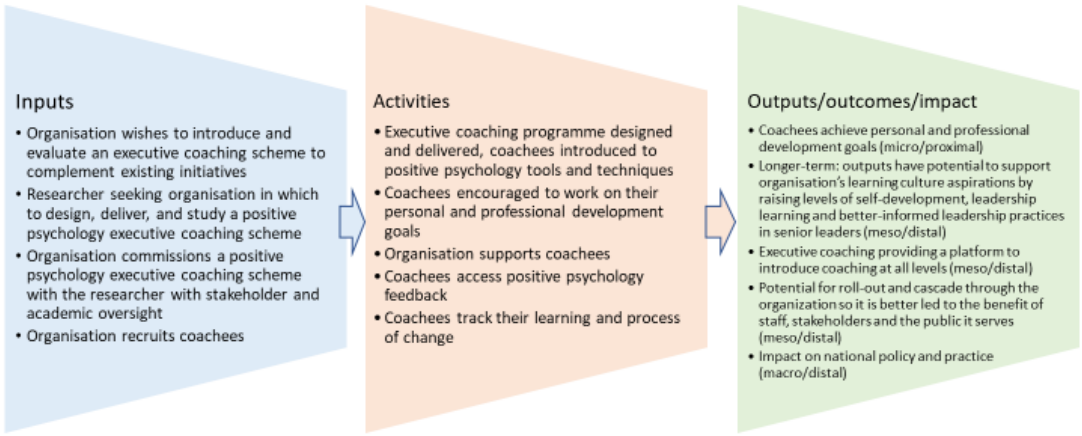

Figure 4.5: Positive psychology executive coaching programme initial logic chain

The logic chain identifies the main inputs to the programme, namely the organisational and research intentions and the recruitment of coachees. It then identifies the activities that might take place to implement the delivery of the programme, namely the coaching sessions, the organisation's support, access to positive psychology feedback and the learning process. The last column contains the proximal, or shorter term, outputs, and distal, or longer term, outcomes that the organisation wished to achieve. Whilst the longer-term outcomes and impact were included to capture a full account of the organisation's broader ambitions for the programme, it was acknowledged that the limitations of the scale and time frame of this current study meant that we could only focus on the first two outputs/outcomes, those of coachees achieving personal and professional development goals and by doing so supporting the organisation's developing learning culture. It was agreed that work towards the latter three outcomes, i.e. those of the study providing an evidence-based platform for further implementation of positive psychology coaching for others, the potential for wider roll-out and the possible impact on national policy and practice, would be informed by this current study but not included in its scope. As stated above, the organisation is a champion and early adopter of national policing initiatives, and, in that capacity, it was identified that the results of this study might provide a longer-term opportunity for them to exert direct influence nationally, as indicated in the fifth output/outcome/impact item.

At this point in the development of the agreed logic framework, realist principles had not been incorporated. I did so, however, in Phase 2, where this framework formed the basis of a *realist* programme logic chain as part of the initial

programme theory building phase. I discuss this in more detail in Chapter 5 (pp. 160-161).

Following Jagosh's (2017a) advice, I developed two review questions that flow from the research question, the initial situation analysis and the determination of the initial theory of change. These were taken forward into Phase 2 and were:

> "How can a positive psychology executive coaching programme work to support senior police leaders to set, pursue and achieve personal and organisational leadership development goals?"
>
> "How can a positive psychology executive coaching programme work to support the achievement of the organisation's leadership development objectives?"

In this section, I have considered the key aspects of the first phase of the realist action research, principally concerning the defining of the intervention and expected outcomes. In the second section, I turn my attention to Phase 2, namely the development of the initial realist programme theory.

Phase 2: Plan - Developing initial programme theory

The purpose of Phase 2 was to theorise how the programme might generate the expected outcomes and in what contexts. Following Jagosh (2017a), to determine what is likely to work, for whom, in what circumstances and how, activities here included the identification of the key programme components, the construction of an initial programme theory using "if-then" statements, and conducting consultations with the literature, middle range theories, independent academic practitioners, organisational practitioners and organisational

programme architects. The details of this phase appear in the next chapter, Chapter 5. The theoretical framework that resulted from this work and shown in Table 5.2 in Chapter 5 (pp. 193-195) was taken forward into the rest of the study.

Phase 3: Intervention design

The purpose of this phase was to design the coaching intervention and take into account any ethical issues. I set out to devise a cogent set of coaching components that would bring the programme activities of the positive psychology coaching sessions, organisational involvement, self-awareness tools and learning support to life to achieve the programme's objectives, as informed by the "candidate" realist programme theory outlined in Chapter 5 (pp. 191-195).

Coaching programme design

I designed a programme based on one-to-one coaching meetings to be held in person. The programme, synthesised and developed from the initial programme theory as described in Chapter 5 (pp. 191 to 195), the positive psychology coaching approach shown in Table 4.1 on page 129 above and my own coaching design experience, comprised a combination of different elements. These included:

1. Six coaching sessions for each volunteer of between an hour and a half and two hours;
2. Guided reading;

3. The completion of psychometric assessments, exercises and between-session goal-related activity; and
4. Reflexive learning aided by the encouragement to complete a reflexive diary designed to facilitate the coachees' consideration of the learning from their positive psychology coaching experiences.

Coaching meetings 1 to 5 were intended to be held once every one to two months. I allowed a gap of 6 months to elapse between meeting number 5 and meeting number 6 in anticipation of some maturation of learning and to give time for goal-related action to be completed.

Whilst recognising that, to a large extent, coaching engagements develop in different ways according to the coachees' needs, aspirations and working styles, I designed an overarching work plan to guide the coaching and between-session work for my use only and with a light touch. This was not intended to be prescriptive but to offer coachees a range of options when charting their own courses through the programme. I was cognisant of the difference between "closed" and "open" curricula in coaching and mentoring (Garvey and Williamson, 2002). A closed approach represents a more formal programme that attempts to exert more control over what is learned and how, whilst an open approach puts the coachee at the heart of their own development and more in control. The coaching programme was designed with the latter in mind. Not all of the coachees completed all of the elements to the same extent or at the same time, but there were some "core" elements of positive psychology to which all coachees were exposed. For example, all coachees worked with the VIA measure of strengths, they were introduced to the concepts of flow, mind-set and positive visioning at some point in their programme and they received a positive psychology reading

list. Other positive psychology coaching materials, activities and exercises were made available to coachees at appropriate points in their coaching to suit the particular aims and objectives they set for themselves, their own styles of learning and the rates of progress they were making. The coaching programme outline was as follows:

Table 4.3: Positive psychology coaching programme outline

Session	Topic	Between-session work
1: Coaching Meeting 1 (Set-up)	• Explaining the study • Contracting • Expectations • Developing positive psychology coaching knowledge and skills • Role and skills of goal setting and achieving • Reflexive diary	• MBTI • VIA questionnaire (Seligman, 2014) • Completion of Reflexive Diary
2: Coaching meeting 2	• Strengths Card sort • MBTI/VIA feedback and review • Defining the issues • Positive case conceptualisation • Goal setting • Options • Action planning	• Completion of agreed actions • Recommended reading • Possible use of 360-degree feedback questionnaires • Completion of Reflexive Diary
3: Coaching meeting 3	• Reflection, review and progress since last meeting • Redefining goals • Coaching on “flow” • Using strengths as “bridges” • Action planning	• Completion of agreed actions • Recommended reading • Completion of “Ideal Self” activity (Biswas-Diener, 2010) or Best Possible Self Exercise (Boniwell et al, 2014) • Completion of Reflexive Diary
4: Coaching meeting 4	• Reflection, review and progress since last meeting • Greatest achievement exercise • Coaching for mind-set • Coaching for long-term positive vision	• Completion of agreed actions • Personal vision exercise • Recommended reading • Completion of Reflexive Diary
5: Coaching Meeting 5 (Review)	• Reflection on the coaching experience: positives and negatives • Reflection on short-term learning and personal change • Evaluation of benefit • Action planning between this meeting and the next • Organisational support and continuity	• Follow-up actions • Recommended reading • Completion of Reflexive Diary
6: Coaching Meeting 6 (Follow-up) (6 months after coaching meeting 5)	• Reflections on the coaching • Reflections on the methods • Reflection on the longer-term learning and personal change • Action planning beyond this coaching engagement • Organisational support and continuity • Evaluation of benefits • Next steps	• Recommended reading • Completion of Reflexive Diary

I ensured that each programme component was covered at least once in the programme, and, as can be seen in Table 4.3 above, most were covered far more frequently than just on one occasion. I worked with key stakeholders to verify and approve the design. It was agreed that the immediate outcome required from the coaching was that each coachee should identify and achieve at least two goals of their choosing, one that would have relevance to their own personal development as leaders, and the second related to an organisational issue, again of their choosing, taken from the range of objectives they were required to achieve or planning to achieve as part of carrying out their everyday leadership role. The encouragement to achieve at least two types of goal was deliberately included in order to foster a sense of balance between the organisation's and individuals' own agendas, which, it was recognised, could sometimes conflict with each other. The tactic was also included to avoid perceptions that one type of goal would be dominant over the other.

I elaborate more on how the various elements of the design worked in practice in Phase 4, "Delivery" (pp. 144 to 147). I conclude this section by considering the ethical aspects of the programme's design.

Ethical considerations

The project was governed by several codes of practice, the main ones being those of the British Psychological Society and the European Mentoring and Coaching Council, together with the many safeguards provided by the ethics policies of the university. The project was also granted full university ethical approval. In accordance with the British Psychological Society's Code of Human Research Ethics (2014, p.18), an information sheet was prepared for the use of

participants and incorporated a form of consent. An example is included in Appendix 2.

The British Psychological Society's Code of Human Research Ethics (2014) recommends that the participants' information sheet should be piloted with a naïve person who is not part of the study and who is at the lower end of the target population expected in the planned research sample. The document was piloted with a professional colleague who was unconnected to the project, has some sector knowledge at the correct level for the target audience but not a detailed understanding of the particular organisation under study. A review checklist was prepared based on the principles contained in the British Psychological Society's Code of Human Research Ethics (2014, pp. 18-19) and the independent reviewer was asked to complete it. The final version of the information sheet included some minor revisions as they recommended.

As an integral feature of the contracting phase of the coaching intervention, all participants and the organisational stakeholders were provided with access to the British Psychological Society's Code of Human Research Ethics (2014) and the Association for Coaching and the European Mentoring and Coaching Council joint Global Code of Ethics (2016).

I consider how I have addressed the ethical issues posed by the use of action research as a methodological orientation in Chapter 9 (pp. 348-351).

Phase 4: Act, delivering the coaching programme

The purpose of this phase was to implement the coaching programme so it could be studied in depth. The programme was delivered between October 2016 and

December 2017. Six volunteers, all senior leaders, were recruited by the organisation and undertook the programme. As mentioned in the design section above (pp. 139 to 143), as well as the coaching sessions, the delivery included the use of other strategies, and coachees undertook psychological measures, exercises, between-session work and guided reading. I conducted all of the sessions as the coach, and, to the best of my ability, I afforded each coachee a similar level of professionalism and positive experience.

Boniwell et all (2014) suggest that the distinctive elements of the positive psychology coaching process include three key features:

1. It uses psychological assessment techniques, and the assessment of positive characteristics and orientations would be typical;
2. Coaches have high and positive expectations of their clients; this may be said about any kind of good coaching, but there is a particular emphasis on this in positive psychology coaching; and
3. Positive psychology coaching uses a co-active coaching approach (Kimsey-House et al, 2011), which assumes a professional and equal partnership between coach and coachee, that the coachee is "whole" and already possesses all of the resources they need to succeed.

The co-active approach is particularly relevant to positive psychology coaching. As Freire (2013) points out:

> "a positive approach is present in the co-active coaching model that was developed by Whitworth et al (2007)….the agenda of the client is the cornerstone of this model" (p. 432).

The co-active coaching agenda has two aspects, first to look holistically at "the client's life and focuses on the principles of fulfilment, balance and progress. The

second perspective involves specific issues the client may wish to address during coaching sessions" (Freire, 2013, p. 432). I adopted both of these principles in the coaching sessions.

By way of psychological assessment and for the identification of strengths, I encouraged coachees to complete the Values in Action (VIA) strengths survey. I considered alternatives, such as some commercially available measures. I decided to adopt the VIA principally because it had been developed directly by Seligman (2014) from the same theoretical approach to strengths as the one that underpins the current study, that of Peterson and Seligman (2004). It appears to be well-researched psychometrically and it is offered on academic terms rather than on commercial ones, i.e. at no cost to the respondent in return for their consent for the authors to use their data for research purposes. The measure is easily accessed online and it provides a short printable report tailored to the individual. The report identifies not only their "signature" strengths but also a personalised ordered list of all of the 24 strengths upon which they will have submitted responses. As a validation exercise, and in order to promote further discussion, I used a card-sort activity with each coachee based on "Strengths Cards" (Mindspring, 2015), which correspond to the 24 strengths identified in the VIA. I also made use of the Myers Briggs Type Inventory (MBTI, Briggs Myers, 2000) and 360-degree feedback reports where they were available, helping coachees to triangulate the information and make sense of their feedback across a variety of sources.

The exercises and techniques pertinent to positive psychology coaching that I encouraged coachees to try included the following, developed from the work of Silberman (2007):

- *Three good things*: a gratitude exercise that invites the coachee to write down or think of three positive things that have happened during the day and consider what they did to make them happen;
- *Three questions*: an exercise based on eliciting what gives people meaning, pleasure and engagement;
- *Gratitude visit*: writing and delivering a gratitude letter to someone you feel you have not thanked or thanked enough;
- *Savouring*: taking time and effort to appreciate one's life experiences
- *Best possible future self*: an exercise to envisage how we can be the best we can in all areas of life;
- *Working with strengths* rather than deficit; and
- *Using strengths in a new way*: an exercise to encourage coachees to approach new challenges using and developing their "signature strengths".

I tried to avoid using a prescriptive approach but instead offered all of these activities as possibilities for coachees to choose from to suit their goals, their interests and their personal working styles.

I compiled a reading list that included a wide range of positive psychology books, papers and materials, again inviting coachees to come to their own decisions as to which items they would pursue or not as the case may be, based on their goals, existing state of knowledge, motivation to find out more and personal learning style. In-between session work comprised of a personally determined combination of goal-related action, reading, and the use of the reflexive diary based on their positive psychology coaching journey.

Phase 5: Observe, research

This phase examined how the contexts and mechanisms interacted to generate programme outcomes. Here I consider in detail the research methods I used, my sampling strategy, my data analysis strategy and my reflexivity.

Respondent involvement

I conducted individual semi-structured research interviews with each of the six coachees, five senior organisational stakeholders and three academic and practice-expert respondents. I also responded to the participant topic guide questions (Appendix 3) myself, based on the observational data I had collected. I held over 20 interviews. The coachee research interviews took place after coaching meeting 5 and I member-checked them after coaching meeting 6. Stakeholder research interviews took place at various points during the research project. I designed and used topic guides according to which type of interview was being conducted. Examples of these topic guides appear in the appendices as follows:

- Appendix 3: recipient research meeting 1 topic guide
- Appendix 4: experts' meeting 1 topic guide
- Appendix 5: organisational meeting 2 topic guide
- Appendix 6: organisational meeting 3 topic guide
- Appendix 7: wash-up meeting topic guide

It is apposite to mention here the realist approach to conducting interviews and collecting data. It differs significantly to more traditional structured or unstructured

interview styles, particularly in respect of whose agenda should be pursued, the theory-driven purpose of the interview and the role of the respondents' accounts (Pawson, 1996). Manzano (2016) suggests that the realist approach to the interview has a unique strategy, namely, that programme theories are made known to the interviewee for comment in order to revise and refine them. The researcher's theory constitutes the subject-matter of the interview and the interviewee's role is to confirm, falsify or refine the researcher's theory (Pawson and Tilley, 1997). This implies that a "teacher-learner cycle" approach should be taken in realist interviewing (Pawson, 1996) and that there is a need for the researcher to engage with the interviewee in a purposeful way that serves the theory's agenda (Manzano, 2016). This process is not all one-way, however: the researcher "teaches" the interviewee about their theory and how to theorise, and the interviewee "teaches" the researcher about their experience of, insights into, and theories-in-action about the subject-matter in question (Pawson, 1996). Whilst realist interviews tend to be semi-structured, there is a need to remain focused in their delivery and to design them to glean information from the most knowledgeable interviewees that can be identified (Pawson and Tilley, 1997). Hence, I chose not only to interview the coachees who had directly experienced the programme, but also senior stakeholders, who, in Manzano's (2016) terms, are the programme's practitioners and architects, together with experts in the psychological and coaching fields, in order to gain a wide range of different views about the contexts, mechanisms and outcomes of the programme that might be in play.

Some approaches to realist interviewing counsel the taking of a differentiated approach according to who is to be interviewed. For example, Jagosh (2017b) advises that, for senior stakeholders such as policy makers and front-line

managers, an explicit theory-exploring approach is appropriate, whilst for "vulnerable" programme recipients, an implicit or indirect form of theory exploration should be pursued. In this current study, all of the recipients of the coaching were senior leaders in their own right. I therefore judged that they were intellectually and emotionally capable of responding to the same explicit theory-based approach that I took with the other stakeholders. Therefore, in all cases, I asked similar questions with the same level of complexity to all respondents, regardless of the stakeholder's role in the programme.

In exploring the candidate programme and component theories with respondents, I used a three-fold questioning technique in order to avoid asking "leading" questions and to maximise the relevance of the information obtained. I did not want to "close down" the conversation by disclosing the candidate theory too early in the conversation. In general, for each topic I asked a basic question first, for example, "how do you think a positive supportive coaching relationship has impacted on the goals and outcomes you have achieved from the coaching programme?" I allowed time for the respondent to answer. Second, I used prompts where needed, for example, "I'm thinking about positive support, challenge, encouragement, safe and confidential time and space, and trust." Again, I allowed time for the respondent to answer. Third, I then shared the part of the candidate programme theory in question with the respondent, as per Manzano's advice (Manzano, 2016), and invited comment; for example, "research suggests that those who are open to the idea of positive psychology coaching and who experience a positive and supportive coaching relationship build trust in the coaching process and are motivated to set and achieve stretching and cogent goals. How does this match your thinking, or not, as the case may be?" Once more, I allowed time for the respondent to answer. At the

end of the interview, I asked if we had missed anything, to capture any issues that had not been thought of in the theory-building stage.

I voice-recorded the interviews and transcribed them, focusing on the substantive conversations whilst omitting material that was irrelevant to the core purpose of the interview. I removed any references to names, places or specific aspects of interviewees' roles or conversational style that would identify them in order to preserve anonymity as much as possible. Where such omitted text was substantial, I kept an additional full copy of the transcript as part of the audit trail. I sent each respondent their own transcript for comment, including full copies where relevant, and gained their approval before I analysed any of the data in order to conduct a member check, in accordance with Gray's (2014) advice. I amended transcripts where participants required. In the event, only a few minor alterations were needed, either to preserve anonymity or to correct small inaccuracies. I noted the details of each respondent's agreement and the date upon which it was given.

Researcher observations

I collected together the observations that I had written up in context-mechanism-outcome format after each of the 36 coaching sessions. I did not include my normal coaching notes as we had agreed beforehand that the content of the coaching sessions would remain confidential between me and the individual coachees. I also used my observations and the participant research meeting topic guide to structure the write-up of my account. For confidentiality reasons, I analysed and wrote up the outcomes from this exercise in amalgamated and anonymised form, using the programme as the unit of analysis.

My intention was to provide an account as honest and balanced as possible of my experience of the coaching sessions to add to the "thick description" (Geertz, 1973), trying at all times to remain cognisant of my own biases and preferences.

Quantitative methods

Because of the small scale of the study, only simple quantitative methods were used, for example, frequency counts on data such as session completion rates and goal achievement rates.

Document/literature/realist-informed literature reviews

I conducted a background document review based on organisational and sectoral material, but this is not reported in this thesis for confidentiality reasons. I also carried out a realist informed literature review to set the study in context as presented in Chapter 2 (pp. 47 to 67). I used additional publications drawn from the literature to support the justifications in the theory building and refinement processes, presented in Chapters 5 and 7.

Data analysis method

I prepared all approved interview transcripts, including my own account, for analysis. Data were analysed according to realist research principles, i.e. against the *a priori* theory produced in the programme theory building phase (Chapter 5), asking what works for whom, when and how, and focusing on generative causality (Bhaskar, 1975). The unit of analysis was at the programme level

(Pawson and Tilley, 1997). Tools based on thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) and explanatory effects matrices (Miles and Huberman, 1994) were modified for use in a realist study as can be seen throughout Chapter 6.

Qualitative data analysis usually takes place via three stages; those of data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing and verification (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Sobh and Perry (2006), however, describe the stages in realist data analysis, which, they suggest, differ from the more traditional view. They say that, when using other methods, coding qualitative data usually takes place in three passes as highlighted in Miles and Huberman's (1994) description. In realist research, the first pass is usually not undertaken, as the codes will have already been generated in context-mechanism-outcome (CMO) configuration form in the process of building the initial conceptual programme theory, as was the case in my study. Their second stage of analysis, then, where effectively realist data analysis begins, is data reduction, defined in their terms as "reducing data into a manageable form" (p.1204) by identifying passages of interest as themes in the text according to the realist conceptual framework, which in my case constituted the candidate programme and component theories. The third and final stage they call "data display" (p.1205), and this includes selected areas of interest from the previous stage but presented this time in narrative form, including comparisons, interpretations and quotations.

My coding and analysis procedures were designed to establish generative causation chains and were therefore as follows:

- The first pass of the data had already been completed via the use of the initial programme theory components, which determined the interview structure, the question ordering and the recording of answers. The

questions and responses in the transcripts were therefore already organised according to six programme components described on pages 164 to 165 in Chapter 5 (knowledge and skills, coaching relationship, reframing, organisational involvement, feedback and learning) and the overall programme theory.

- In the second pass, I identified themes in the transcripts using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006), identifying them as contexts, mechanisms and outcomes. These were captured in a series of theory-driven Context-Mechanism-Outcome Configuration (CMOc) matrices as reported in the findings in Chapter 6 (pp. 200 to 201) and in Appendix 8.
- In the third pass, I constructed detailed narratives containing comparisons, interpretations, examples and quotations from the range of stakeholder accounts, including my own observations as the coach, to further develop and refine the programme theory.

The results of the data analyses appear in Chapter 6, and of the theory refinement phase in Chapter 7.

Reflexive Considerations

In adopting a realist methodology, I recognised and welcomed the need to engage in reflexivity. I include a note of it here because of its importance to the research philosophy that guided the study. I reflected on the effect the project had on me and me on it, as a researcher and as a coach. I kept a running reflexive log throughout the study, upon which Chapter 10 is based.

Phase 6: Reflect and refine theory

In this phase, I took forward the outcomes from the exploration described in Chapter 6 in order to compare them with the original “candidate” theory and to develop a new refined programme theory with which to re-configure and design any future iterations of the coaching programme. A key stage in this process was regular communication and feedback to key stakeholders through reports and meetings. In order to provide some clarity to aid my presentation of the data, I constructed a visual model of the outcomes as shown in Figure 7.15 in Chapter 7 (p. 282), to map out the key aspects of the revised overall programme theory and their interactions.

Phase 7: Future programme specification

The purpose of this phase was to complete the realist action research cycle by helping the organisation develop a future executive coaching programme design based on the refined programme theory and informed by the evidence. I worked with the key organisational stakeholders through the submission of regular reports and face-to-face in Organisation Meeting 3 and the Wash-up Meeting, to share and discuss with them the findings and the implications for future design. I describe and discuss this phase in more detail in Chapter 8 (pp. 312 to 321).

As a further example of involving the participants in the research, when reporting to the organisation, on all three occasions I sent the draft reports to the volunteer coachees before sending them to the organisation, so they could read what I had written and to invite comment. I negotiated any requested alterations and each

coachee received a copy of the final version of the reports that were sent to the organisation.

4.4 Chapter summary

In this chapter, I have described and justified the collaborative work and procedures to implement the seven-phase realist action research methodology that I introduced at the beginning of this chapter. I have referred the reader to separate chapters to access the detail of two key phases in the process, that of initial realist programme theory building (Chapter 5) and that of programme theory refinement (Chapter 7).

This chapter takes forward several of the main arguments made in this thesis. By designing, delivering and researching the coaching programme according to the seven-phase approach, the design laid down the foundation to examine whether or not positive psychology coaching as an approach could bring theoretical and practical value to the study of coaching. Its realist orientation provided a framework within which it could be studied how the programme worked, for whom and in what circumstances in a robust and nuanced way.

The thesis now moves on to Chapter 5 to present a detailed discussion of how the initial realist programme theory was developed.

Chapter 5: Building Realist Programme Theory

5.1 Chapter introduction

I stated at the beginning of Chapter 4, when I briefly mentioned the initial programme theory building phase of the realist action research design (Phase 2 in Figure 4:1 on page 111), that the detail of it would be the focus of this chapter. This is such an important step in the realist action research cycle that it deserves separate and detailed treatment. The purpose of this chapter, then, is to present an in-depth account of Phase 2 of the design, that is, of the construction of the initial realist programme theory.

In this chapter, I discuss the steps involved in the theory development process, from the creation of an initial realist programme logic model, through the development of a provisional overall programme theory to the identification of programme resources and tentative theories for them. This acted as a theoretical foundation for the coaching programme design (Phase 3), delivery (Phase 4) and the exploration (Phase 5) , which have already been described in Chapter 4 (pp. 139 to 154).

5.2 Building the theory

As Pawson and Manzano-Santaella (2012) point out, “realist evaluation is avowedly theory-driven; it searches for and refines explanations of programme effectiveness” (p. 178). Although my intention was not to conduct a formal realist evaluation exercise, realist evaluation’s methodological orientation provided a recognised approach and framework with which to underpin the empirical part of

my study. A key part of my realist approach, therefore, was an *a priori* determination of a "candidate" (i.e. not yet explored) realist programme theory, which was then examined via the exploration process as explained in Phase 5 in Chapter 4 (pp. 148 to 154). The initial theory was then refined to develop the evidence-informed programme theory in Phase 6 that in turn was used to re-define the design principles for future coaching programmes in Phase 7.

The key aspects of the initial theory building exercise included the identification of the underlying realist assumptions made in the planning phase, the drafting of a realist programme logic model and the determination of the candidate overall programme theory, together with candidate theories for each of the main programme components, that would be taken forward into the rest of the study.

"What is the programme or intervention that I am examining?"

I started with this simple question recommended by Jagosh (2016) and designed to summarise the essence of the programme under study. I concluded that it was a coaching programme for senior executives in a police force that will use positive psychology coaching methods (especially strengths-based methods) to encourage participants to set, pursue and achieve personal and professional development goals.

"What is really going on in the programme in question?"

Next, I used this question suggested by Jagosh (2016) at the beginning of the candidate theory-building stage to begin to surface the possible causal pathways that might lead to the achievement of outcomes. This involves going behind

official statements about what the programme is required to achieve and the surrounding circumstances, and using retroductive thinking (Bhaskar, 1975) in the process. For this purpose, I referred to my summary of the outcomes from the issues identification process as described in Phase 1 in Chapter 4 (pp. 130 to 135). I concluded that the key organisational stakeholders felt that, while in general senior executives were doing well, they could do better, without being specific. The programme would fill a gap in coaching provision at senior level and replace in part a recently discontinued national senior careers provision that focused on senior career and professional development in the police service. The organisation was keen to incorporate a positive psychology approach to the coaching process. In part this was to move away from a perceived deficit-focused approach to leadership development that was in widespread use in the police service. Some coaching theories explain why coachees fail to set and achieve appropriate development goals by asserting that people tend not to be motivated if the focus is on their deficits or gaps, the so-called “deficit” model. This notion was introduced in Chapter 1 (pp. 15-16). Garvey et al (2009) point out that receiving coaching with the idea that something is “missing” in the coachee can be off-putting to them. Driver (2011) observes that such an approach can detract coachees from approaching their coaching experience in a positive manner; he suggests that people are motivated by what they are interested in and good at, and development is more likely to happen when they identify and achieve self-concordant goals. The requirement for this current programme, therefore, was to provide one-to-one coaching sessions with me as an experienced external coach using positive psychology methods, including strengths identification, to help coachees set and achieve their personal and professional development goals.

This would be accompanied by organisational involvement, the use of self-awareness raising tools and learning support.

Theory building: initial realist logic model

Based on this conceptualisation, I developed a realist logic model as a key step towards developing the initial programme theory. The initial logic chain in Phase 1 as shown in Figure 4.5 in Chapter 4 (p. 136) identified the key inputs, activities and outputs/outcomes/impact of the programme as follows:

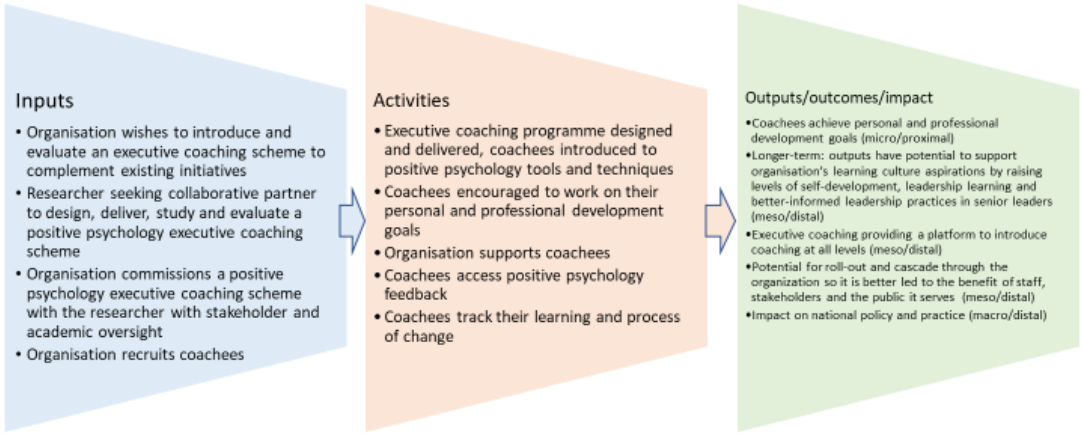

Figure 4.5: Positive psychology executive coaching programme initial logic chain

In that form, the logic chain was not expressed in realist terms. In order to move the original concept towards the building of realist programme theory, a first step was to re-cast the programme inputs as “context”, activities as the “strategies” that it was thought would provide mechanisms in the form of “programme

resources" and "programme reasoning" to the coachees, and the outputs that were in scope as programme "outcomes". This is illustrated in Figure 5.1 below:

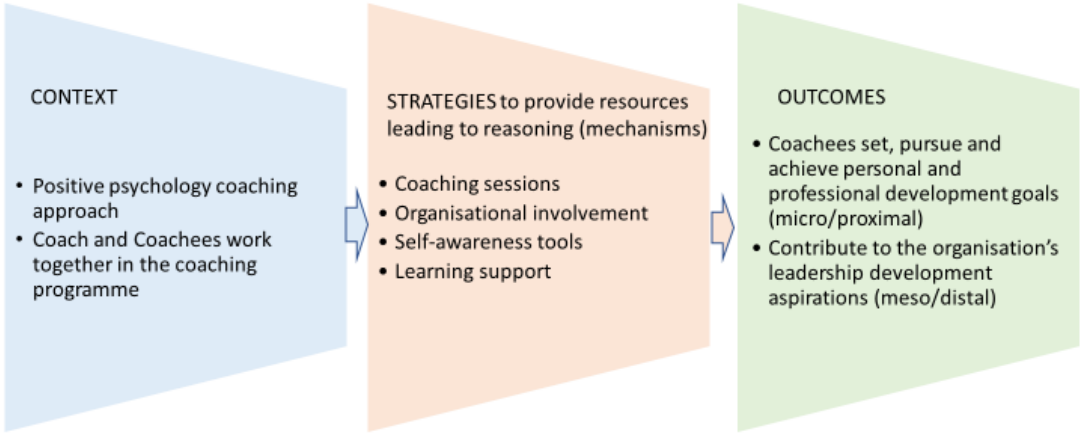

Figure 5:1: Initial realist programme theory logic model

At this stage, the mechanisms themselves had not been identified; the programme was merely offering *strategies* that were hoped would generate resources and reasoning that would lead to the desired outcomes. For clarification, the term "micro/proximal" refers to individual and interpersonal outcomes at the coach/coachee interaction level to be achieved in the shorter term, and the term "meso/distal" refers to institutional outcomes influenced by force-level and local leadership factors to be achieved in the medium to longer term.

In order to develop realist programme theory, Pawson and Manzano-Santaella (2012) and Jagosh (2017a) recommend the use of a heuristic that works by creating "if…then" statements to determine a hypothetical statement. This statement is then used to form the basis of a Context-Mechanism-Outcome

configuration (CMOc). Based on the initial realist logic model shown in Figure 5.1 above, I developed a tentative "if…then" statement for the programme using an abductive approach (Tavory and Timmermans, 2014), to suggest, in overall terms, what might happen in the coaching programme, as follows:

> **"If** the coach and coachee work together in the coaching programme in a positive psychology coaching setting, the coach provides the coachee with the opportunity to develop their positive approach through a series of coaching sessions, supported by positive organisational involvement, the provision of positive feedback and engagement in positive reflective learning, **then** the coachee will be more likely to be motivated to set, pursue and achieve personal and professional development goals and contribute to the organisation's developing culture".

The hypothetical statement that flowed from this "if…then" statement was as follows:

> "Coachees working with their coach in a positive psychology setting who are given the opportunity to develop their positive approach through a series of coaching sessions, positive organisational support and positive feedback, and engage in positive reflective learning will be more likely to be motivated to set, pursue and achieve personal and professional development goals and contribute to the organisation's developing culture".

I then turned this statement into an initial CMOc configuration as follows:

- **Context:** “Coachees working with their coach in a positive psychology setting”;
- **Mechanism:** “the opportunity to develop their positive approach through a series of coaching sessions, positive organisational support and positive feedback, and engage in positive reflective learning *(resource mechanism)* will be motivated *(reasoning mechanism)”*; and
- **Outcome:** “the setting, pursuance and achievement of personal and professional development goals and contribution to the organisation’s developing culture”.

Having determined a high-level candidate programme theory, and in order to drill down into a greater level of detail, I followed a similar procedure to consider each of the main programme strategies, namely the coaching sessions, the organisation’s involvement, the use of self-awareness raising tools and techniques and the learning support. How these strategies might work together in the programme to create outcomes is shown in the following diagram:

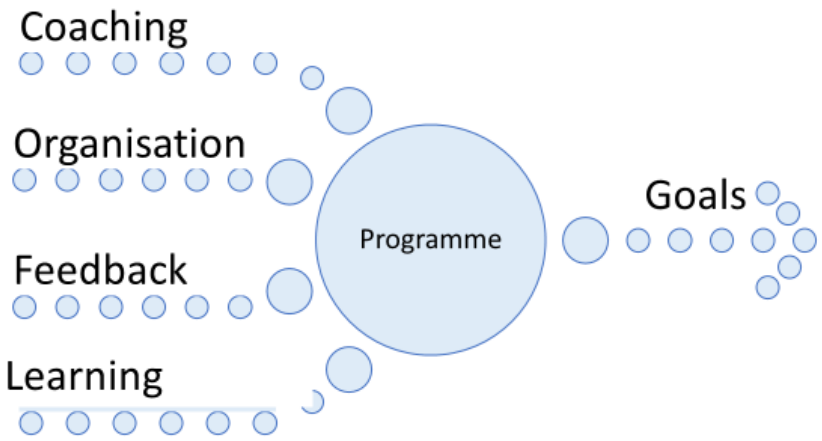

Figure 5.2: Transforming programme strategies into outcomes

To begin the process of generating detailed candidate programme theories at the strategy level, the following potential resources that the coaching programme could provide to the participants were identified, firstly by me alone, then refined in consultation with the key organisational stakeholders:

Table 5.1: Strategy resources

Strategy 1: the coaching sessions

Knowledge	Awareness raising	Challenge
Skills	Confidence raising	Support
External perspective	Strengths perspective	Encouragement
Reflection time/space	Reframing	Empathic relationship

Strategy 2: organisational involvement

Caring	Trust
Interest in the individual	Role modelling (by boss)

Strategy 3: the self-awareness tools

Feedback	Knowledge about personality
Self-knowledge	Self-awareness of strengths

Strategy 4: learning support

Self-reflection	Self-reinforcement
Structured framework	Opportunity to articulate their learning

As can be seen, the coaching sessions offer more opportunities for the provision of resources than each of the other three strategies. I identified three distinct resource clusters in the coaching session strategy, those of knowledge and skills, the relationship between the coach and the coachees, and the provision of an external perspective. I therefore constructed six separate programme components from the four strategies, which I named as follows:

1. “Coaching sessions: positive psychology knowledge and skills”;
2. “Coaching sessions: positive coaching relationship”;
3. “Coaching sessions: positive reframing”;
4. “Positive organisational involvement”;
5. “Positive psychology feedback”; and
6. “Positive psychology learning”.

I now briefly discuss the process by which I developed a candidate component programme theory for each of these six programme components. I followed the same set of procedures for each of the components. I present here a detailed description of my method relating to the first component only: in the interests of brevity, I provide summaries for the remaining five.

1 Coaching sessions: positive psychology knowledge and skills

I devised a review question as follows:

> “How can the programme’s coaching sessions help coachees gain knowledge and skills of positive psychology tools and techniques so they are motivated to set and achieve development goals?”

My next step was to follow Jagosh’s (2017a) advice and consult the existing literature around the topic to gain an impression and generate ideas for the theorising process. In order to define what should constitute “literature” in this context, I heeded the work of Sobh and Perry (2006), who make apposite observations relating to the generation of *a priori* theory in realist research. Based on the realist ontology and epistemology that posits that the world is external but accessible only through the subjective experiences of others, they say that realist

researchers can draw not only on the formal literature, where published research represents a form of external reality, but also on the views of people who have experience of the issue under investigation. I therefore conducted a brief search of the published theory, took into account stakeholder theory as gleaned through the interviews I conducted for the issues analysis in Phase 1 (pp. 130 to 135), and the theories that I have developed through my own education and experience of coaching and psychology. I used these sources to determine what I already knew about how this programme element might work in these particular organisational circumstances. The following is a short summary of the published, practitioner and researcher theory.

Published theory

I observed in Chapter 2 (pp. 55 to 61) that the positive psychology coaching literature is consistent in its view of the tools and techniques that constitute its practice, in particular, strengths, change and positive behaviours (Boniwell, 2014). The police service, like many organisations, tend to base their leadership development activities on the notion of "deficit" as introduced in Chapter 1 (pp. 15-16). Strengths theory (Driver, 2011) suggests that developing strengths is more productive in development activity than trying to rectify weakness; people are more likely to respond positively in coaching and set and achieve their goals when the coaching adopts a "focus on what works and motivates rather than what does not" (p.12).

Linley et al (2010) demonstrate quantitatively that focusing on strengths leads to improved progress with the pursuit of goals. In this context, a strength is defined as "an energising activity that is done well and done often" (Centre of Applied

Positive Psychology, 2017). Linley et al (2010) also suggest that there is a direct link between strengths and motivation. Employing the Values in Action inventory (VIA) that aims to discover “signature strengths” (Peterson and Seligman, 2004) and as used in this current study, they defined signature strengths as those in which the individual has a clear sense of ownership and authenticity and are therefore are congruent with interests and values. This leads to feelings of “competence, autonomy and relatedness” (p. 8). Trenier (2013) reports similar effects when a strengths approach is adopted in managerial performance management: when it was focused on strengths, performance increased and when focused on weaknesses, performance declined. Toogood (2012) conducted research with coaches who used strength-based techniques and found that there could be benefits to using a strengths approach for both the coach and the coachee due to an enhanced feeling of authenticity on the part of both parties. Clifford (2011) found that the factors affecting the success of the intervention included the association between coachees’ strengths and their life experiences, the ease by which coachees could discuss their strengths, the relevance of applying strengths to the topics brought to coaching and when the consideration of strengths was scheduled into the coaching engagement.

I used this quick review of the extensive published literature to generate some ideas for theory-building, along with the practitioner views and my own coaching knowledge and experience as detailed below.

Practitioner theory

Strengths and positivity were of great importance to the senior stakeholders. In Organisational Meeting 1, it emerged that the collaborating organisation has

recently introduced a number of initiatives designed to take a more solutions-focused approach to issues rather than problem-based, and had a desire to promote a more positive organisational culture:

> "The organisation is attracted by that approach *(solutions-focused)* rather than focusing on problems. The focus will be different to what has always been done, i.e. on technical skills" (Interview 6, lines 58-60).

They see that the executive coaching programme will support that overall approach by introducing a strengths approach at that level, leading to more senior leaders setting, pursuing and achieving stretching development goals. Coaching is already employed in an initiative with lower levels of managers and staff in the organisation, but without an overt emphasis on strengths or positive psychology. The stakeholders were looking for the executive coaching sessions to help participants achieve positive development outcomes.

Researcher theory

From years of coaching at the executive level nationally in the policing sector, the proposition that a focus on strengths is more likely to engage people in the coaching process and lead to the setting, pursuit and achievement of personal and professional development goals fits with my experience. I have witnessed several instances of working with deficits and gaps between national competence standards and frameworks and coachees' existing levels of knowledge and skill that have led to coachee de-motivation and, in some cases, a lack of success in, or indeed, complete withdrawal from, the coaching engagement itself.

Having reviewed the existing theory, I developed an "if…then" statement as follows:

> "**If** interested and curious coachees gain knowledge and skills about strengths and the positive psychology coaching approach, **then** they will raise their awareness, identify their strengths, engage with the coaching process, be open to learning and be more motivated to set and achieve goals"

Because of the complexity involved in working with six different sets of "if…then" statements, for this stage of theory building, instead of using hypothesis statements as a tool to develop CMOcs, I decided to use another type of heuristic based on visual modelling and recommended in a paper by Dalkin et al (2015). Their version of the CMO configuration process is an adaptation of Pawson and Tilley's (1997) original concept. Pawson and Tilley (1997) recommended that the order of the component parts should be "Context-Mechanism-Outcome", expressed as the equation C + M = O. Dalkin et al (2015) maintain that it is the mechanism in a programme that has the capacity to generate the causal demi-regularities that are so important in achieving outcomes. Their approach, therefore, shown in the diagram in Figure 5.3, puts forward the notion that in order for mechanisms to "fire" or activate in a particular context, mechanisms both in the form of resources and in the form of reasoning are required, thus resource mechanisms should be disaggregated from response mechanisms in the CMO configuration. Configurations, therefore, could more usefully be constructed as Resources-Context-Reasoning-Outcomes, or "M(Resources) + C + M(Reasoning) = O" (Dalkin et al, 2015, p. 52). It then becomes a matter of entering the theory construction process by identifying the resource mechanisms

made available to participants by the programme first, then working through the programme's context and the participants' reasoning mechanisms in order to arrive at the outcomes. Some realist researchers find this approach easier to work with than the original method. This small but significant alteration can be a very powerful tactic to unlock blocked thinking around the complex activity involved in the development of a CMO configuration.

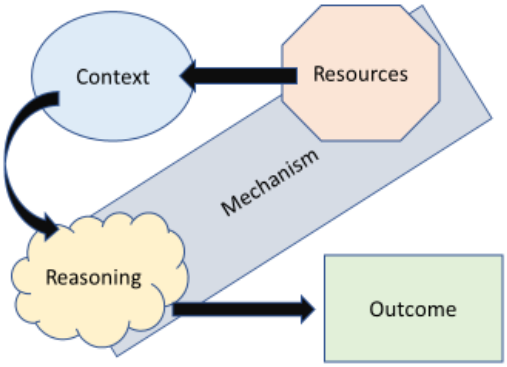

Figure 5.3: CMO configuration visual model (Dalkin et al, 2015) reproduced under Creative Commons Licence http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Using this heuristic and the "if…then" statement, I drafted a CMO configuration for the Coaching sessions: positive psychology knowledge and skills element as follows:

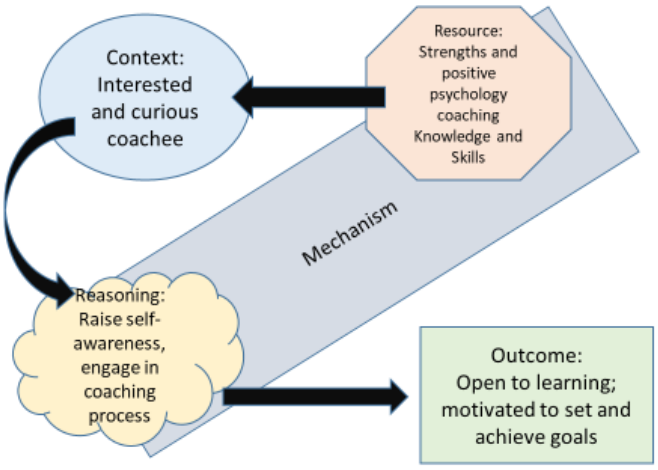

Figure 5.4: Coaching sessions: positive psychology knowledge and skills CMOc

From this representation, I constructed a narrative candidate programme theory statement for the Coaching sessions: positive psychology knowledge and skills component as follows:

> **"**Interested and curious coachees who gain knowledge of their strengths and positive psychology coaching approaches and the skills to apply it are more likely to raise their self-awareness, engage with the coaching process, be open to learning, and motivated to set and achieve development goals."

I then entered a summarised form of this statement labelled CCMOc 1a as the first Context-Mechanism-Outcome configuration for the coaching programme into the chart presented in Table 5.2 shown on pages 193 to 195 towards the end of this chapter. I used the abbreviation "CCMOc" to indicate it is a *candidate* CMO configuration. The candidate component theory was eventually examined against

the evidence, with the other candidate programme theories, in the exploration phase.

I repeated this process for each of the remaining five programme elements, brief summaries for which are discussed below.

2 Coaching sessions: positive coaching relationship

My review question was as follows:

> "How can the coaching relationship in the programme positively support and challenge the coachees so they are motivated to set and achieve development goals?"

Published theory

There is an established tradition of searching for the "active ingredients" that make for successful outcomes in the field of psychotherapy, of which the relationship between therapist and client has been found to be pivotal (Horvath and Bedi, 2002). This notion has been applied to coaching in general (de Haan and Gannon, 2017) and to executive coaching (Joo, 2005; de Haan, 2008; McKenna and Davis, 2009) to emphasise the importance of the quality of the coaching relationship in achieving successful executive coaching. A direct link between a strengths approach and positive psychology in the way coaching is conducted between coach and coachee has been articulated in the literature by Oades and Passmore (2014), Kauffman (2006) and by Biswas-Diener (2010), and also in my synthesis of their positive psychology coaching models in Table 4.1 in Phase 1 of the research design described in Chapter 4 (p. 126-129).

Boniwell et al (2014) highlight the fit between positive psychology coaching and co-active coaching (Whitworth et al, 1998), an approach that I have used in my coaching programme. Boniwell et al (2014) comment on the criticism that positive psychology coaching can be seen as focusing too much on the positive. They highlight the importance of striking an appropriate balance between the positive and negative "by structuring the coaching encounter as an active synthesis of support and challenge, addressing both positive and negative emotion and experience" (p. 161).

Evidence of the importance of developing trust in the coach-coachee relationship has been presented in the coaching, mentoring and psychotherapy literatures by several writers, for example, de Haan and Duckworth (2012). Wasylyshyn (2003) noted that executive coachees look to the coach to be an unprejudiced and independent "sounding board" who can support and challenge them to develop their strengths.

Practitioner theory

In Organisational Meeting 1, the senior stakeholders emphasised the organisation's requirement for a particular relationship between coach and coachee in the executive coaching programme:

> "we need an independent programme where participants will have confidence in the deliverer's knowledge and independence, because of the participants' seniority and the politics surrounding that. They need to trust the coach" (Interview 6, lines 33-36).

The senior stakeholders also emphasised the need for individual buy-in to the coaching and the importance of the relationship with the coach in this process.

Researcher theory

In my practice in the police service, the importance of coach credibility and the ability to establish trust quickly was constantly demonstrated, probably more so than in other sectors in which I have worked. Judgements tend to be made rapidly in the moment, in line with the general operating culture in policing (Loftus, 2010). If for any reason credibility and trust did not occur in the very early stages of the coaching programme then the engagement itself it was very unlikely to succeed.

I developed the if…then statement as:

> **"If** coachees who are open to positive psychology coaching receive supportive coaching, challenge, encouragement, empathy and safe and confidential time and space, **then** they will be more likely to build trust in the coach and the coaching process, engage and be more motivated to set and achieve stretching and cogent development goals"

I constructed the CMOc configuration as follows:

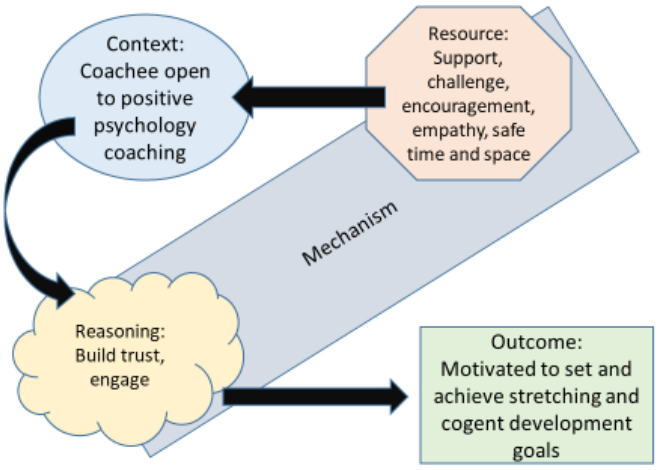

Figure 5.5: Coaching sessions: positive coaching relationship CMOc

I wrote the narrative candidate component programme theory as follows:

> "Coachees who are open to positive psychology coaching who are supported, challenged, encouraged empathetically and given safe and confidential time and space are more likely to build trust in the coach and the coaching process, engage with it and be motivated to set, pursue and achieve cogent and stretching development goals"

Once again, I entered a summarised form of this statement as CCMOc 2a in the chart presented in Table 5.2 shown on pages 193 to 195. The candidate component theory was examined against the evidence in the exploration phase.

3 Coaching sessions: positive reframing

This time, the review question was as follows:

> "How can the coaching sessions in the programme provide the coachees with the opportunity to reframe thinking positively so they are motivated to set and achieve development goals?"

Published theory

The importance of reframing has been emphasised in the coaching psychology literature, for example, Peltier (2010). Joo (2005) comments on the need for executive coachees to possess the willingness to be open and receptive to change. The role of positive reframing in the context of a positive psychology coaching process has also been emphasised (Oades and Passmore, 2014). In Sims' (2017) TEARS HOPE model of using positive psychology coaching with clients who have difficult emotions, the "R" stands for re-appraise and reframe, which she defines as:

> "Emotional agility through cognitive-behavioural approaches (Palmer and Gyllensten, 2008, Edgerton and Palmer, 2005), either 'positively' reframe (e.g. from fear to hope, anxiety to excitement) or modify thoughts (anxiety to concern, depression to sadness)" (p. 71).

Extensive research has also been conducted by Dweck (2006) to demonstrate the role of reframing thinking in developing a "growth" mindset, which is essential if coachees are to develop and learn as a result of a coaching engagement.

Practitioner theory

In Organisational Meeting 1, the senior stakeholders described the reason for wanting to introduce the executive coaching programme the coaching as:

> "there are no particular issues that the programme needs to address. It's more a case of things could be done better, looking at strengths and positives in particular. The focus will be different to what they've always done" (Interview 6, lines 56-60).

Reframing on the part of the coachees' thinking and approaches is a key component of the programme in order to encourage coachees to change the way they do things away from how things have always been done and be successful in the creation and achievement of appropriate development goals.

Researcher theory

From coaching executives in the sector, I have experienced at first hand the power of a reframing question such as "if you were to re-phrase (your account of the issue) in a positive way, how might that sound?" in order to move the coachee on from "stuck" or negative thinking towards a more productive, positive position. If the organisation is keen to move coachees towards new ways of thinking and working, then reframing is likely to be an important feature of the coaching programme.

I wrote the if…then statement as:

> **"If** Coachees who have a growth mindset, who are exposed to an external perspective and receive the opportunity to reframe their current way of thinking to a more positive state, **then** they will be more likely to test their own internal logic, see things differently, raise their confidence, take more calculated risks and be more motivated to set and achieve aspirational goals"

I constructed the CMO configuration as follows:

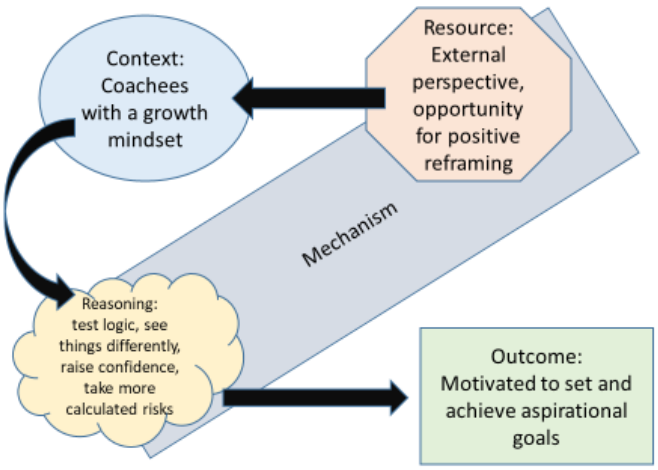

Figure 5.6: Coaching sessions: positive re-framing CMOc

I wrote the narrative candidate component theory as:

> "Coachees with a growth mindset, who access an external perspective and the opportunity to reframe their current viewpoints positively are more likely to test their internal logic, see things differently, raise their confidence, take more calculated risks and be motivated to set and achieve aspirational development goals."

This became CCMOc 3a in the chart presented in Table 5.2 on pages 193 to 195. The candidate component theory was examined against the evidence in the exploration phase.

4 Positive organisational involvement

The review question was as follows:

> "How can the organisation's positive involvement in the coaching programme enable or constrain the coachees' motivation to achieve development goals?"

Published theory

The roles of immediacy, relevance, the need for personal development and achievement of potential in learner motivation are emphasised in adult learning theory (Knowles, 1980), in the humanist psychology literature (Rogers, 1961), and in motivation theory (Maslow, 1943). Hence it is proposed that the coachees are more likely to be motivated to engage with the programme if they perceive that the organisation considers it as an investment in them as leaders (recognition of potential and the need for personal development), trusts them to engage in development tailored to their own circumstances (relevance) and is prepared to give them the opportunity to apply their learning (immediacy).

Social learning theory (Bandura, 1986) discusses in detail the importance of role modelling in human learning, which in essence suggests that learning is a social process and our development, to a certain extent, is influenced in a positive or negative manner depending upon the role models that are available to us in society. Hence, role modelling was important to this study in the form of the examples of behaviour that the executive leaders presented to the coachees on an everyday basis.

Practitioner theory

These themes were reflected in Organisational Meeting 1 that I held with the senior stakeholders. Examples included their desire to explore the potential in this group with a view to developing them and providing them with a coaching resource to give them the chance for them to do things for themselves. They saw an educational role for the coaching to promote a sense of independence in senior leaders and to encourage them to take control of their professional lives. There was also an emphasis on the importance of demonstrating that the organisation trusts the participants to "use the time [in coaching] wisely", as said during the Set-up Meeting. In the senior stakeholders' view, the organisation's role is to provide the tools of coaching and create the right culture and environment for development. The organisation can help make explicit the links between the coaching and the provision of a quality public service. The senior stakeholders expressed their willingness to support the coachees in involving their line managers in their coaching – often themselves - and to tie coachees' coaching goals to organisational aims (Interview 11). They thought that organisational buy-in was important but that line management attitudes could present a barrier to that. They also suggested that coachees' experience of this could be different depending on their local reporting structures (Interview 12). The organisation's key stakeholders see the coaching programme as essential to deliver their intentions to shape a positive leadership development culture. They see role-modelling of positive, development-orientated behaviour by the executive leaders in the organisation as a key part of this initiative.

Researcher theory

My experience of coaching in the police service has highlighted to me the high degree of influence the organisation, its senior officers and staff have on its culture when compared to other sectors in which I have worked. Loftus (2010) commented on the distinctive features of police culture, as I highlight at various points in this thesis. Policing is more hierarchical than most types of organisation, and status is constantly reinforced by symbols and uniform. How executive officers and staff behave, what they support and who, and how these are perceived, are key ingredients to the success or failure of any initiative, including this current coaching programme.

I wrote the if…then statement as:

> **"If** coachees perceive that their organisation invests in them, trusts them, experience role modelling and are given the opportunity to put their development into practice in a supportive, consistent and development-orientated culture, **then** they will be more likely to take their development seriously, feel the organisation is interested in them, be inspired and motivated to engage with the coaching and set and achieve their development goals"

I constructed the CMO configuration as follows:

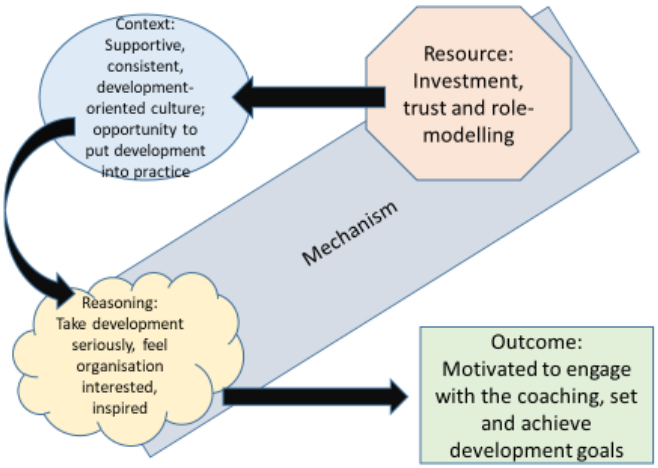

Figure 5.7: Positive organisational involvement CMOc

I wrote the narrative candidate component theory as:

> "Coachees who perceive that their organisation invests in them, trusts them, experience role modelling and are given the opportunity to put their development into practice in a supportive, consistent and development-orientated culture are more likely to take their development seriously, feel the organisation is interested in them, be inspired and motivated to engage with the coaching and set and achieve their development goals."

This became CCMOc 4a in the chart presented in Table 5.2 on pages 193 to 195. The candidate component theory was then examined against the evidence in the exploration phase.

5 Positive psychology feedback

I drafted the review question as follows:

> "How can positive psychological measures in the programme raise or diminish coachees' self-awareness and motivation to set stretching development goals?"

The following is a summary of my literature and experience review:

Published theory

There is a great deal of published literature on the subject of the role of psychological feedback in executive coaching, with some conflicting viewpoints. Some studies, for example, that of Thach (2002), report positive findings in the use of 360-degree feedback. Others, however, for example Driver (2011) and Linley (2008), argue that some types of feedback such as 360-degree can have a demotivating effect on the coachee.

This study provides an opportunity to explore the area in depth and compare the impact of three different types of feedback instrument. My main assessment tool was the VIA (Values in Action Inventory, Seligman, 2014), which I used as a measure of strengths. Kauffman et al (2014) and others, for example, McQuaid et al (2019) assert that strengths measures such as the VIA are highly aligned with positive psychology coaching. At the request of the organisation, who have introduced the use of the MBTI (Myers Briggs Type Indicator – Briggs Myers, 2000) and 360-degree feedback throughout the senior levels, this information, where available, was also considered during the coaching process. Kauffman et al (2015) commented favourably on the compatibility of the MBTI and positive

psychology coaching. Choong and Britton (2007) also demonstrated a high degree of correlation between the MBTI and the VIA. Self-regulation and control theory (Gregory et al, 2011) is also an important concept in this area: they suggest that a key role for executive coaches is to assist their clients to develop themselves as self-regulators, defined as being capable to monitor and regulate their own behaviour, to seek out feedback and to engage in goal setting in order to achieve their objectives.

Practitioner theory

The senior stakeholders saw an important role for formal feedback in the coaching, not only using the measures that the coaching itself can bring, for example, for the identification of strengths, but also others that are now in regular use in the organisation. They saw the coaching as working in conjunction with MBTI and the 360-degree measure. They thought the measures would be useful to identify different personality types that might affect their attitude towards coaching, their choice of goals and their propensity to build on their strengths. There was a view that the use of these measures and the feedback would introduce a degree of honesty into the coaching about coachees' current positions in respect of their personal and professional development (Interviews 11 and 12).

Researcher theory

The positive psychology approach of the VIA, and to a certain extent the MBTI as the latter is predicated on a non-judgmental and appreciative model of human

personality, are likely candidates to encourage engagement with the coaching process and lead to the identification of development goals. 360-degree measures, with their emphasis on both strengths and weaknesses, could have positive, neutral or negative effects depending on the nature of the report's content, whether it is mostly positive, mostly negative or mostly neutral, the degree to which the person being assessed has control over the choice of their raters, how trusted the raters are by the person being assessed to provide honest and accurate feedback, and how and by whom the results are communicated to the coachee.

I wrote the if…then statement as:

> **"If** coachees who are self-regulating and open to feedback receive accurate information about their strengths, **then** they will be more likely to raise their self-knowledge, make better informed development choices and be motivated to set stretching development goals"

I constructed the CMO configuration as follows:

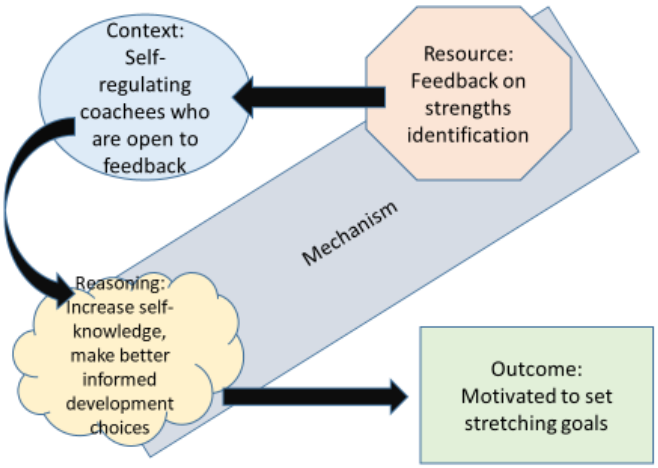

Figure 5.8: Positive psychology feedback CMOc

I wrote the narrative candidate component theory as follows:

> "Coachees who are self-regulating and open to feedback and who receive accurate information about their strengths are more likely to raise their self-knowledge, make better informed development choices and be motivated to set stretching development goals."

This statement is shown as CCMOc 5a in the chart presented in Table 5.2 on pages 193 to 195. As before, the candidate component theory was examined against the evidence in the exploration phase.

6 Positive psychology learning

I drafted the review question as follows:

> "How can the completion of a positive psychology-based learning diary throughout the programme encourage reflexive learning to help coachees structure their self-reflection, self-reinforce their learning and set and achieve realistic development goals?"

Published theory

Reflective learning and reflective practice have been influential learning strategies in many aspects of professional life since the 1980s (Bolton, 2014). The main modern-day advocate was Donald Schön (1983), whose theory was that in order to learn, reflecting on one's thoughts and actions is a key stage in the adult learning cycle. The main proponent of the adult learning cycle is Kolb (1984). The use of learning journals or diaries has become popular in many executive education programmes (Bolton, 2014) and is seen as an essential step in the self-reinforcement of learning. The importance of self-reinforcement and discourse in learning has been emphasised by several eminent writers, for example Mezirow (1981) and Bandura (1977). By committing thoughts to writing provides a structured opportunity to record one's reflection and engage in reflexive processes in order to achieve deep learning (Bolton, 2014).

There are a number of approaches to the role of change in the reflective process. Change is an inherent feature of learning, says Pavlovich (2007). The fourth dimension in Pavlovich's (2007) model of reflective practice refers to learning from situations that can lead to changed behaviour: her design criteria for

journaling includes “describing the experience, analysis of the experience, creation of new meanings and understandings and actions for change” (Pavlovich, 2007, p. 284). Kilburg’s (1996) definition of executive coaching includes the importance of change behaviours in organisational effectiveness. Kauffman et al (2015) relate the process of change in positive psychology coaching to the stage theory of transtheoretical change (Prochaska et al, 2001). The encouragement of the participant to track the process of their change throughout the coaching programme through reflective practice should therefore contribute to the setting and realisation of their coaching goals.

Practitioner theory

During Organisational Meeting 1, the senior stakeholders considered that the positive learning strategy was the most important one. However, they said that it depends on the level of personal commitment to find the will, time and effort to write up and use reflective learning. They said that forming good habits, honesty, discipline and time are all important in this process. This approach fits with organisational and national leadership development thinking (Interview 12). They also said that reflective learning supports the organisation’s values of reflective practice and the national policies of the professionalisation of policing and continuous professional development. The organisation promotes the values of personal responsibility, and this and the encouragement to engage in positive learning as part of the coaching programme are highly aligned (Interview 11).

The College of Policing is policing’s new professional body in England and Wales. It has recently published a comprehensive review of leadership in policing (College of Policing, 2015). In Recommendation 6, which concerns leadership

and management development in the service, senior leaders are required to adopt a reflective approach to their development and practice. The recording of and reflecting on personal and professional learning are incorporated in the College's new continuous professional development policy, which was recently launched nationally (College of Policing, 2016). By incorporating a reflective learning element in the executive coaching programme it allows the initiative to align with the organisation's wider strategy of being at the forefront of excellence in national policing practice. As one senior stakeholder said:

> "We are also involved in national initiatives, such as the College of Policing's Leadership Review, professional development programmes and continuous professional development requirements…The College of Policing is embracing an approach where personal and professional development sits alongside performance management and for us, aspirational conversations and talent management are very important. A positive psychology approach to coaching is consistent with this thinking" (Interview 6, lines 82-88).

The stakeholders see the coaching programme fitting with the organisation's wider human resources and operational strategies and their leadership approach: "it…encourages self-awareness, self-reflection and personal development" (Interview 6, lines 76-77). They therefore perceive a direct line of sight from national policing policy to organisational policy and to individual application that suggests a consistency of approach through the use of reflection and recorded learning.

Researcher theory

My experience of the success of promoting reflexive learning in the police service is somewhat patchy, and, when it is required as part of formal learning

programmes, it tends to be viewed as something of a chore to be dashed off as quickly as possible. Where learners do embrace it and use it, it can result in powerful outcomes leading to deep personal learning and change. I was interested to see if by adding the positive psychology aspect to the coaching the use and success of reflexive learning would be enhanced.

I wrote the if…then statement as:

> **"If** coachees who are provided with encouragement and a framework to self-reflect in a development-focused organisational, sector and national climate, **then** they will be more likely to structure their self-reflection and self-reinforce their learning to track their process of change and to set realistic development goals."

I constructed the CMO configuration as follows:

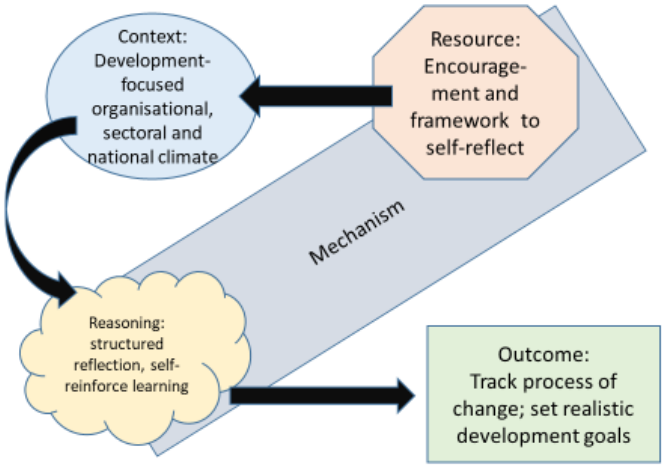

Figure 5.9: Positive psychology learning CMOc

I wrote the narrative candidate component theory as follows:

> "Coachees who are provided with encouragement and a framework to self-reflect in a development-focused organisational, sector and national climate are more likely to structure their self-reflection and self-reinforce their learning to track their process of change and to set realistic development goals."

This statement appears as CCMOc 6a in the chart presented in Table 5.2 on pages 193 to 195. As with the other candidate component theories, this was examined against the evidence in the exploration phase. This concluded the individual component stages of the theory-building activity; my next task was to pull the various threads together into a comprehensive candidate programme theory, to which I now turn.

Compilation of the candidate programme theory

Based on the above, I collated the candidate programme theory and component theories in order to guide the programme design, delivery and exploration. It is acknowledged that, at this stage, the programme theory statements had been written in entirely positive language. As a final step in the process, therefore, I decided to include a corresponding set of negative CMOcs to acknowledge that respondents might offer alternative explanations, referred to in realist terms as "rival" theories. These are shown as CCMOcs 1b, 2b, 3b, 4b, 5b and 6b in Table 5.2 on pages 193 to 195. I did this to avoid an assumption that the programme components would always be perceived to work in a positive way and to

recognise that theorising the likely outcomes should include the possibility of negative evidence.

The candidate programme theory and component theories were therefore expressed as follows:

> **Candidate overall programme theory** - "Coachees working with their coach in a positive psychology setting who are given the opportunity to develop their positive approach through a series of coaching sessions, positive organisational support and positive feedback, and engage in positive reflective learning will be more likely to be motivated to set, pursue and achieve personal and professional development goals and contribute to the organisation's developing culture".

For ease of use, I have expressed the candidate component theories as a set of causation chains in tabular form in Table 5.2 on the next page:

Table 5.2: Causation Chains – Candidate CMO Configurations (format developed from Blane, 2016 and Dalkin et al, 2015)

Component CCMOc	Enabling/constraining Contexts	Mechanism "Resource"	Mechanism "Reasoning"	Potential Outcomes
CCMOc 1a Coaching Sessions (Positive Psychology Knowledge and Skills)	Coachees who are interested and curious	And who are provided with the opportunity to gain the knowledge and skills of their strengths and positive psychology coaching	Are more likely to raise their self-awareness, engage with the coaching process	And be open to learning and motivated to set and achieve development goals
CCMOc 1b Coaching Sessions (Positive Psychology Knowledge and Skills)	Coachees who are not interested or curious	And who are provided with the knowledge and skills of strengths and positive psychology coaching	Are more likely to be unresponsive to the coaching approach, more likely to fail to acquire the knowledge and the skills to apply it, less likely to engage with the coaching process	Be less motivated to learn and set and achieve development goals
CCMOc 2a Coaching Sessions (Positive Coaching relationship)	Coachees who are open to positive psychology coaching	And who are supported, challenged, encouraged empathetically and given safe and confidential time and space	Are more likely to build trust in the coach and the coaching process, engage with it	And be motivated to set, pursue and achieve cogent and stretching development goals
CCMOc 2b Coaching Sessions (Positive Coaching Relationship)	Coachees who are not open to positive psychology coaching relationship	And who are provided with an unsupportive coaching relationship	Are less likely to build trust in the process and/or coach	And fail to set and achieve their goals

Component CCMOc	Enabling/constraining Contexts	Mechanism "Resource"	Mechanism "Reasoning"	Potential Outcomes
CCMOc 3a Coaching Sessions (Positive Reframing)	Coachees who are open-minded with a growth mindset	And who are provided with access to an external perspective and the opportunity to reframe their current standpoints	Are more likely to test their internal logic, identify their strengths, see things differently, raise their confidence, take more calculated risks	And be motivated to set and achieve aspirational development goals
CCMOc 3b Coaching Sessions (Positive Reframing)	Coachees who are not open-minded with a fixed mindset	And who are provided with access to an external perspective and the opportunity to reframe their current standpoints	Are less likely to test their internal logic, identify their strengths, see things differently, raise their confidence, take more calculated risks	And be less motivated to set and achieve aspirational development goals
CCMOc 4a Positive Organisational Involvement	Coachees who perceive the organisational culture as supportive, consistent and development-orientated	And who are provided with the organisation's investment, trust, role modelling and the opportunity to put their development into practice	Are more likely to take their development seriously, feel that the organisation is interested in their career development, feel inspired	Be motivated to engage with the coaching and set and achieve their development goals
CCMOc 4b Positive Organisational Involvement	Coachees who perceive the organisational culture as unsupportive, inconsistent and not development-orientated	And who are not provided with the organisation's investment, trust, role modelling and the opportunity to put their development into practice	Are less likely to take their development seriously, feel that the organisation is interested in their career development, feel inspired	Be less motivated to engage with the coaching and set and achieve their development goals

Component CCMOc	Enabling/constraining Contexts	Mechanism "Resource"	Mechanism "Reasoning"	Potential Outcomes
CCMOc 5a Positive Psychology Feedback	Coachees who are self-regulating and open to feedback	And who receive accurate information about their strengths	Are more likely to raise their self-knowledge, make better informed development choices	And be motivated to set stretching development goals
CCMOc 5b Positive Psychology Feedback	Coachees who are not self-regulating and closed to feedback	And who receive accurate information about their strengths	Are less likely to raise their self-knowledge, not make better informed development choices	And be less motivated to set stretching development goals
CCMOc 6a Positive Psychology Learning	Coachees who are open to reflective/reflexive learning in a development-focused organisational, sector and national climate	And are provided with encouragement and a framework to self-reflect	Are more likely to structure their self-reflection and self-reinforce their learning to track their process of change	And be more likely to set and pursue realistic development goals
CCMOc 6b Positive Psychology Learning	Coachees who are resistant to reflective/reflexive learning and/or in a non-development-focused organisational, sector and national climate	And are provided with encouragement and a framework to self-reflect	Are less likely to structure their self-reflection, self-reinforce their learning to track their process of change	And be less likely to set and pursue realistic development goals

From the above, it was possible to identify an emerging programme theory structure, to which I return to develop further in Chapter 6 when I present the findings of the exploration phase of the study (pp. 200 to 202). The initial structure was as follows:

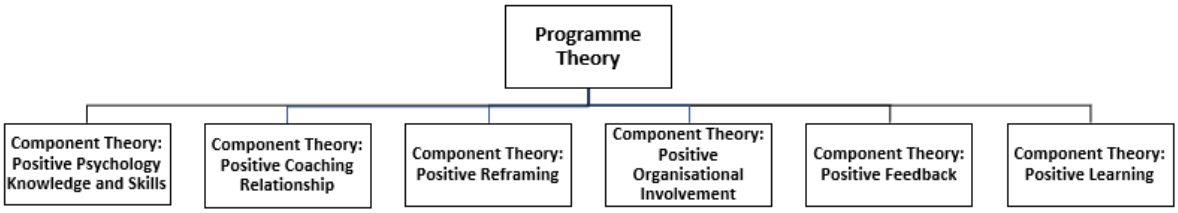

Figure 5.10: Initial programme theory structure

As described in Chapter 4, pages 139 to 144, this initial programme theory was used to inform the coaching programme design (Phase 3) and the research exercise and analysis (Phase 5, pp. 148 to 154). The initial programme theory was then refined in the light of the evidence (Phase 6, p. 155).

5.3 Chapter summary

This chapter has provided a detailed account of the building of the initial programme theory. It develops the argument originally introduced in Chapter 1 (p. 35) that a realist approach may provide a more nuanced alternative to positive psychology coaching research than more traditional approaches, by demonstrating how *a priori* theorising might form a robust foundation.

The next chapter presents the findings from the exploratory phase of the research study (Phase 5).

Chapter 6: Findings

6.1 Chapter introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings from the exploratory study (Phase 5 Observe: research, pp. 148-154). These take the form of a simple numeric analysis of the data that relate to the programme's outcomes and a more complex interview data- and observation-based analysis of how the coaching programme worked, or not, as the case may be. I also present an analysis for whom in the organisation such a programme might work in the future and how, as viewed by the key stakeholders. These findings are then discussed in greater detail in Chapter 8.

6.2 Initial exploration outcomes: Basic measures

All six volunteer coachees started and completed the whole programme of six coaching sessions. 36 individual coaching meetings were held, delivering up to 72 hours of coaching, with each participant engaging in up to 12 hours of coaching. According to the evidence I observed in the coaching sessions and via a thematic analysis of coachees' self-reports when asked the question in the research interviews, "have you noticed any changes in the way you go about your work that are different because of your participation in the coaching programme?" (Question 4, Recipient Research Meeting 1 Topic Guide, Appendix 3), each participant pursued and achieved at least one personal leadership development goal and at least one organisational leadership development goal. At least 12 goals were therefore achieved, although in most cases, participants achieved

several goals, both personal and organisational. For confidentiality reasons, I am unable to describe the specific nature of the goals defined or refined and achieved in this thesis. I have, however, summarised the anonymised headlines in Table 6.1 on the next page:

Table 6.1: Outcomes achieved as a result of the coaching programme

Goal outcomes	Progress towards personal leadership development objectives	Contribution to the organisation's leadership development culture
All coachees defined/refined and achieved at least two coaching goals	Developed sense of self: raised self-awareness, appreciated self; increased self-belief; increased belief in own capabilities; increased leadership confidence; felt more positive about oneself Developed positivity and strengths: became more positive; identified strengths and skills; used strengths to develop leadership approach Developed judgement ability: recognised right time to introduce change Develop leadership behaviours: evaluated one's leadership behaviour Developed leadership style: became a more effective leader	Appreciating others: recognising others' strengths; seeing best in people; recognised differences in others as a positive thing; developed a better understanding of others; viewed people more positively Developed relationships: better staff management, staff relations and engagement Developed culture: worked towards a no blame culture; avoiding attributing fault Team development: appreciated team's value; used positive feedback to enhance team performance Cascading learning in the organisation: applied learning wider than immediate goals Enhanced organisational performance: achieved more strategic goals

The coaching outcomes were achieved within the planned time parameters set at the beginning of the programme. At this basic level of analysis, the programme appears to have achieved the organisation's headline objective, that of attracting and supporting a group of senior leaders to contribute the development of the organisation's learning culture by engaging in general goal-oriented thinking and action through a formal coaching process. However, as already discussed, the main aim of the research was not to determine whether or not the coaching programme "worked" but to explore in detail *how* it might work, for whom and in what circumstances, leading to the refinement of the original programme theory. This is the focus of the following sections.

6.3 Programme exploration: Interview and observational data

Fifteen stakeholders were interviewed for research purposes: two programme architects, 3 practitioners, 6 recipients, 3 experts and 1 researcher. I contributed to this exercise as the researcher stakeholder by responding to the same research interview questions as the others and drawing from the material in my observational notes.

The realist-informed thematic analysis of the interview data produced 164 separate context-mechanism-outcome configurations (CMOcs) at the individual level. From these, I identified 24 key themes, 4 for each of the six programme components. I developed the hierarchy of programme theory that I had begun in the theory-building phase, shown in Figure 5.10 on page 196 in Chapter 5 and repeated on page 201. This started with the overall programme theory itself at the top level, then moved to the six component-level programme theories at the second level:

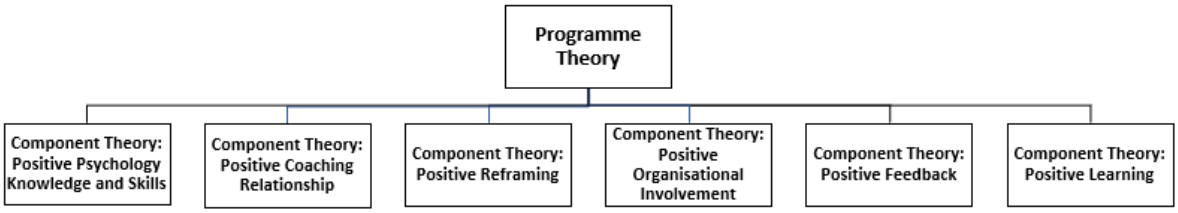

Figure 5.10: Initial programme theory structure

I developed the 24 themes as mentioned above into theme-level context-mechanism-outcome configurations (referred to as TCMOcs) that either supported, refuted or served to refine the candidate programme-level and component-level theories. In the interests of brevity, I am not reporting here on each of the 164 individual-level CMOCcs that contributed to each of the thematic CMOCs (TCMOcs), as they were subsumed in the data analysis phase through various stages to arrive at the TCMOcs, as described in Chapter 4 (pp. 153 to 154). I do, however, make reference to the thematic TCMOcs throughout this chapter, and for ease of reference they are included in full in Appendix 8 (p. 414).

As a result of analysing the interview data and identifying the underlying themes within each of the components to deepen the analysis to a further level, I developed the initial programme theory structure by adding in the themes. This is shown in Figure 6.1 on the next page. I use this enhanced structure as a framework to present the findings organised by each programme component and its themes. In Chapter 7, I discuss how these findings formed the evidence base upon which the programme theory was refined at the component and whole-programme level.

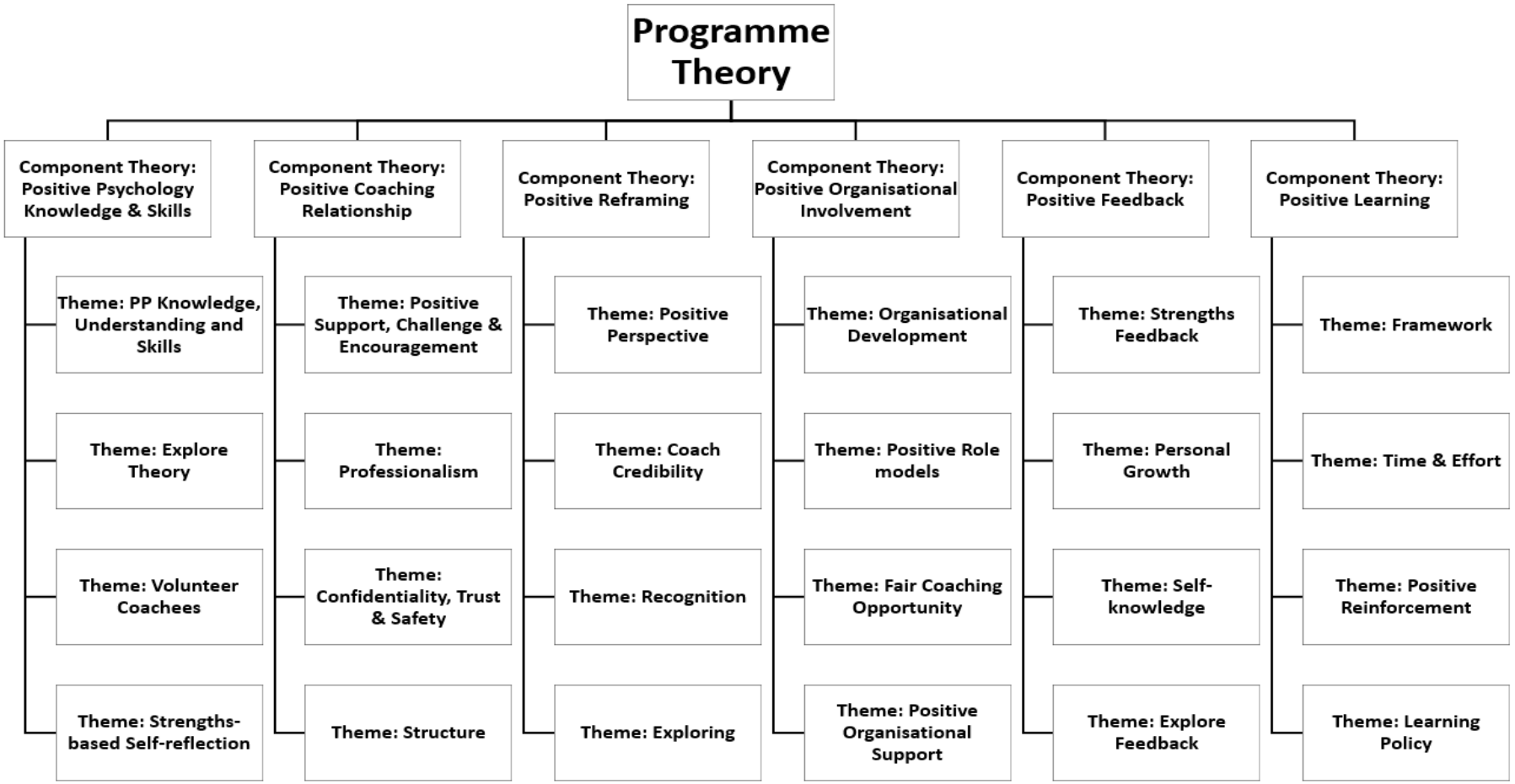

Figure 6.1: Developed programme theory structure

I now present the findings on a component by component basis.

Component 1: Coaching sessions: Positive psychology knowledge and skills

This resource mechanism provided coachees with the opportunity to increase their knowledge and skills relating to positive psychology. All of the respondents were supportive of the candidate programme component theory (CCMOcs 1a and 1b in Table 5.2, pages 193 to 195, Chapter 5). The evidence also led to a refinement of the wording as shown in the revised context-mechanism-outcome configurations (RCMOCs) 1a and 1b in the revised version in Table 7.1 in Chapter 7 (pp. 276 to 279). I identified four themes: “positive psychology knowledge, understanding and skills”, “explore theory”, “volunteer coachees” and “strengths-based self-reflection”. Five TCMOcs were supportive and one unsupportive. In the latter case, the respondent used a negative experience to illustrate their support for the candidate component theory.

Theme 1 – Positive psychology knowledge, understanding and skills

The evidence confirmed that the coaching offered a range of positive psychology concepts, materials and tools, such as the strengths inventory and the reading list, as *resource mechanisms* to provide the opportunity to develop knowledge and skills (TCMOc 1a, Appendix 8). When asked about how their experience of this aspect of the programme matched the proposed theory, a respondent stated:

> “In terms of the aspects of positive psychology, I have enjoyed doing the different tests and highlighting my strengths. I have a tendency to focus on what I can’t do, so focusing on my strengths

> rather than what I can't do has been very useful. In terms of the reading list, I wanted to read about the subject, I got one of the books, but I haven't had time to read much of it. I am still intending to read it. I might also read some of the others off the list" (Interview 4, lines 20-25).

Responding to a similar question, another respondent provided evidence that also emphasised the importance of developing an *understanding* as well as knowledge and skills, suggesting a deeper level of cognitive processing:

> "I think it would be really important, because if you are not self-aware, and don't understand yourself, you might set off on a path that's completely unachievable and therefore you are going to be constantly setting yourself goals that you're not going to achieve and therefore you're going to think that goal setting's not working. So, you'll probably stop doing it and just float in limbo. Because I'm thinking that if you're doing things that you're never going to achieve, you're going to lose faith in that, whereas if you understand what your strengths are and how to set goals that play to your strengths then you are more likely to achieve or be motivated to achieve that goal and therefore you'll continue to set bigger and more stretching goals because you'll grow in confidence, if that makes sense" (Interview 14, lines 10-20).

This led to a refinement of the original component theory to include "understanding" as a key resource mechanism. With their emphasis on strengths identification, these responses also link with another of the identified themes, that of "strengths feedback" in the positive feedback component , discussed on pages 236 to 238 later in this chapter.

The evidence relating to the *context* in which the programme had operated supported the notion that to optimise the resources, coachees needed to be interested not only in taking part in a coaching programme but also to be curious and wanting to learn about positive psychology. They also needed to be willing to engage with the process of acquiring and developing the knowledge, understanding and skills relating to positive psychology. Interest in positive

psychology coaching came from a variety of sources. In one instance, the fact that the word “positive” was mentioned in the advertisement for the offer of coaching, the novelty of positive psychology coaching as a particular coaching type, and chiming with their specific leadership development needs at the time attracted the respondent:

> “I think it was the “positive” offer…I think the way I’ve tried to construct the new roles in the team was actually to try to find ways that played on things that people were good at, and I didn’t feel that actually managing those roles was focusing on the positive stuff and I thought this [the coaching] might give me a different kind of input” (Interview 15, lines 31-40).

Another example demonstrated how an interest in positive psychology coaching had arisen from a non-work context. It was seen as a counterbalance to the prevailing policing culture and to provide a sense of hope:

> “I’ve always been interested in sports psychology and positive mindsets, getting yourself “in the zone”, but using it in a work environment…it’s generally dealing with trauma and misery, so it’s important to try and get that positive mindset about some of the acts of kindness that we do and the value we don’t realise we bring…and appreciate more of the positive psychology aspects of the work we do” (Interview 16, lines 132-137).

Several respondents observed that their interest came from their previous experience of coaching and mentoring, either as a coach or mentor or as a coachee or mentee, and wanting to learn and improve. As one respondent put it:

> “I’ve had unofficial coaches but I’ve never had an official coach and done this before, therefore it has driven me to work towards those goals in a far more determined and dedicated way.” (Interview 16, lines 116-119).

Some respondents were attracted to the positive psychology element because of aspects of their own personalities, for example, tending towards pessimism in

outlook, focusing on negatives and wanting to change. For example, one respondent said they came to positive psychology coaching because “I tend to self-reflect a lot and dwell on my own negativity” (Interview 18, lines 33-34). Using positive psychology tools and techniques encouraged them to be kinder to themselves, reduce self-criticism, increase self-esteem and develop their understanding of others.

Reasoning mechanisms relating to the knowledge, understanding and skills of positive psychology led to cognitive responses such as self-knowledge, self-understanding and self-awareness. Emotions included raised self-esteem and confidence. As one respondent expressed it:

> “I think identifying and knowing my strengths gave me a sense of confidence and self-reassurance that I have the ability and capability, which comes from the positive psychology, I suppose. (Interview 20, lines 125-127).

Another reasoning response concerned feeling motivated to engage in goal-directed behaviour:

> “If you understand what your strengths are and how to set goals that play to your strengths then you are more likely to achieve or be motivated to achieve that goal” (Interview 14, lines 16-18).

A further group of responses focused on the appeal of adopting a novel approach to leadership activity taking into account the positives in themselves and others. An example was provided by one respondent:

> “Do I think that I approached those things differently, as a result of thinking what’s the most positive aspect I can bring to bear on that, what are the things I’ve got to offer, what are the things that other people have got to offer to work with here? Yes, I do think that” (Interview 15, lines 141-145).

The respondent observed that knowing one's strengths puts a different complexion on confidence to address issues, and also mentions hope:

> "I think it puts it [one's issue] into a more hopeful vein. You come to it looking on the assumption that you have the tools already to deal with it, rather than coming to it as a problem that you have to find a way to grapple with … and the fact that you can recognise it in yourself means that you can recognise it more easily in other people" (Interview 15, lines 154-163).

There was evidence to support the premise that the resources, context and reasoning led to positive *outcomes*, as in the following example:

> *Researcher:* "*In terms of addressing those goals, do you think that because we used positive psychology as our basis, it motivated you to address those goals to a greater extent, a lesser extent or about the same?*
>
> Respondent: I think it would have to be greater, and the reason that I say that is because I was quite struggling with my situation at the time, if the approach had been, well, these are the things that you are not doing right, sort of the negative psychology, it would have just sunk the trough! At some points when you are dealing with a difficult situation, you kind of lose some self-esteem in that, and if the coaching process is then about, well, let's find all the reasons why you didn't do or didn't cope, you know, all the things you've done wrong, if I can put it that way, I think you find that extremely difficult to continue with. I think the fact that you focus on the positive side of things means that there's more chance of getting to a reasonable conclusion" (Interview 15, lines 173-185).

This respondent also hints at the importance of maintaining a positive mindset developed through working with a coach. This links to the theme of "positive perspective" identified in the positive reframing component discussed on pages 221 to 222 later in this chapter.

The candidate component theory used the phrase "set and achieve their [coachees'] goals" when describing outcomes. Respondents observed that the positive psychology coaching did not necessarily lead them to set particular

goals. Sometimes, they came to the coaching programme with pre-determined intentions, as in the following example:

> "Has it [positive psychology coaching] affected which things to work on?... The circumstances dictated what I wanted to work on, it wasn't a pick, it wasn't a free choice" (Interview 15, lines 137-141).

However, all respondents said that the coaching did affect how they perceived their goals and how they felt motivated to pursue and achieve them. This led to a revision of the "goal-setting" outcome to read as "define/refine goals" in the refined programme theory as shown in Table 7.1 in Chapter 7 (pp. 276 to 279). It was apparent that the coaching had an impact on how people went about addressing and achieving the goals, but if they came to the coaching with pre-determined goals, the coaching served to refine rather than to determine them. If people came with no set goals, the coaching acted to help define those goals and subsequently how they went about addressing them. In this example, the respondent used their knowledge of their strengths to define and pursue their goals:

> "I think that choosing that [goal] and developing it in the way that I have plays to the strengths that we've identified, and I think those strengths definitely help to move that forward and the way I approach that" (Interview 1, lines 135-138).

There was, therefore, a role for positive psychology coaching to play in promoting goal-directed behaviour in this study. It depended on whether or not goal direction had been formed before coming to the coaching as to whether it acted to define or refine the goal.

Some were motivated to shape a new leadership approach to help other people, not just responding to the more technical parts of their senior job, signifying a contribution to the organisation's wider leadership development ambitions:

> "I think had we not been doing this [the coaching], I would have very much focused on the more technical side of the job, whereas this [the coaching] has broadened that out and made me think more about the softer skills and how the strengths impact on those as how I would be able to develop [my leadership] role" (Interview 1, lines 123-128).

One respondent commented on how they thought things would have gone if the coaching had taken more of a deficit approach:

> "I think in difficult situations, I think focusing on the positive and the positive tools you have to deal with it and the positive ways in which you can go about things is part of the way of getting you into the positive spiral, rather than the negative one…which I think is what most people tend to do naturally, and probably what I would have tended to do, that I do naturally, and I think then you are focused on the gap and you spend all your time on the bits that you are probably least strong at doing, and it's quite a long slow tedious haul to get through that" (Interview 15, lines 189-202).

This led to the construction of a negative TCMOc around a deficit approach, even though the evidence had been recounted in support of the positive psychology approach (TCMOc 1b, Appendix 8).

The importance of developing an understanding of positive psychology knowledge and skills in respect of goal setting (resource) and including feeling motivated to learn and practise positive goal defining (reasoning) was emphasised when considering less experienced coachees (TCMOc 1c, Appendix 8):

> "At the beginning I was struggling to define what I was going to do so I definitely think that having the [coaching] sessions and just

> having someone to talk it through with gives you that focus in terms of how you are going to define it and someone who [asks] is that what you want to do, ask how is it going to work, how are you going to develop it, it gives you the opportunity to have that discussion and know that you are going in the right direction or what else you might want to think about" (Interview 1, line 169).

One respondent thought that busy coachees who set high standards for themselves would benefit from the opportunity to understand the knowledge and skills of positive psychology coaching, especially when framing goals:

> "*Researcher: just thinking about the coaching sessions, how important do you think knowing about strengths and positive psychology might affect the way in which coachees decide on and pursue their goals?*
>
> Respondent: very important. I suppose if I can put that in context, my experience of working with executive coaching sessions, you are often dealing with highly pressurised perfectionist individuals who will come and will talk about development needs. That is by and large the default position and often to a surprising extent bearing in mind the amount of success they are often carrying in their lives. They will be putting themselves under huge pressure because of these development needs... There might be a natural tendency for an individual to bring it [the issue] with a problem-focused mindset… knowing the background to positive psychology then knowing that will give them a better understanding of how the actual issue or goal is framed" (Interview 17, lines 355-384).

Positive psychology coaching can sometimes be shrouded in jargon, which could be off-putting for coachees. As one respondent stated:

> "[The coach] explaining some of the detail around the [positive psychology coaching process], it lessened some of the mysticism around it for me" (Interview 18, lines 167-168).

Another respondent spoke about a possible negative outcome if the knowledge and skills of positive psychology are not transferred to the coachee from the coach, especially in a command and control culture:

> "*Researcher: just thinking about the coaching sessions, how important do you think knowing about strengths and positive psychology might affect the way in which coachees decide on and pursue their goals?*
>
> Respondent: very important! Again, the process could be a bit mysterious, and I think in particular with the police as a sector. Not all but a lot of people come from a culture of "tell me the answer and I'll do what is expected of me", and therefore it would be disconcerting if people…from that kind of culture plunge into a process where there were elements of uncertainty and doubt, which would cause anxiety, and therefore they might not commit fully to the programme, might hold back, might not be totally honest and not get the full benefit. If that area [positive psychology] is explained and they are helped to work through it whatever their level they start at, that's a really helpful and positive start" (Interview 19, lines 274-285).

In terms of outcomes, there was some evidence of coachees using new knowledge and skills in achieving their goals:

> "I think definitely having that knowledge helps you in terms of the way you approach certain things and how you deal with different people" (Interview 1, lines 117-118).

In summary, the knowledge and skills theme contributed by far the majority of evidence to this component. There were, however, three related themes that are useful to note at this point, as follows.

Theme 2 –Explore theory

Some coachees were attracted to the opportunity to explore positive psychology coaching theories, concepts and models, adding finer detail to the nature of coachee curiosity as a context. According to one respondent:

> "So, am I always looking for underpinning theories, am I always looking for a methodology to apply? Yes, I'm interested in all of that stuff. That's what brought me to it [the positive psychology coaching] in the first instance…if you are naturally inclined towards

> that [a theoretical approach] in the first place then you are going to be more drawn to that technique" (Interview 15, lines 215-202).

Another respondent, talking about the use of the MBTI personality inventory, said:

> *"Researcher: just thinking about the coaching sessions, how do you think that knowing about the theory behind strengths and the positive psychology approach to coaching affected the way you chose things to have as your goals and how you went about them? What kinds of things did it trigger in your mind that helped with the goals?*
>
> Respondent: I like to understand the theories behind whatever it is that we're looking at so I do like that and I think it helps with the understanding of what we are trying to achieve, so what is Myers Briggs trying to achieve? [It's] been explained to me before but…maybe I wasn't fully engaged when it came up before. This time, in the coaching session I was engaged, because for example, you explained about knowing your own personality…and [when] you are interacting with someone who is different to you…it's that theory of understanding the difference in the relationship between you and somebody else who has different characteristics or type [that] allows you then to put the Myers Briggs into practice. So, understanding the theory and where we are supposed to get to help to practically deliver it" (Interview 3, lines 127-227).

This evidence led to the development of TCMOc 2 (Appendix 8) to suggest that curious coachees who have the opportunity to explore theory respond by seeing the "bigger picture" and feel motivated to engage in goal-directed behaviour.

The opportunity to explore also appeared in themes in other programme components, such as "exploring" in the context of novel thinking in the positive reframing component (pp. 224 to 225), and "exploring feedback" in the positive feedback component (pp. 239 to 240) later in this chapter.

Theme 3 – Volunteer coachees

The evidence pointed to the kind of state of mind that coachees might possess if they volunteer for positive psychology coaching, that of a growth mindset. One respondent offered this viewpoint:

> "So, if you are volunteering, you are already in that positive mindset, "how can I learn, how can this enhance my thinking, my leadership skills?", whatever that might be." (Interview 13, lines 197-199).

Corroborated by several respondents, this resulted in TCMOc 3 (Appendix 8), suggesting a potential causal link between volunteering, a positive mindset and goal-focused behaviours, leading to a refinement of the candidate programme theory that included the voluntary element as an enabling context.

Theme 4 – Strengths-based self-reflection

A further level of detail was provided through evidence of the motivational effect of self-reflection in the context of identifying one's strengths:

> "I do remember feeling empowered because I understood how I worked better... knowing my strengths gave me the impetus to crack on, and the feeling that, yes, this was something I could achieve and deliver." (Interview 20, lines 134-135; 163-164).

This led to TCMOc 4 (Appendix 8) to capture a potential causal link between the resource mechanisms of strength identification and self-reflection, the emotional reasoning responses of feelings of increased self-esteem, empowerment and motivation, and positive goal-focused outcomes.

Researcher's Observations

My observations of the coaching sessions (summarised in Interview 2) confirmed the evidence presented above. In addition, I noted that coachees' interest in positive psychology coaching derived from, for some, exposure to the concept of positive psychology in previous academic activities, such as MBA programmes or work-related courses. The positive psychology exercises provided resources via the card sort exercise and developing positive psychology skills through the "bridging" and "best possible self" exercises. As coach and coachee, we used our developing positive psychology knowledge to make sure we identified naturalistic development opportunities together. The coachees developed their positive psychology knowledge further through the reading recommendations and our discussions of flow, mindset and emotional intelligence. They developed their cognitive skills through positive visioning, considering the drivers for the various changes they were seeking to bring about, engaging in positive futures activities and creative techniques, and developing an appreciation of themselves and others via the "3 good things" exercise. I observed that the resource mechanisms prompted reasoning mechanisms of enthusiasm and energy that were sustained throughout the coaching period. Active engagement continued throughout, awareness was raised, knowledge increased, skills were developed and confidence grew throughout the course of the six coaching sessions.

Component 1 summary

On the basis of the evidence, the candidate positive psychology knowledge and skills component theory was supported. The resources provided by the coaching programme gave rise to an array of reasoning responses that work at the

cognitive, emotional and behavioural level. Outcomes included not only the defining/refining and achieving of goals *per se* but doing so in a way that furthers coachees' own leadership development objectives and those of the organisation. As well as confirming the initial component programme theory, the evidence indicated that more emphasis needed to be placed on the voluntary nature of the programme, on coachees' openness to coaching, on the importance of gaining understanding as well as knowledge and skills relating to strengths and positive psychology approaches, and on raising self-confidence, self-esteem and self-belief.

I discuss how the component programme theory was refined in Chapter 7. The rival component theory was also refined, highlighting the potential outcomes of taking a deficit approach to coaching. The refined component theory and rival theory (RCMOcs 1a and 1b) appear in Table 7.1 on pages 276 to 279 in Chapter 7.

Component 2: Coaching sessions: Positive coaching relationship

This component focused on the candidate component theory relating to the resource mechanism of a positive coaching relationship (CCMOcs 2a and 2b in Table 5:2, pages 193 to 195, Chapter 5). All of the responses were supportive, whilst serving to refine the programme theory. I grouped the evidence into four themes: "positive support, challenge and encouragement", "professionalism", "confidentiality, trust and safety" and "structure". I identified four supportive TCMOcs. In three cases, interviewees spoke of negative experiences to illustrate why they supported the candidate component theory, which I report under Themes 1 and 3 as follows.

Theme 1 – Positive support, challenge and encouragement

TCMOc 5a (Appendix 8) was developed, which traced a potential causal link between a positive, supporting, challenging and encouraging coaching relationship and positive coaching outcomes via reasoning mechanisms of raised self-efficacy, confidence and motivation in the context of complexity. Respondents spoke of the importance of the relationship and the role of the coach's authentic belief in the client, believing that the coachee possessed the resources they need to achieve successful coaching outcomes:

> "You've not just given me the answers; you've made me think about them and come up with the suggestions and the solutions. You haven't just spoon-fed me, I've had to work and, you know, think about it for myself, which can only be beneficial, because then it sinks in and it works, doesn't it?" (Interview 20, lines 181-185).

This view was echoed by other respondents, for example:

> "If you [the coach] believe in [the coachees] at a level that is authentically present in the conversations, then I think that the impact on them will be much, much more positive" (Interview 5, lines 366-368).

There was further evidence of the importance of coach expectations:

> "I would imagine that it [a positive coaching relationship] would be positive and raise the bar, raise the level… if you have higher expectations of people in a supportive environment, they are likely to achieve more, better, quicker, and in a more creative way" (Interview 19, lines 298-301).

Another respondent spoke about the importance of positive support and challenge:

> "That support and challenge but in a supportive way is vital because first of all people respond really well to positivity and support. If you're not being supportive of someone then again, I think it links back to that self-confidence, because a lot of coaching is about developing someone's self-confidence" (Interview 14, lines 40-44).

In contrast, evidence of a different experience that can occur if the coach's support and challenge is perceived negatively was illustrated by TCMOc 5b (Appendix 8). Here, drawing on a previous experience with a different coach in another programme, the respondent felt that the resource of an overly demanding coach can invoke responses of negative self-talk, feeling overwhelmed and avoidance, with adverse effects on the coaching outcomes:

> [The coach] is very demanding and notwithstanding the fact that I think I'm quite a tough person… I could go to [see the coach] more often but I don't" (Interview 14, lines 59-63).

A similarly negative effect on the coachee's motivation may occur through the lack of a positive coaching relationship (TCMOc 5c):

> "…if there isn't that positive and supportive relationship, if there is some kind of tension between the coach and coachee which remains unresolved or they simply aren't working in the same agreed manner, then I would imagine that the motivation of the coachee, and to a certain extent the coach, is going to be compromised" (Interview 17, lines 393-397).

Three further themes emerged from the data as follows.

Theme 2 – Professionalism

This theme illustrated the difference in coachees' minds between a professional coaching conversation and one with a friend or colleague. It is closely aligned with building trust (TCMOc 6, Appendix 8):

> "So it's about being able to express yourself…but having said that because you are talking to someone else who is your coach rather than someone you know well, there is a professionalism about it" (Interview 3, lines 304-306).

Theme 3 – Confidentiality, trust and safety

This theme produced a volume of evidence and resulted in TCMOcs 7a and 7b (Appendix 8). In this study, coachees who perceived a safe and confidential environment engaged and developed the confidence and motivation to achieve positive coaching outcomes. The policing context required a particular openness to a trusting working relationship with the coach, helped when that coach was external to, but yet had knowledge of, the organisation. As one respondent expressed this idea:

> "If I was doing the coaching with someone I didn't trust, it wouldn't work as I would need to feel safe" (Interview 4, lines 31-32).

This view was supported by another respondent:

> "The trust is very important, it always is with a [coaching] client but particularly in the police service" (Interview 19, lines 304-305).

It appeared that if that trust and confidence is not present in the coaching relationship, then coachees' reaction to the coaching resource could be compromised:

> "I suppose being completely open and honest, being very open and frank with you, I've felt safe to do that. I think that that in itself builds the trust – I wouldn't tell you those things if I didn't trust you" (Interview 20, lines 211-213).

Theme 4 – Structure

There was evidence from some respondents that a key part of the coaching relationship was the supportive structure it brings (TCMOc 8, Appendix 8). Busy coachees in complex roles responded to the rigour and review mechanisms afforded by the coaching programme to achieve positive coaching outcomes, not just through the structure itself, but also because of a sense of a "psychological contract" arising from the promises they had made to the coach to take action in between the sessions:

> "… so meeting every month has meant that despite the fact that you've got a day job to do, it gives you that focus to think, right, I need to get on with this" (Interview 1, lines 155-157).

Another respondent expressed a similar view:

> "I'm very task-driven, but because I have set a goal with you, I don't want to let you down. I don't want to come to the next coaching session and say, "I haven't done any of that", so it almost drives me to make sure I'm doing these things." (Interview 16, lines 94-97).

Structure also played an important part in the positive learning component, where some respondents, for whom a structured experience of the coaching process was important, saw the learning diary as fulfilling that purpose for them (pp. 241 to 242 later in this chapter).

Researcher's observations

In addition to the evidence above, I observed throughout the coaching sessions that coachees entered into the coaching relationship very eagerly right from the contracting stage and sustained the sound working relationship to the end of the coaching engagement. All were ready to trust and engage. I formed the impression initially that some had come to coaching to be "fixed" but that was something that I dispelled very early on in the contracting phase. My observations largely corroborated the interview evidence. As the coaching engagement progressed, there was evidence of deepening ambitions in that coachees developed more stretching goals as their confidence grew. They began to think more strategically as senior leaders and to cascade their emergent positive psychology approaches to their teams and other individuals.

Component 2 summary

The candidate component programme theory was supported. Reflecting the evidence, it highlighted the need to include openness to a positive coaching relationship, the role of complex goals and two new reasoning mechanisms, those of raised self-confidence and self-efficacy, in the refined theory. It also pointed to two new outcomes, those of developing leadership ability and resilience. The evidence also suggested the need to refine the rival component theory to emphasise the importance of the willingness of the coachee to engage with the coach and the coaching process. I discuss how the component programme theory and rival theory were refined in Chapter 7. The refined component theory and rival theory (RCMOcs 2a and 2b) appear in Table 7.1 on pages 276 to 279 in Chapter 7.

Component 3: Coaching sessions: Positive reframing

This component focused on the resource mechanism that provided coachees with the opportunity to engage in positively reframing their views and outlook. All respondents were supportive of the candidate programme component theory (CCMOCs 3a and 3b, Table 5:2, Chapter 5, pages 193 to 195), although the evidence led to refinement. I grouped the evidence into four themes: “positive perspective”, “coach credibility”, “recognition” and “exploring”, as detailed below.

Theme 1 – Positive perspective

This theme concerned the provision of a positive external perspective by the coach to the issues coachees brought to coaching. TCMOc 9 (Appendix 8) was developed to reflect the evidence. When open-minded coachees were provided with an opportunity to reframe, it evoked cognitive, emotional and behavioural responses that led to successful coaching outcomes. Cognitive reasoning included seeing the opportunities in situations rather than focusing on threats and exploring different ways of working. Emotional responses included increases in feelings of confidence and self-efficacy, and behaviour changes encompassed taking quicker decisions and actions. This was illustrated by one respondent as follows:

> “Often when an individual is stretched and under pressure, they will see the problems rather than the opportunities, and I think having that external frame of reference that is grounded in a positive psychology perspective will help in very basic terms the coachee to understand the opportunities rather than a threat. Then I would imagine that can have the effect of a bit of a lightbulb moment” (Interview 17, lines 416-421).

Another respondent agreed:

> "I think having an external coach can be really helpful as it kind of puts things into perspective, because I think what we dramatise internally, actually, in the real world isn't really as big a deal" (Interview 14, lines 129-131).

Theme 2 – Coach credibility

Related to the theme of positive perspective above, there was some evidence to suggest that the credibility of the coach served as an important resource mechanism. This resulted in cognitive reasoning to see things differently and an emotional response of a feeling of heightened motivation. This is illustrated in TCMOc 10 (Appendix 8). The following interview extract illustrates the evidence in support of the benefits of working with an external coach in this particular programme:

> *"Researcher: how has having a positive external perspective from an external coach affected your work on the goals you have set yourself and pursued as a result of the coaching? Can you give me any examples?*
>
> Respondent: Yes, it has, and I think it overcomes the cultural [barriers]…it's a fresh pair of eyes on the cultural norms, I suppose. It encourages you to step back, when you are reflecting on [the coach's] advice it can make you see it from a different perspective.
>
> *Researcher: could you do that with a conversation with an internal person, for example?*
>
> I think it would very much depend on the internal person and if you could I think they would be very few and far between, because I think it is having that external perspective that brings the value. I think it's where the culture…has perhaps a detrimental effect as you haven't got that external expertise to challenge…it would be a very different conversation as opposed to having it with an external third party" (Interview 20, lines 230-246).

Theme 3 – Recognition

Some respondents felt there was a mechanism arising from their selection for the coaching programme that worked to reframe their own feelings of self-doubt. They interpreted their selection as indicating a positive message from the organisation, marking them out as "worthy" and building a sense of self-esteem. It was also reinforced by the use of co-active coaching, in that the approach is dependent upon the establishment of a sense of parity between coach and coachee. This was noted in TCMOc 11 (Appendix 8) and illustrated by an exemplar extract as follows:

> *"Researcher: how has having a positive external perspective from an external coach affected your work on the goals you have set yourself and pursued as a result of the coaching? Can you give me any examples?*
>
> Respondent: I think it creates that sense of possibility again. I think because the whole focus has not been on remedial action, it's been about developmental action, and I think that makes quite a bit of difference to people. In this particular programme…[the others in the coaching group]...are probably in senior roles, that was the coaching proposition, so they probably are, and there's a bit of vanity in that. There's a sense that I don't want to be sent back to naughty school to learn how to do my job. There's a bit of a sense of I want to be special, and I want to explore, and I want to be tested and I think all of those things that accord with people's personal visions of themselves, which may be vain, but nevertheless it's there! So, I suppose I think that having somebody [as one's coach] who treats [the coaching] as a developmental thing and a positive thing, it plays a little bit to the vanity in a good way because it's actually saying, yes, OK, you are doing this for the right reasons, to be more effective, and have a bit more insight, and you're doing this because you want to be that kind of step above, step different" (Interview 15, lines 285-302)

There are similarities in this example to evidence in the "positive organisational support" theme in the positive organisational involvement component (pp. 232 to 234), in that some coachees interpreted organisational interest in them and the

allowing of time for them to take part in the coaching as an indication of their value.

Theme 4 –Exploring

The resource of a positive opportunity to explore situations and engaging in courageous thinking emerged, leading to cognitive reasoning and emotional responses such as seeing things differently, feeling safe enough to be honest, confident and motivated. Behavioural outcomes included trying new things, making bolder decisions and contributing to the "learning organisation", as illustrated in TCMOc 12 (Appendix 8) and by the following examples:

> *"Researcher: how has having a positive external perspective from an external coach affected your work on the goals you have set yourself and pursued as a result of the coaching? Can you give me any examples?*
>
> Respondent: I think I've been able to be really honest with you [the coach], because you're not connected into the relationships internally, which can be a bit like swimming with sharks...again, because you are totally independent, I feel I can be totally honest with you without any career implications or challenge, and that for me personally has been a real bonus.
>
> *Researcher: [could] that be something that has triggered in you to feel safe enough to set things that are stretching and that you wouldn't have done normally?*
>
> Respondent: yes" (Interview 18, lines 269-277).

Another respondent emphasised the value of coachees being able to explore their thinking with an external person without the fear of recrimination:

> "There's one element for me and that's about being a learning organisation…and that it's OK to try [new things] and make mistakes. It's just making sure that it comes back to the trust and confidentiality elements [in the coaching], that it's OK to explore these things. People are worried about making mistakes because they think it has a negative impact. So, we need to say we're OK about learning, we're OK about making mistakes, and actually,

> those who really push the boundaries are going to make mistakes…With somebody external, they can really explore that" (Interview 13, lines 274-284; 309-310).

There are parallels between these responses with the theme of "confidentiality, trust and safety" that was also found in the positive coaching relationship component (pp. 218 to 219 earlier in this chapter). There are also similarities to "exploring theory" in the knowledge and skills component (pp. 211 to 212) and to "exploring feedback" in the positive feedback component (pp. 239 to 240).

Researcher's observations

My observations corroborated the evidence provided by the respondents, but they also added to their accounts in terms of the wider organisational development outcomes. These included not only the internal personal changes noted above, but also the reframing of their attitudes towards others and the organisation, increased tolerance and acceptance of others, gradually over the course of the coaching engagement beginning to see other stakeholders' points of view, looking for win-win solutions, applying positive psychology tools in their own leadership work, seeking development opportunities, the broadening of vision and generally maturing and growing as senior leaders (summarised from Interview 2).

Component 3 summary

The evidence was supportive of the candidate component theory, but it could be refined. The evidence suggested there was more focus on the provision of the opportunity afforded to coachees to develop a positive perspective through the

coaching, and to channel and explore their thinking. The evidence highlights raised self-confidence and self-efficacy as reasoning mechanisms and the motivation to *do* things differently rather than just *see* things differently as an outcome. The evidence also demonstrated a need to refine the rival component theory to reflect the potentially negative outcomes if these resources and contexts are not present. I discuss how the component programme theory and rival theory were refined in Chapter 7, pages 261 to 264. The refined component theory and rival theory (RCMOcs 3a and 3b) appear in Table 7.1 on pages 276 to 279 in Chapter 7.

Component 4: Positive organisational involvement

This component focused on the provision of organisational support for the coachees as a positive resource mechanism. The candidate programme component theories appear in CCMOcs 4a and 4b in Table 5:2 on pages 193 to 195 in Chapter 5. Unlike the components already noted, the evidence here was mixed. All of the respondents were supportive in concept; however, in practice their experience did not necessarily match the rhetoric. I identified four themes: “organisational development”, “positive role models”, “fair coaching opportunity” and “positive organisational support”. There were 6 supportive TCMOcs, but in five cases, respondents spoke of negative experiences to illustrate why they supported the candidate component theory. One respondent reported a neutral experience.

Theme 1 – Organisational development

This theme concerned the way in which the coaching programme fitted into a wider organisational development agenda and formed a legitimate route towards the coachees' own leadership development. The detail can be found in TCMOcs 13a and 13b (Appendix 8). The theme demonstrates the importance of organisational transparency and consistency in the leadership development climate, which allows coachees to consider their issues in a wider organisational context and provide an endorsement for their participation in the coaching process. In turn, the theme promotes feelings of confidence in coachees of the boundaries, motivation to pursue more ambitious coaching outcomes, apply their learning to their teams and contribute to the achievement of the organisation's leadership development objectives.

These interview extracts illustrate the positive points respondents made. The first demonstrates that the respondent sees the positive psychology coaching as part of the organisation's wellbeing agenda:

> "I think a lot of things that the organisation is doing in terms of welfare and personal development are big steps forward and I think this [the positive psychology coaching] is definitely it" (Interview 3, 409-411).

Another respondent sees the organisation's provision of the programme as enhancing its positive reputation:

> "The fact that the organisation is embracing this [positive psychology coaching] as a programme actually says something about the organisation, doesn't it? And it says a positive thing" (Interview 15, lines 372-374).

The role of organisational legitimacy in participation is echoed in the following:

> "I think because [the programme] been something that has been promoted through the organisation, and there has been quite a lot of promotion recently about wanting to be developmental and wellbeing and those sorts of things… I kind of feel that it's been acceptable to spend the time doing that" (Interview 1, lines 203-209).

A note of caution, however, and leading to TCMOc 13b (Appendix 8), lay in a sense of mistrust in the organisation's ability to follow through with their leadership development intentions, which could act as a potential constraint on the extent of coachees' commitment to the programme:

> "I think a lot of the things that we [the organisation] do that are developmental are for the few rather than the many… You know, all these things we do are positive things, but they are very small-scale positive things. They never progress into the mainstream of what we do. We always seem to say it's a pilot. There's a sense of if you asked people, "do we do this kind of stuff?" they'd say no. It's not the way we do things around here" (Interview 15, lines 375-386).

Respondents also commented about the fit between the coaching programme and national learning policy in the theme of "learning policy" in the positive learning component as discussed on pages 245 to 246 later in this chapter.

Theme 2 – Positive role models

The second theme concerned the importance of role models in forming part of effective organisational support. An exploration of the provision of executive role models by those to whom coachees report produced mixed evidence that was positive, negative and neutral, as described in TCMOcs 14a, 14b and 14c (Appendix 8). Where coachees perceived their seniors as positive role models for continuing leadership learning and development, they were more likely to feel

inspired, engage in the coaching and pursue stretching and innovative coaching outcomes (TCMOc 14a, Appendix 8). This extract illustrates the positive aspects:

> *"Researcher: some research I have read suggests that a supportive, consistent and development-orientated culture can lead to coachees' perceptions of investment, trust, role modelling and the availability of an opportunity to put learning into practice. They are likely to feel valued, take their development seriously and feel inspired, motivating them to engage with the coaching and set and achieve their development goals. To what extent does this match your expectations?*
>
> Respondent: yes, and I think that one of the factors will be "what is the prevailing leadership and management culture?" as well, because there will be degrees where [coachees] are simply familiar with the coaching style through the approach of their direct line manager, and the level of engagement of being able to get into the space quickly could be dependent upon how familiar they are simply with that kind of dialogue and engagement in that kind of process" (Interview 17, lines 453-465).

In terms of the importance of positive role models when developing a learning organisation, a respondent offered this view:

> "I think it comes back to [the quality of] your role models. I think if [coachees] see others in the organisation, key prominent people holding their hands up [when things go wrong], and I do think we are trying to do that, having the coaching sessions, [going for] promotions or interviews or whatever that might be, where we need to be really clear we are not recruiting somebody that looks like me, acts like me, behaves like me, and we respect and value difference, open to challenge." (Interview 13, 415-420).

This response also alluded to the importance of others' perceptions of equality as discussed in the theme of a fair coaching opportunity in pages 230 to 231 in the next section.

Several respondents did not perceive the executive leaders as role models at all, as detailed in TCMOc 14b (Appendix 8): as one respondent put it directly, "no, I

don't see them as role models" (Interview 20, line 297). In these circumstances, the outcome was that respondents fell back onto their own motivation to pursue their coaching objectives, still benefitting from the programme perhaps, but potentially failing to optimise their coaching opportunity.

Others saw members of the executive as providing inconsistent examples of role-modelling resulting in a neutral experience (TCMOc 14c, Appendix 8):

> *"Researcher: in terms of role-modelling with the executive, is that in evidence at all?*
>
> Respondent: I don't know, not that I've seen at all. I think my more recent experience, I would say that some of the individuals, you do get more rhetoric around [the importance of leadership development], especially from some but some are more concerned with gaps [in performance] I suppose" (Interview 18, lines 328-333).

Theme 3 – Fair coaching opportunity

Fair and authentic coaching opportunities were seen by some as important resource mechanisms to militate against perceived patronage in the organisation and in the sector more widely. This would work, they thought, to introduce fairer access to development opportunities such as the positive psychology coaching. This is detailed in TCMOcs 15a and 15b (Appendix 8). Respondents felt there had been a fair and transparent recruitment process for the coaching programme. The important reasoning mechanism here was the greater likelihood of coachees feeling valued and included, feeling that they had been chosen for the programme on merit and thereby feeling more motivated to pursue their coaching aims:

> "…the welfare agenda has been going for the last two or three years. It's built up momentum and this [the coaching] is all part of it, and for me it's about the equality around progression... I can see [in informal] mentoring… that it depends on who you know whether or not you get the best mentoring…I think [the coaching programme] is an experiment and the feedback from this is, well actually, [with] this coaching you can identify talent through it and

> give people an opportunity to get coaching because of who they are rather than who they know" (Interview 3, lines 421-431).

A potential constraint on the benefits of the programme, however, can arise due to perceptions of the authenticity of the coaching opportunity and the respondent's interpretation of the organisation's intentions. The respondents knew that I had offered the coaching to the organisation free of charge as I saw it as research rather than a commercial activity. It demonstrates how good intentions can sometimes lead to unexpected consequences, as expressed in TCMOc 15b, Appendix 8, and illustrated in this vignette:

> "Respondent: I thought they [the organisation] were doing it [the coaching programme] because it was free! …To me, they'd been offered an opportunity that wasn't going to cost anything, so why not do it? …OK, I think there is a tenuous link to the leadership development work that has been going on in [the organisation in] the last couple of years…very much my completely personal view was there's been an opportunity to get something for nothing, so why not take it? …I think … that actually, had we been paying for it, I wouldn't have got it…
>
> *Researcher: you've actually mentioned the "something for nothing" [idea] three times now, so this is obviously a theme that is important in your mind?*
>
> Respondent: I suppose it's that value, isn't it? I found [the coaching] really valuable. I suppose because [I] submitted [my] own desire to be involved…I don't think there was any particular strategic thinking about me doing it, that they wanted to help me personally, or my immediate colleagues. It does feel very much like a tick in a box. That doesn't mean that I haven't benefited from it, and I firmly believe I have…
>
> *Researcher: …whether or not there was or was not some strategic intent sitting behind all of that… just to paraphrase, it wasn't apparent to you, it wasn't communicated to you?*
>
> Respondent: correct, our culture means that's not how we do things…
>
> *Researcher: so, as far as the effect that's had on your motivation, would you say that's been an enabler, disabler or a neutral factor?*
>
> Respondent: I would say a bit of a neutral [factor], because, whilst I have absolutely loved [the coaching] and benefited from it, I still don't particularly feel that the organisation has invested in me as a

> person or particularly wanted to invest in me as a person. The fact that I responded [to the call for expressions of interest] is irrelevant. (Extracted from Interview 20, lines 304-360)

This response also supports the "recognition" theme identified in the positive re-framing component (pp. 223 to 224). It demonstrates the potential impact of a negative perception of the value the organisation places on an individual manifested in a coachee's diminished motivation to engage and succeed in the coaching engagement.

Theme 4 – Positive organisational support

This theme concerns the extent to which the organisation shows a positive interest in the coachees and their development, allows the resource of time and provides the opportunity to put the learning into practice. To start, I look at positive organisational interest. Both examples that emerged from the evidence recounted negative experiences. The first gives an indication of what the positive outcomes might have been had interest been showed (TCMOc 16a, Appendix 8) and highlights the importance of the reasoning mechanisms of feeling that spending time on the coaching is legitimate, and feeling valued and supported. Respondents wanted to feel that the organisation regarded the coaching as worthwhile and one's boss's active interest would be an indication of that:

> "I suppose if my boss had been more positive about it… it might have made me even more focused upon it, even more productive in achieving… if your line manager is absolutely engaged in it and supportive, very obviously supportive, I can see how that would make a difference" (Interview 20, lines 410-420).

The lived experience, however, was different to respondents' expectations in some cases, as illustrated in TCMOc 16b, Appendix 8. Here, the respondent was

talking about the paucity of interest in them doing the coaching programme shown by the organisation in their view:

> "I think it is absolutely about value [in me], and I think if [the organisation doesn't] show any interest in it you are not reinforcing that value (Interview 15, lines 550-551).

When one coachee felt unsupported by the organisation or their boss, they looked to other sources for support:

> "I mean I personally like to get some encouragement and support, so because that hasn't been there, I genuinely got some of it from you [the coach] and from some of my peers but not really from above, which is a gap for me because I like that clarity as well around am I doing alright still?... That could be quite demotivating (Interview 18, lines 346-350).

Positive interest also links to the "recognition" theme in the positive re-framing component already discussed (pp. 223 to 224).

The second aspect concerns the organisation allowing sufficient time for development activities as part of the coaching programme, other than the formal coaching hours, or not as the case may be. It was seen, once again, as an indication that the organisation values them and that it legitimises the activity. This is detailed in TCMOcs 17a and 17b (Appendix 8) and illustrated by the following quotation:

> "We have a lot of autonomy at our level of the organisation… but that doesn't mean that it wouldn't be very important to other people who don't have the same autonomy…because having time matters" (Interview 3, lines 401-406).

From a negative perspective, several respondents' experience was that sufficient "work time" was not allocated to them to complete the development activities arising from their coaching. Against a backdrop of a heavy and stressful workload,

this caused them to feel overwhelmed, less motivated to engage in the coaching fully and not able to achieve their optimum potential (TCMOc 17b, Appendix 8):

> "The organisation could do more in terms of freeing up time, recognising the value of this type of work [coaching], but we still seem to be [working at] 100 miles an hour. I think we pay lip service to this kind of thing [development] in my view… but when you are running [your job] and your staff want a slice of you and the [staff changes], for all the will in the world, something has to give, and the risks are me not [completing the job] rather than me doing some of this [coaching work]" (Interview 16, lines 231-242).

Time is also shown to be a key factor when engaging in reflective learning, as illustrated in the "time and effort" theme of the positive learning component later in this chapter (pp. 243 to 244).

The last aspect of the positive organisation interest theme was the opportunity to put the learning from the coaching programme into practice, in other words, the transfer of learning (TCMOc 18, Appendix 8). Once again, the resource led to feelings of being valued by the organisation and the legitimacy of the activity, leading to successful coaching outcomes:

> "I want to re-emphasise the putting [of] the learning into practice, which is vital, and unusual, sadly... you are putting your learning into practice, recording it, evidencing it, as a reinforcer (Interview 19, lines 350-354).

Researcher's observations

My observations again corroborated much of the evidence presented above. It also provided additional detail in several ways. Throughout the coaching, I observed several occasions of organisational tension, including mistrust. There was a sense that the coaching provision had come at the right time because of

the complex and difficult climate they were experiencing and the perceived lack of organisational support. The respondents' lived experience was partially consistent with the organisation's leadership development intentions. There were, however, examples of patchy line management interest, lack of time as a constraining context, and differing perceptions of a compatible organisational culture. It may not have emerged from the coachees' evidence, but as the programme progressed, I witnessed a growing sense of maturity, particularly around key relationships, with coachees improving their ability to manage up, down and across the organisation. Through this, some, but not all, were able to develop a wider understanding of the challenges at the executive level and thereby put their perceived lack of interest and support from their bosses more into perspective.

Component 4 summary

There were mixed results in this element. The initial component programme theory is supported in principle but highlights the importance of coachees' perceptions of a fair organisational culture and of a purpose for their positive psychology coaching, feeling supported and valued by local and organisational management, feeling that their development is being taken seriously by the organisation and feeling inspired. The evidence also included the raising of organisational awareness and efficacy. The evidence indicated that the rival theories should be refined to reflect the potentially negative or neutral outcomes if these resource mechanisms and contexts are not present, or that coachees' perceptions of them are mixed.

I discuss how the component programme theory and rival theory were refined in Chapter 7 on pages 264 to 268. The refined component theory and rival theories (RCMOcs 4a, 4b and 4c) appear in Table 7.1 on pages 276 to 279 in Chapter 7.

Component 5: Positive psychology feedback

This component focused on the resource mechanism that provided coachees with individual positive psychology feedback. The candidate programme component theories appear in CCMOcs 5a and 5b in Table 5:2 on pages 193 to 195 in Chapter 5. All of the respondents were supportive of the essence of the candidate component programme theory, although the evidence led to a refinement of the wording in the revised version. I grouped the evidence into four themes: “strengths feedback”, “personal growth”, “self-knowledge” and “explore feedback”. I identified four supportive TCMOcs. In one case, an interviewee recounted a negative experience, which I report under Theme 1 below.

Theme 1 – Strengths feedback

This theme concerned the resource mechanism that afforded coachees the opportunity to discover their strengths via the VIA measure and one-to-one feedback on it from the coach. The evidence is reflected in TCMOcs 19a and 19b (Appendix 8). In essence, in the context of those coachees that held challenging roles and being open to feedback, the resource gave rise to cognitive reasoning that raised knowledge of self-awareness and developing insight, plus emotional responses of feeling confident, raised self-efficacy and an increased sense of

empowerment. This led to behavioural changes in defining and refining goals with greater ambition on the basis of the knowledge of their strengths, taking bolder decisions and being motivated to help develop others. The positive patterns are illustrated by TMOC 19a (Appendix 8) and the following quotation:

> "I think it [the feedback] might have shaped some of the goals in terms of the size and the scale potentially, because there might be strengths… that they weren't aware of or they didn't particularly consider as strengths" (Interview 14, lines 173-176).

Another respondent expressed a similar view:

> "Having that better understanding of yourself gives you that confidence to achieve, and confidence in your ability to do it. I think being reminded that you have strengths and be positive can only be beneficial" (Interview 20, lines 425-428).

On the negative side, as detailed in TCMOc 19b, Appendix 8), some respondents did not warm to the VIA strengths measure as an instrument, possibly because, as it is used principally as a research tool, it does not possess the polished presentation of some other, more commercially based, products such as the MBTI. In such cases, the respondents relied more heavily on the one-to-one feedback and the Mindspring (2015) card-sort aided conversation with the coach:

> "Overall it [the VIA strengths measure] didn't make an impact and I didn't enjoy the strengths exercise, but, when we had the verbal conversation, I got more out of it. I felt a bit dismissive of it...without the [card-sort exercise] it would have been really unhelpful for me." (Interview 18, lines 499-504).

As previously discussed (pp. 203 to 211), this theme is linked to the theme of "knowledge, understanding and skills" in the positive psychology knowledge and skills component. That theme identified the perceived benefits of working with

one's strengths in the coaching engagement, whilst this current theme concerns the means of measurement of such strengths.

Theme 2 – Personal growth

A supporting theme emerged concerning the importance of personal growth. This emphasised the importance of coachees maintaining an open mind, optimising their use of positive feedback to grow and develop through pursuing their coaching objectives. These patterns are described in TCMOc 20 (Appendix 8) and illustrated by the following quotation:

> "If you're going to enter into a coaching relationship or a mentoring relationship, you've got to be open to development, because that's what they are all about. So, if you're not open to feedback, and honest feedback, what are you really getting out of that relationship?" (Interview 13, lines 471-476).

Theme 3 – Self-knowledge

This theme reinforced the importance, particularly for those who are new to the role, of having access to positive psychology feedback, raising their motivation to self-reflect and examine their leadership style, and to encourage similar positive behaviours in their staff (TCMOc 21, Appendix 8). This was not always received wholeheartedly by everyone, as illustrated in the following interview extract:

> *"Researcher: how do you think the positive feedback you received from psychological measures such as strengths (VIA), MBTI, 360 has affected the goals you have set and pursued through the coaching programme?*
>
> Respondent: I'm not sure really about any direct impact on the goals. Again, where I was in terms of my length of time in the [role], it was just a useful refresher of where I was with the Myers Briggs, and reminding me to look at my team, where I was with my style as a leader. It reminded me of different people and different

> approaches... So, I did use it with them" (Interview 18, lines 416-431).

Theme 4 – Explore feedback

A very clear theme emerged relating to the opportunity to explore different sources of feedback with the coach at length and in depth, something that many respondents felt they had not had chance to do on previous occasions when they have completed feedback measures. The details are in TCMOc 22 (Appendix 8). In essence, coachees who were open to exploring their feedback were more likely to engage in the cognitive activities of reframing, making wider connections with the organisational context and focus on strengths rather than dwell on weaknesses. Emotional responses included raised levels of confidence, feeling motivated and energised. Outcome patterns included taking better informed leadership decisions and action, increased health and wellbeing, experimenting with novel leadership approaches and applying the positive psychology principles beyond their immediate work circumstances. These patterns are illustrated in the following quotation:

> "I think having the [one-to-one] feedback rather than just doing the tests and thinking about it yourself, I think it means that you have more of an idea of how this can practically affect what you do and also I think it has meant that I have focused on the positive aspects of it… I think it does make you focus on how you can use your strengths in a more practical sense. And also, I think, how they can fit into the goals." (Interview 1, lines 256-263).

As previously observed, this theme showed similarities to other themes involving exploring, such as "exploring theory" in the positive psychology knowledge and skills component (pp. 211 to 212) and "exploring" in

relation to innovative thinking in the positive reframing component (pp. 224 to 225).

Researcher's observations

My observations largely confirmed the findings as above. In addition, I observed some broader organisational development outcomes including increasing levels of creativity in project scoping and conceptualisation and applying positive psychology concepts to staff and team development.

Component 5 summary

This component generated a largely positive response from respondents, but with an important caveat that not all of the positive psychology feedback activities hold equal appeal. A note of caution was therefore sounded relating to the choice of positive psychology feedback measures. The evidence emphasises the relevance of coachees occupying complex and challenging leadership roles. It also adds new data on engaging in personal growth, raising self-awareness, confidence and efficacy and responding constructively to feedback. An important extension to the original thinking is an emphasis on wider organisational perspectives and applications with respect to goal-defining/refining and achievement. Evidence relating to feelings of alienation arising from the feedback instruments and challenging and/or ignoring the results indicated that a refinement was necessary to the rival component theory.

I discuss how the component programme theory and rival theory were refined on pages 268 to 271 in Chapter 7. The refined component theory and rival theory (RCMOcs 5a and 5b) appear in Table 7.1 on pages 276 to 279 in Chapter 7.

Component 6: Positive learning

This component focused on the resource mechanism that provided coachees with the opportunity to engage in learning in a positive way. The candidate programme component theories appear in CCMOcs 5a and 5b in Table 5:2 on pages 193 to 195 in Chapter 5. The results were less supportive than those seen in other components. All of the respondents were supportive of the principles espoused in the candidate programme component theory; however, in practice their experience did not necessarily match up to them. I identified four themes: “framework”, “time and effort”, “positive reinforcement” and “learning policy”. In four cases, respondents recounted negative experiences, and, in two cases, neutral experiences.

Theme 1 –Framework

A theme was identified concerning the positive learning framework provided as part of the coaching programme, principally by the learning diary. This mechanism produced polarised responses, as demonstrated in TCMOcs 23a and 23b (Appendix 8). Coachees with a preference for order and who embrace the idea of reflexive learning found their own ways to conduct it and use it in shaping and pursuing their coaching outcomes (TCMOc 23a, Appendix 8):

> "Having the learning diary as a framework is useful as before and after each session [it] helps me focus on what you need to do. I don't write a lot, but enough to remind me of the main points, but having them is really useful. If I didn't have that I might find the coaching sessions useful but could forget and not make the most of them" (Interview 4, lines 121-125).

There appeared to be similarities with the theme of "structure" observed in respect of the positive coaching relationship component, where some respondents thought the coaching relationship provided structure through a "psychological contract" to fulfil their coaching actions and discussed on page 219 earlier in this chapter.

Others, who were less inclined to use reflexive learning, or who perceived the learning diary format as restrictive or onerous or who had had poor previous experiences of it, were less likely to be motivated to engage in it and not realise the full potential of their coaching experience (TMOc 23b):

> "I think the barriers were [in writing it] down, it's [the learning] in my head and the boxes are small, aren't they, and maybe I felt that it had to be succinct, I don't know…I didn't feel as though it could be a stream of consciousness" (Interview 3, lines 581-584).

Another respondent expressed a resistance to the formalised way of recording learning but nonetheless applied their own methods of learning:

> "I found that keeping the learning diary has been an artificial process. I would probably do it as part of a promotion process to provide evidence of competence, but not the learning. Learning comes from what you have done. For me, in coaching, the learning has happened in the session. Personality and style are important. Writing the learning down is not a natural process for me. I'm more of an instinctive learner. I'm not really interested in tracking change. I don't respond well to a tight structure [the questions, spaces and boxes in the diary]. If it had been in free form it might have been more appealing" (Interview 10, lines 67-74).

Theme 2 – Time and effort

Respondents provided an insight into the ways in which the reflective process could become more attractive, as shown in TCMOcs 24a, 24b and 24c (Appendix 8). For example, time pressures and a sense of immediacy led to a call for in-session reflection time and structure. This also chimed with the everyday police operational practices of briefing and debriefing in close proximity to events:

> "I could have written in free form, for example, at the end of the coaching session before the meeting ended. We are very accustomed to de-briefing straight after a job. Asking the question, "what have you got out of today?" The time element is important, too – once the moment has passed, it's back into other things… I am very reflective in my learning but the process of writing it down has been a disincentive for me" (Interview 10, lines 74-87).

Perspectives on the barriers to recording learning as part of the reflexive process were provided by other respondents as demonstrated in TCMOc 24b Appendix 8). For example, lack of "official" time and negative perceptions acted as constraining contexts with a limiting effect on goal ambition:

> "I think we have quite a negative perception around writing stuff down like this and reflecting and learning diaries, so I'm not certain... it could have gone to the point where you choose something [as a goal] that's fairly simple to be able to write down because it makes their lives easier, but then that might limit the stretch of the goal" (Interview 14, lines 195-200).

"Time" also appeared in the "positive organisational support" theme in the positive organisational involvement component discussed earlier in this chapter (pp. 232 to 234). In that case, it referred to the need for official time (or lack of it) to be allocated to partake in coaching activities and the implied permission to take part that such time allowance suggested to the coachees. The official allowance of time appeared to be an influential factor that could affect the amount of time and effort some coachees were prepared to expend on their coaching programmes.

For others, the provision of a learning diary had little effect on their motivation to use it, except for their own limited purposes (TCMOc 24c, Appendix 8):

> "It probably didn't impact on me significantly, the learning diary, I just tended to do it just before we were meant to meet, so I perhaps didn't use it as you intended me to, to be honest…[I used it] as a reminder and preparation for the next meeting…so, it was fine for that. I didn't see that it brought any challenge to my thinking really, just helpful to re-visit and re-cap" (Interview 18, lines 548-557).

Theme 3 – Positive reinforcement

Those who used the learning diary as a framework for self-reinforcement, especially in the gap between meetings, felt motivated to use their reflexive learning in pursuing their coaching outcomes and engage in deeper processing (TCMOc 25a, Appendix 8):

> "[The use of a learning diary based on positive psychology principles is] another reinforcer. I think reflection is a trait that comes easier to some than others. It's a bit of a discipline even for those who find it a straightforward process to actually do it, because it's only by doing that, that you begin to understand what the learning is" (Interview 19, lines 406-409).

There was evidence to suggest that the act of using reflexive learning to self-reinforce depends on coachees' perceptions of value and the ease with which they enter into it (TCMOc 25b, Appendix 8):

> "I think that part of the difficulty people find is, if they are pre-disposed to it or not, is "well, I've got a blank piece of paper here and my brain's all a bit befuddled, what am I supposed to be looking for, what am I supposed to be recording", and I think there is a whole lot of work, actually, around how [coaches] could help people approach that process" (Interview 18, lines 415-419).

Theme 4 – Learning policy

The fourth theme linked individual reflexive learning practice with organisational and/or national policy, as described in TCMOcs 26a, 26b and 26c (Appendix 8). When policies are aligned from national to local levels, coachees were more likely to perceive them as relevant and valuable and be more likely to use them in their coaching processes (TCMOc 26a, Appendix 8). Alternatively, where there is patchy take-up of national initiatives and the use of reflexive learning is not consistent in the organisation, coachees are less likely to use it and may not optimise their development (TCMOc 26b, Appendix 8):

> *"Researcher: has there been any impact by any national initiatives, such as the College of Policing's CPD [Continuing Professional Development] approach? Has [the organisation] embraced and cascaded the approach?*
>
> Respondent: perhaps not as much as it could do. We've promoted the College of Policing Membership Scheme, which has a heavy focus on CPD. I think the organisation acknowledges that CPD is a requirement…I think they see it as something that has to happen…[The] requirement to conduct reflective practice is not part of our cultural norm" (Interview 20, lines 455-515).

Other respondents felt that learning policy had had no impact on their motivation to engage in reflexive learning (TCMOc 26c, Appendix 8):

> "The organisation doesn't use learning diaries and doesn't share learning enough. They use them for certain specialities, e.g. firearms, but not generally. National policy such as reflective learning in continuous professional development has not yet filtered through and not introduced or embedded in the organisation" (Interview 16, lines 330-334).

Although this theme principally concerned the effect of national learning policy on reflexive learning in the coaching programme, it is related to the theme of "organisational development" in the positive organisational involvement

component as discussed on pages 227 to 228. In that theme, the focus was on the perceived “fit” between the coaching programme and organisational leadership development policy.

Researcher observations

My observations corroborated the evidence. However, I observed that, despite the lack of enthusiasm for the learning diary as a tool, much reflexive learning did in fact take place through other, more informal, methods, such as follow-up conversations in subsequent coaching meetings. I also observed, even though the use of the formal means of reflexivity was limited, evidence of learning maturation, for example, through an increase in advanced thinking in discussions about positive psychology exercises.

Component 6 summary

The evidence relating to the provision of a learning diary based on positive psychology principles as a framework for learning, therefore, does not support the proposed theory. However, the positive psychology coaching itself was thought to support the processes of reflection and learning, but perhaps in a more holistic and individual way. The evidence introduces time as a resource mechanism and seeing the connections with wider learning policy as a reasoning mechanism. It also adds the devising of coachees’ own reflexive learning methods as an outcome. The evidence suggested that the rival theory should be refined to reflect the potentially negative and neutral causation chains.

I discuss how the component programme theory and rival theory were refined on pages 271 to 275 in Chapter 7. The refined component theory and rival theory (RCMOcs 6a, 6b and 6c) appear in Table 7.1 on pages 276 to 279 in Chapter 7.

6.4 For whom, in what circumstances, how and why might a future programme work?

The final analysis that I present in this chapter is derived from interview evidence collected from all respondents relating to the kinds of roles and/or groups within the organisation that they think might benefit most from a similar coaching programme and in what circumstances. It has particular relevance to Phase 7 of the research design as outlined in Chapter 4 (pp. 155 to 156), by helping the organisation apply their limited resources in the most effective way. In this phase, I worked with the organisation to determine the impact my research had had on future iterations of the programme. The question 'for whom, in what circumstances, how and why might a future programme work?' was of prime importance to the organisation. I found that the respondents' suggestions could be grouped into the following categories:

Table 6.2 : What might work for whom, under what circumstances and why?

What might work for whom?	Under what circumstances?	Why?
Volunteer senior leaders	Non-mandatory programme: "As it is a voluntary scheme it may work for those who volunteer!" (Interview 6, lines 143-144) "It might not work for some, but it depends on their levels of expectation and commitment." (Interview 6, lines 144-146)	Self-selection and self-deselection: "the programme might attract those for whom it might work, and others might self-deselect because they think it is not for them." (Interview 6, lines 151-153) "Whether you can mandate something like this, I don't know. If people are not doing it voluntarily it's not going to be a success." (Interview 18, lines 128-130) "If you are volunteering, you are already in that positive mindset, "how can I learn, how can this enhance my thinking, my leadership skills?", whatever that might be. You are already in that mind frame." (Interview 13, lines 199-200)
Drive/motivation	Ambitious senior professionals: "Ambitious people and senior professionals are likely to come forward". (Interview 6, lines 144-145)	
Departmental/cultural differences/organisational climate	Departmental differences: "Whether people come from certain areas or departments might have an impact" (Interview 6, line 150)	Silos: "Very few people have worked in both [types of role]. Each group thinks they are busier than the other." (Interview 12, lines 67-68)

	"Possibly there could be some cultural differences, for example, [specialist roles] versus operational officers and staff". (Interview 12, lines 65-66) "Different departments very much function in different ways. There are a multitude of different dynamics, there are very distinct categories of people in the organisation and ways of doing things, some of those are more forward-thinking, some of those are more rigid, so I think that would impact on how it's perceived." (Interview 20, lines 96-100) Organisational culture: "Organisationally, within policing, there is a massive amount of negativity and whether it's because we are dealing with offenders and criminality and sort of the negative side of life, I think there's a real cultural negative approach to dealing with business, looking at the faults." (Interview 18, lines 76-79)	Management style: "It's management styles in most departments. I think those who are more flexible and forward-thinking, more current, as opposed to those who are very rigid and disciplined in what they do and very strict and, you know, haven't ever touched anything like this before, I think it would be quite a cultural shock for them." (Interview 20, lines 109-112) Environment: "Within policing and its widest context and certainly within [the force] there's a real need to do more work around positive psychology and how we view the world. We work in a very negative environment." (Interview 18, lines 86-89)
Individual differences	Personality: "There might be individual differences involved" (Interview 6, line 151)	

	"People with individual personalities [may] respond better to it than others" (Interview 11, lines 77-78)	
Experienced/inexperienced coachees	Coaching experience: "It is also likely that people who have experienced coaching before might respond differently to the coaching programme than those who haven't had the chance before." (Interview 11, lines 77-85)	
Those who are open to coaching	Openness to coaching: "Some people will be more open to coaching than others." (Interview 12, line 62) Barriers: "I think the barriers would be there and you might have to break those barriers down…, but I think once they've bought into it, they can see that actually this isn't a threat." (Interview 16, lines 68-71) Programme appeal: "I think a lot of people would definitely respond positively as I think there's enough scope within it for people to take on what helps them, and I think you could use it in lots of different ways, so I think it would appeal to quite a wide variety of people, really." (Interview 1, lines 90-93)	Volunteers: "we have asked for volunteers so hopefully they will be open to this approach." (Interview 12, lines 62-63) Trusted programme: "This is a really trusted and sensitive programme, where you can have open conversations about you as a person, and I can't see why others wouldn't benefit from that." (Interview 16, lines 71-73) Perceiving benefit: "I think there will always be a minority of people who just don't really see the benefits of something like this, but I can't think they'd be in particular groups necessarily. I think it could be helpful in any role as long as they are individuals who are willing and

		open to it, really." (Interview 1, lines 90-93)
Working with strengths	Strengths-focused programme: "working with strengths is likely to work well but working with weaknesses could be more difficult". (Interview 12, lines 63-65)	
Police officers/police staff top group	Police officer development: those wanting to develop "soft" skills: "on the operational side, there was a lot of the senior team who felt that they hadn't had a lot of development on soft skills over their time." (Interview 15, lines 84-85) Police staff development: "In terms of the support team side of things, I think they'd be quite open-minded towards coaching, and I think definitely the focus of it needs to be on the positive side of things." (Interview 15, lines 100-103) "The support function, I don't think there is anything - probably the organisation is starting to think about development and people progressing in terms of police staff - but this is something definitely people in those sorts of functions would benefit from." (Interview 1, lines 76-79) Development for all senior leaders: "I can't understand why other senior	General development: "I think because we have had a culture organisationally where there has been a sense of staff as opposed to officers being of lesser value, that it should focus things on the positive aspects than focusing on something that could turn into a bit of a whinge-fest. So, I think, in terms of the most senior leaders in the organisation, that top group if you like, I think it should be a given." (Interview 15, lines 103-107) Police staff development: "It might help on the staff side where people don't necessarily have that obvious career path or obvious development opportunities." (Interview 1, lines 82-84)

	leaders in the force wouldn't see how positive this can be on them, from the little tips and the reading material and the ability to sit down and discuss what went right, what went wrong with somebody who is not necessarily operationally involved but who can help you through that minefield, I can't see a good reason why not to recommend it." (Interview 16, lines 47-52)	
Promotion and equality	Levelling the playing field: "I think coaching, or coaching that is formal coaching, obviously with trained individuals based on career progression, would be very beneficial to the force, and fair and balanced, and open to all." (Interview 3, lines 144-146)	Bringing out the best in candidates: "It's about building confidence, I think, it's about building yourself up because we have a lot of people who are very good at what they do but they will get to the promotion process, they'll get into the interview and they'll just not perform… Lack of confidence, a lack of understanding so positive psychology when it is coached will be helpful." (Interview 3, lines 170-177)
Job role/autonomy	Capacity to bring about change: "I think that people's roles and the levels of empowerment that they have would affect how they would react to it in terms of whether they have the capacity to change things" (Interview 20, lines 73-75)	Relevance: "how soul-destroying if you can identify all these things [that need to change], but actually the organisation doesn't allow the opportunity [for them to change them]." (Interview 20, lines 85-86)

To summarise, the evidence suggests the stakeholders, including the participants in the coaching programme, felt that the groups in the organisation that might benefit from a positive psychology approach to coaching would be:

1. The senior leadership group generally; in particular:
2. Volunteer senior leaders
3. Senior leaders who have drive and ambition
4. Senior leaders who are open to positive psychology coaching
5. Senior leaders who are interested in working with strengths
6. Senior leaders who are either police officers or police staff
7. Senior leaders working towards promotion
8. Senior leaders who have job/role autonomy
9. Newly appointed senior leaders.

I examine these outcomes more fully when I discuss the impact of my research on the study's stakeholders in Chapter 8 (pp. 312 to 321).

6.5 Chapter summary

In this chapter, I have presented the findings from the realist-informed exploration phase. These have included the results of a simple numeric analysis of outcomes. The substance of the chapter, however, has focused on the results from a realist-informed thematic analysis of the evidence gained from the semi-structured interviews and participant observation. For each of the programme's six components, I have examined four key themes, 24 in total. I have also presented the results of an analysis of the categories of people in the organisation for whom the stakeholders think a positive psychology approach to future coaching

programmes would work and in what circumstances to aid the work with the organisation on future programmes in the final action research stage.

By presenting the study's findings in this chapter, I have advanced the thesis' main arguments as follows:

1. I have demonstrated how positive psychology can bring theoretical and practical value to the knowledge and practice of executive coaching and the areas where it might not;
2. Some of the evidence suggests a role for coaching that includes concern for well-being, bearing in mind the challenging cultural context in the police service in England and Wales and therefore positive psychology coaching may be an appropriate genre to employ; and
3. The realist methodological orientation and methods employed seem to have produced a detailed and nuanced account of how this psychology coaching programme has worked.

I now proceed to present how I used the evidence in this chapter to refine the programme theory (Phase 6 of the realist action research cycle, "Reflect: theory refinement") in Chapter 7.

Chapter 7: Refining Realist Programme Theory

7.1 Chapter introduction

At the beginning of Chapter 4, when I briefly described the programme theory refinement phase of the realist action research design (Phase 6 in Figure 4:1 on page 111), I stated that I would return to discuss it in detail in a separate chapter. This is the focus of this chapter. As I mentioned in Chapter 4, theory refinement is another substantial step in the realist action research cycle, and, like the initial theory building exercise described in Chapter 5, deserves separate and detailed consideration.

The purpose of this chapter, then, is to present an in-depth account of the refining of the initial programme theory. I demonstrate how, in Phase 6 of the research design, the initial realist programme theory as presented in Chapter 5 was improved by applying the outcomes of the exploratory phase of the realist action research cycle (Phase 5, pp. 148 – 154). The findings from the exploratory phase were reported in Chapter 6. The key difference between the initial theorising reported in Chapter 5 and the theorising in this chapter is that the theories presented here have been enhanced according to the evidence. At the end of this exercise, theories were no longer “candidate” theories, but were “refined” ones.

I start by considering the refinement of the six component-level theories before bringing them together to refine the overall programme theory and presenting an integrated visual model. I then move on to discuss the findings and the outcomes from the theory refinement in the next chapter, Chapter 8.

7.2 Refined component-level programme theory

Based on the evidence, I revisited the original theory-building stage and the component CMO configurations to refine them in the light of the new information as set out below.

Component 1 - Coaching sessions: Positive psychology knowledge and skills

The initial component theory was conceptualised in the following way, originally shown as Figure 5.4 on page 171 in Chapter 5:

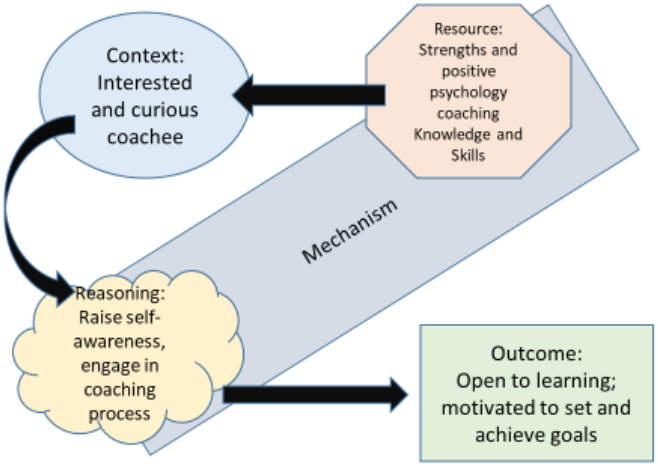

Figure 5.4: Initial coaching sessions: positive psychology knowledge and skills CMOc

As well as supporting the initial theory, the evidence described in Chapter 6 (pp. 203 to 211) suggested that the voluntary status of the coachees, their openness to coaching, the importance of understanding as well as knowledge and skills relating to strengths and positive psychology approaches, and on raising self-confidence, self-esteem and self-belief should be highlighted. The theory was therefore refined as follows:

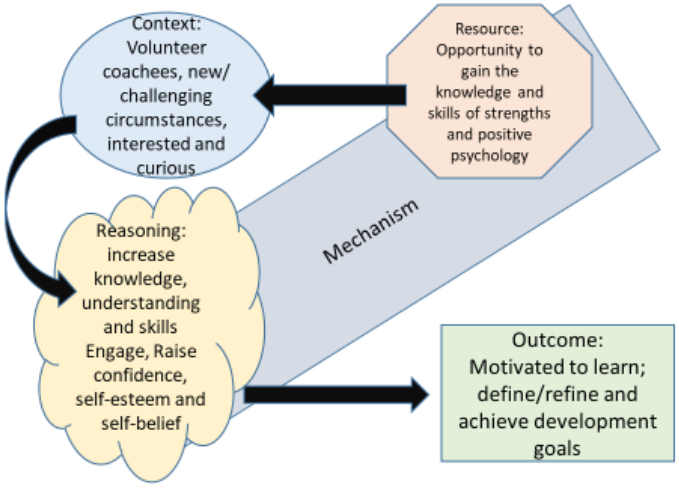

Figure 7:1: Refined coaching sessions: positive psychology knowledge and skills CMOc

The initial rival component theory had been written as a negative version of the main theory as follows:

> "Coachees who are not interested or curious and who are provided with the knowledge and skills of strengths and positive psychology coaching are more likely to be unresponsive to the coaching approach, more likely to fail to acquire the knowledge and the skills to apply it, less likely to engage with the coaching process, be less

motivated to learn and set and achieve development goals" (CCMOc 1b, Table 5.2, Chapter 5, p. 193-195).

This was also refined according to the evidence, highlighting the potential outcomes of a more specific context, that of taking a deficit approach to coaching:

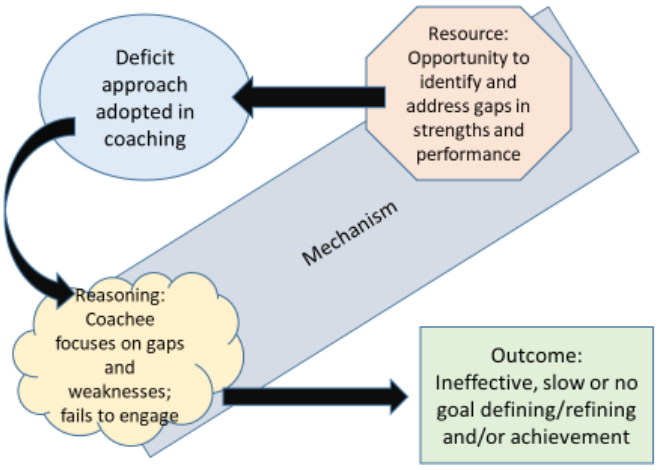

Figure 7.2: Refined coaching sessions: positive psychology knowledge and skills rival CMOc

A narrative version of these refinements is shown in the refined context-mechanism-outcome configurations (abbreviated to RCMOcs) 1a and 1b in Table 7:1 on pages 276 to 279 later in this chapter.

I applied the same theory refinement process to the remaining five component theories, as summarised in the following sections.

Component 2 – Coaching sessions: Positive coaching relationship

The initial component theory was conceptualised as follows, originally shown as Figure 5.5 on page 175 in Chapter 5:

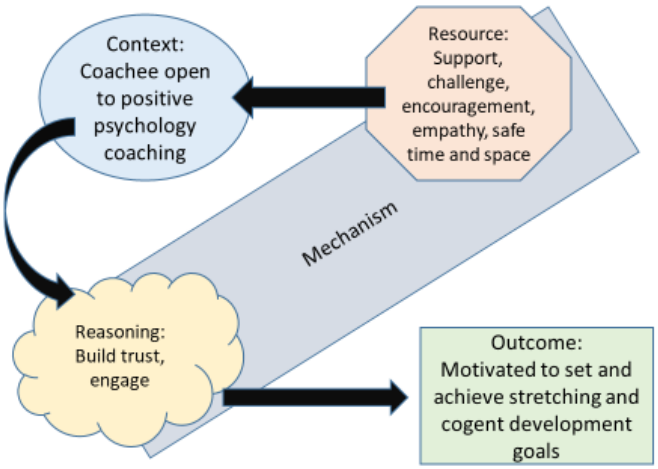

Figure 5.5: Initial coaching sessions: positive coaching relationship CMOc

The evidence supported the initial component theory. Additional evidence suggested that it should be refined to include two new aspects of context, those of openness to a positive coaching relationship and the role of complex goals, two new reasoning mechanisms of raised self-confidence and self-efficacy, and two new outcomes, those of developing leadership ability and resilience. These refinements were then theorised as:

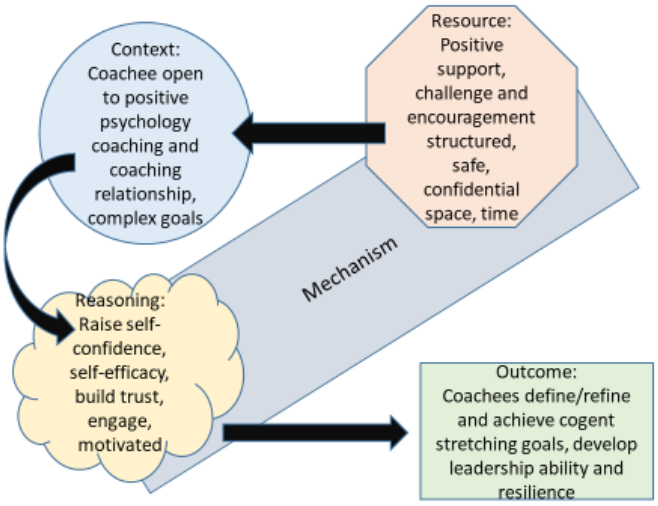

Figure 7.3: Refined coaching sessions: positive coaching relationship CMOc

The initial rival component theory had been written as a negative version of the main theory as follows:

> "Coachees who are not open to a positive psychology coaching relationship and who are provided with an unsupportive coaching relationship are less likely to build trust in the process and/or coach and fail to set and achieve their goals" (CCMOc 2b, Table 5.2, Chapter 5, p. 193-195).

Based on the evidence, the rival theory was refined to highlight the importance of the willingness of the coachee to engage with the coach and the coaching process, as follows:

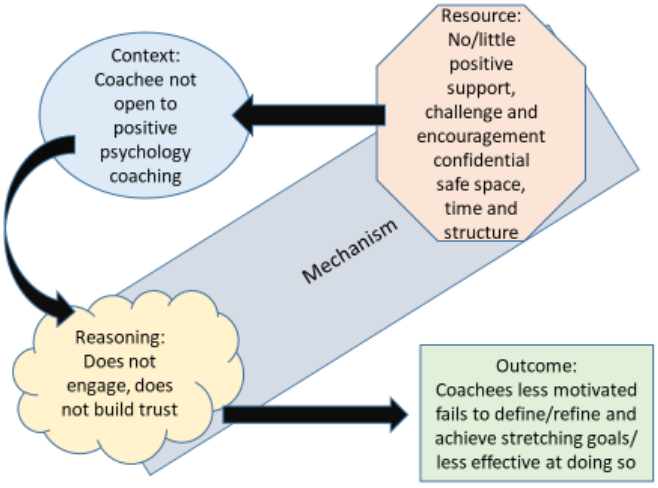

Figure 7.4: Refined coaching sessions: positive coaching relationship rival CMOc

The refined component theory and rival theory appear in RCMOcs 2a and 2b in Table 7.1 on pages 276 to 279 later in this chapter.

Component 3 – Coaching sessions: Positive reframing

The initial component theory was conceptualised as follows, originally shown as Figure 5.6 on page 178 in Chapter 5:

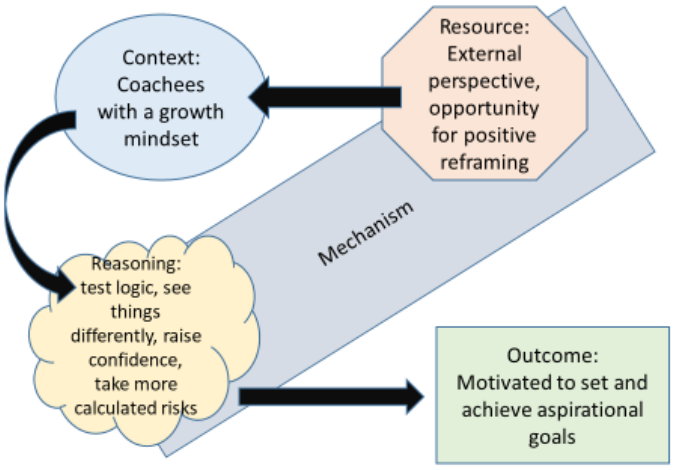

Figure 5.6: Initial coaching sessions: positive reframing CMOc

Again, the evidence was supportive of the candidate component theory. However, it was refined to reflect more in the resource mechanism of the opportunity afforded to coachees to develop a positive perspective through the coaching to explore their thinking, the reasoning mechanisms of raised self-confidence and self-efficacy and the outcome of the motivation to *do* things differently rather than just *see* things differently:

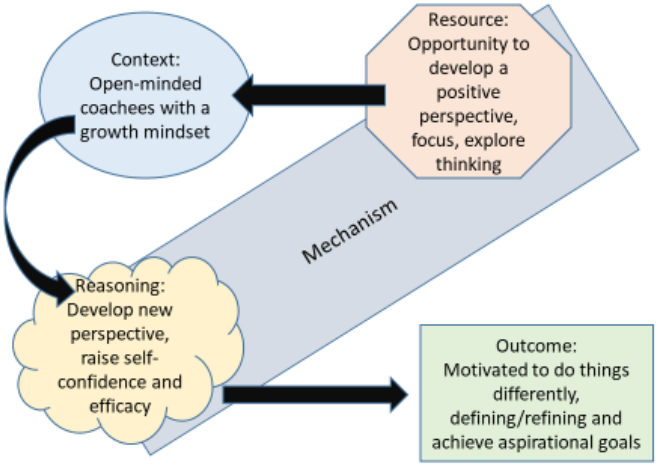

Figure 7.5: Refined coaching sessions: positive reframing CMOc

The initial rival component theory had been written as a negative version of the main theory as follows:

> "Coachees who are not open-minded or have a fixed mindset and who are provided with access to an external perspective and the opportunity to reframe their current standpoints are less likely to test their internal logic, identify their strengths, see things differently, raise their confidence, take more calculated risks and be less motivated to set and achieve aspirational development goals" (CCMOc 3b, Table 5.2, Chapter 5, p. 193-195).

The refined rival component theory reflects the evidence of the potentially negative outcomes if these resources and contexts are not present:

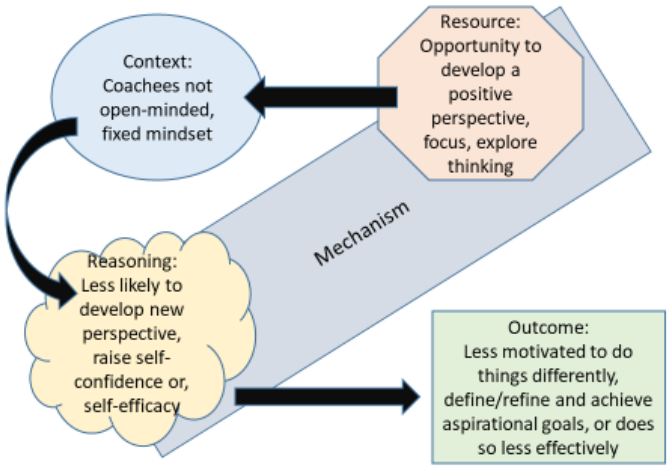

Figure 7.6: Refined coaching sessions: positive reframing rival CMOc

The refined versions of the theory and rival theory are shown as RCMOcs 3a and 3b in Table 7:1 on pages 276 to 279 later in this chapter.

Component 4: Positive organisational involvement

The initial component theory was conceptualised as follows, originally shown as Figure 5.7 on page 183 in Chapter 5:

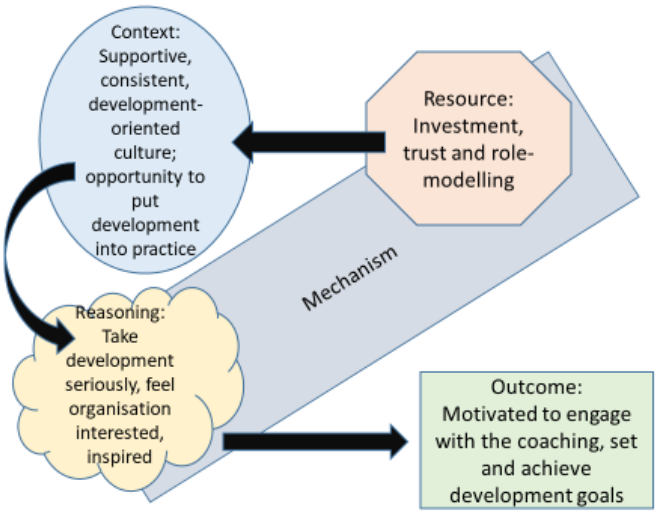

Figure 5.7: Initial positive organisational involvement CMOc

As noted in Chapter 6, pages 226 to 236, the evidence supported the theory but not the lived experience of the component. The refined theory adds as context the importance of coachees' perceptions of a fair organisational culture and of a purpose for their positive psychology coaching, reasoning mechanisms of feeling supported and valued by local and organisational management, feeling that their development is being taken seriously by the organisation and feeling inspired and the raising of organisational awareness and efficacy:

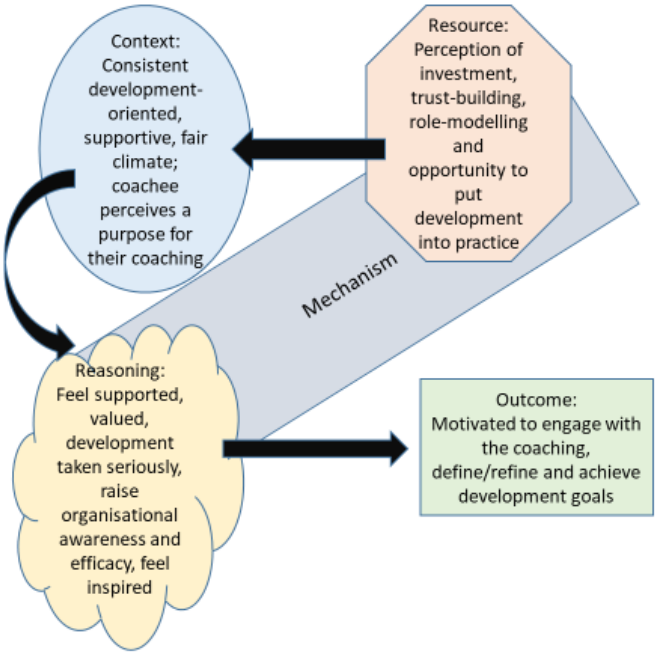

Figure 7.7: Refined positive organisational involvement CMOc

The initial rival component theory had been written as a negative version of the main theory as follows:

> "Coachees who perceive the organisational culture as unsupportive, inconsistent and not development-orientated and who are not provided with the organisation's investment, trust, role modelling and the opportunity to put their development into practice are less likely to take their development seriously, feel that the organisation is interested in their career development, feel inspired, be less motivated to engage with the coaching and set and achieve their development goals" (CCMOc 4b, Table 5.2, Chapter 5, p. 193-195).

On the basis of the evidence, this was refined and also one new one was added to reflect the potentially negative or neutral outcomes if these resource

mechanisms and contexts are not present, or that coachees' perceptions of them are mixed. The refined negative rival CMOc is as follows:

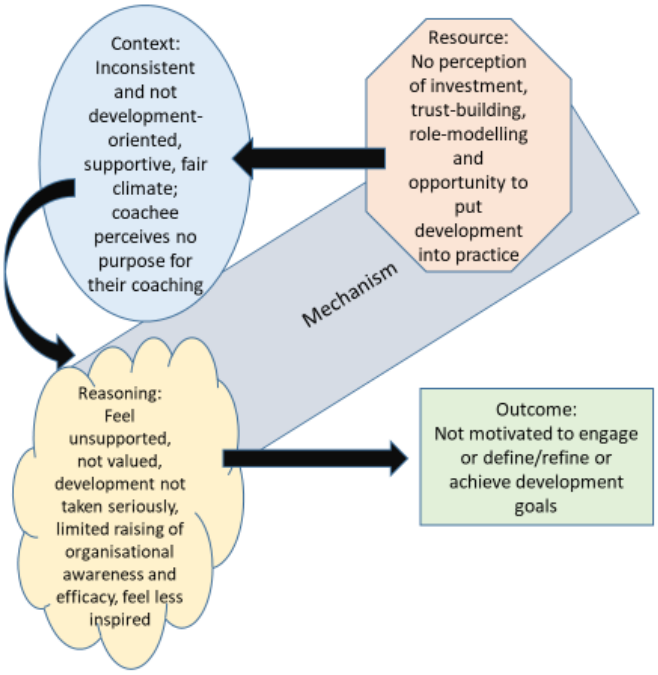

Figure 7.8: Refined positive organisational involvement rival CMOc (negative)

The new neutral rival CMOc is as follows:

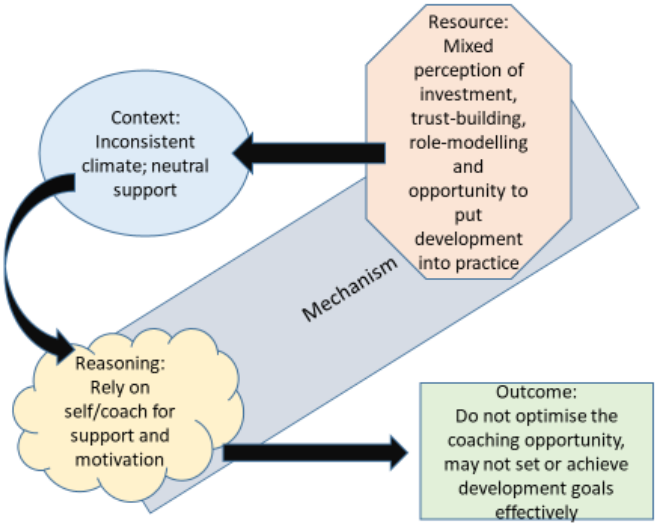

Figure 7.9: Refined positive organisational involvement rival CMOc (neutral)

The revised theories appear as RCMOcs 4a, 4b and 4c in Table 7:1 on pages 276 to 279 later in this chapter.

Component 5: Positive psychology feedback

The initial component theory was conceptualised as follows, originally shown as Figure 5.8 on page 186 in Chapter 5:

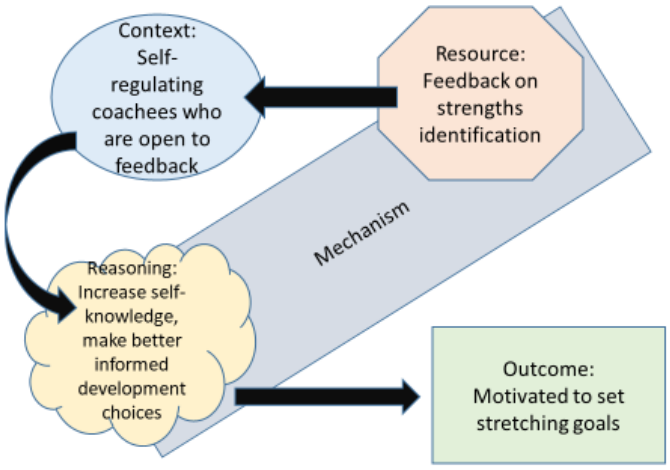

Figure 5.8: Initial positive psychology feedback CMOc

The evidence demonstrated support for the initial component theory. It also highlighted the relevance of coachees occupying complex and challenging leadership roles as contexts and engaging in personal growth, raising self-awareness, confidence and efficacy and responding constructively to feedback as reasoning mechanisms. Additions to outcomes include wider organisational considerations in respect to goal-defining/refining and achievement. The refined theory is as follows:

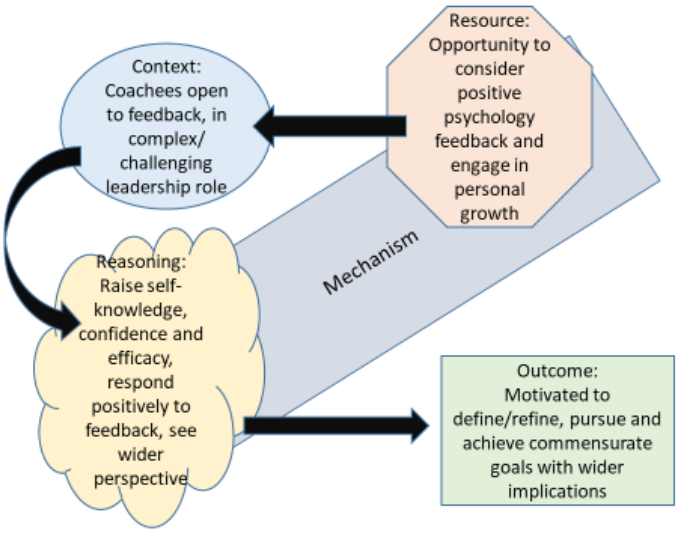

Figure 7.10: Refined positive psychology feedback CMOc

The initial rival component theory had been written as a negative version of the main theory as follows:

> "Coachees who are not self-regulating and closed to feedback and who receive accurate information about their strengths are less likely to raise their self-knowledge, not make better informed development choices and be less motivated to set stretching development goals" (CCMOc 5b, Table 5.2, Chapter 5, p. 193-195).

The evidence indicated a degree of scepticism relating to some of the positive psychology feedback measures and exercises. The rival theory was therefore refined as follows:

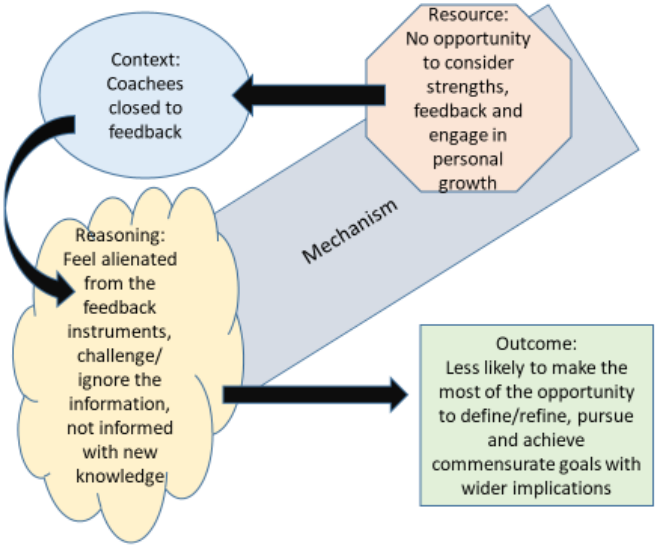

Figure 7.11: Refined positive psychology feedback rival CMOc

The revised theories appear as RCMOcs 5a and 5b in Table 7:1 on pages 276 to 279 later in this chapter.

Component 6: Positive learning

The initial component theory was conceptualised as follows, originally shown as Figure 5.9 on page 190 in Chapter 5:

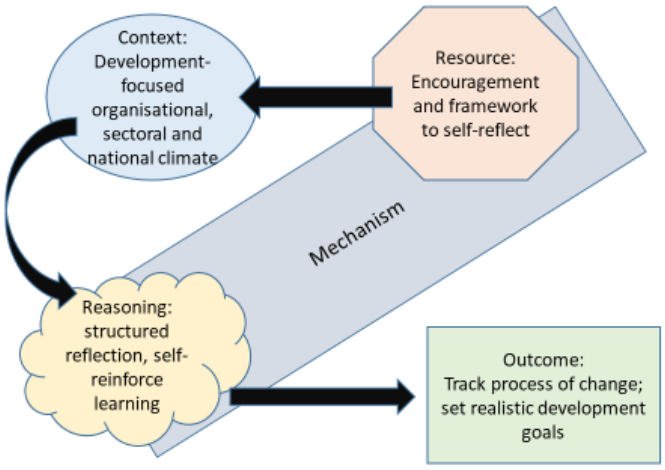

Figure 5.9: Initial positive psychology learning CMOc

The evidence relating to the provision of a learning diary based on positive psychology principles as a framework for learning did not generally support the proposed theory. However, some respondents did support it and some agreed in concept but differed in their lived experience. Evidence highlighted the coaching process itself as a framework to support reflexive learning. The evidence also identified time as a resource mechanism, seeing interplays with wider learning policy as a reasoning mechanism, and coachees' creation of their own reflexive learning methods as an outcome. This mixed evidence suggested that three separate refined versions of the component theory were necessary to reflect potentially positive, negative and neutral causation chains.

The refined positive CMOc is as follows:

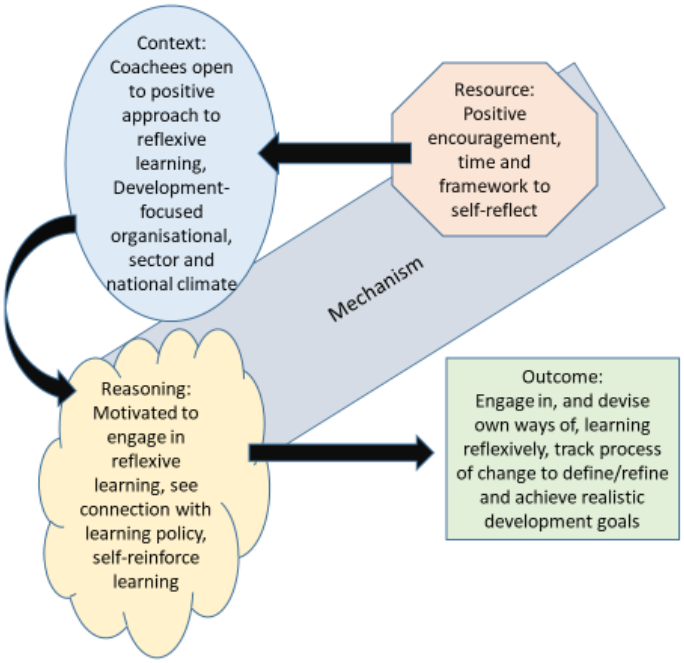

Figure 7.12: Refined positive psychology learning CMOc

The initial rival component theory had been written as a negative version of the main theory as follows:

> "Coachees who are resistant to reflective/reflexive learning and/or in a non-development-focused organisational, sector and national climate and are provided with encouragement and a framework to self-reflect are less likely to structure their self-reflection, self-reinforce their learning to track their process of change and be less likely to set and pursue realistic development goals" (CCMOc 6b, Table 5.2, Chapter 5, p. 193-195).

The negative refined CMOc is as follows:

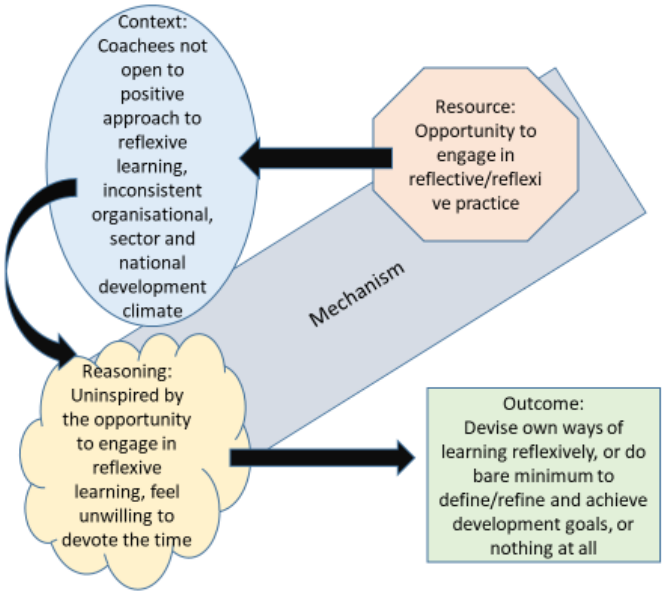

Figure 7.13: Refined positive psychology learning rival CMOc (negative)

The additional neutral CMOc is as follows:

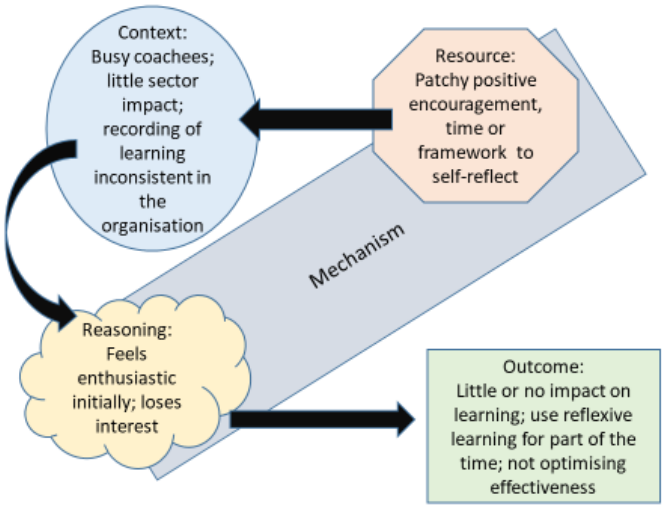

Figure 7.14: Refined positive psychology learning rival CMOc (neutral)

The revised theories appear as RCMOcs 6a, 6b and 6c in Table 7:1 on pages 276 to 279 later in this chapter.

Based on the heuristics shown above, I wrote a set of refined programme component theories, which, for ease of reference, I have drawn together in the matrix in Table 7.1 on the next page and highlighted the refined wording in yellow. Text that is not highlighted is the original wording in the initial component theories.

Table 7.1: Refined Component-Level Programme Theory

Component RCMOc	Enabling/constraining Contexts	Mechanism "Resource"	Mechanism "Reasoning"	Outcomes
RCMOc 1a Coaching sessions: Positive Psychology Knowledge and skills (Positive)	Volunteer coachees, coachees with new and/or challenging circumstances and who are interested and curious	And who are provided with the opportunity to gain the knowledge, understanding and skills of their strengths and positive psychology through coaching	Are more likely to increase knowledge, understanding and skills, engage with the coaching process, raise their self-confidence, self-esteem and self-belief	And be motivated to learn, define/refine and achieve development goals
RCMOc 1b Coaching sessions: Positive Psychology Knowledge and skills Deficit Approach (Negative)	Coachees who are coached and encouraged to take a deficit approach and focus on their weaknesses	Who have the opportunity to address gaps in their strengths and performance	Are more likely to focus on their deficiencies, less likely to engage with the coaching process	And be less motivated to learn and define/refine and achieve development goals or be less effective in doing so
RCMOc 2a Coaching sessions: Positive coaching relationship (Positive)	Coachees who are open to positive psychology coaching and a positive coaching relationship, who have complex goals	And who are positively supported, challenged and encouraged empathetically by the coach and provided with structured, safe and confidential time and space	Are more likely to raise their self-confidence and self-efficacy, build trust in the coach and the coaching process, engage with them	And be motivated to define/refine, pursue and achieve cogent and stretching development goals, develop leadership ability and resilience

Component RCMOc	Enabling/constraining Contexts	Mechanism "Resource"	Mechanism "Reasoning"	Outcomes
RCMOc 2b Coaching sessions: Positive coaching relationship (Negative)	Coachees who are not open to positive psychology coaching relationship	And do not take advantage of the opportunity to engage with the coaching process, support, challenge, encouragement or structured safe and confidential time and space	Are less likely to build trust in the coach and the coaching process or engage with it	And be less motivated to define/refine, pursue and achieve cogent and stretching development goals
RCMOc 3a Coaching sessions: Positive reframing (Positive)	Coachees who are open-minded with a growth mindset	And who are provided with the opportunity to develop a positive perspective, focus and explore their thinking	Are more likely to develop a new perspective, raise self-confidence and self-efficacy	And be motivated to do things differently and define/refine and achieving aspirational development goals
RCMOc 3b Coaching sessions: Positive reframing (Negative)	Coachees who are not open-minded, who have a fixed mindset	Who are provided with the opportunity to develop a positive perspective, focus and explore their thinking	Are less likely to develop a new perspective, raise self-confidence and self-efficacy	And be less motivated to do things differently or define/refine and achieve aspirational development goals
RCMOc 4a Positive Organisational Involvement (Positive)	Coachees who perceive the organisational culture as positively supportive, fair, consistent and development-orientated, and perceive a purpose for their positive psychology coaching	And who receive a coaching opportunity that invests in them, trusts them, provides them with positive role models and the prospect of putting their development into practice	Are more likely to feel supported and valued, that their development is taken seriously, raise their organisational awareness and efficacy, feel inspired	And be motivated to engage with the coaching to define/refine and achieve their development goals

Component RCMOc	Enabling/constraining Contexts	Mechanism "Resource"	Mechanism "Reasoning"	Outcomes
RCMOc 4b Positive Organisational Involvement (Negative)	Coachees who do not perceive the organisational culture as positively supportive, fair, consistent and development-orientated, or have no purpose for their positive psychology coaching	And who receive a coaching opportunity that does not invest in them, trust them, provide them with positive role models or the prospect of putting their development into practice	Are more likely to feel unsupported and under-valued, that their development is not taken seriously, fail to raise their organisational awareness and efficacy, feel uninspired	And not motivated to engage with the coaching to define/refine and achieve their development goals
RCMOc 4c Positive Organisational Involvement (Neutral)	In an organisational climate of inconsistency	Coachees who have a mixed perception of the investment, trust, role modelling and the opportunity to put their development into practice	Are more likely to rely on themselves/coach for support and motivation	Affecting the extent to which they define/refine, pursue and achieve their goals
RCMOc 5a Positive Psychology Feedback (Positive)	Coachees who are open to feedback and occupy complex, challenging leadership roles	And who through positive psychology coaching receive the opportunity to explore positive psychological feedback and engage in personal growth	Are more likely to raise their self-knowledge, confidence and efficacy, respond positively to feedback, see the wider organisational perspective	And be motivated to define/refine, pursue and achieve commensurate goals with wider applications beyond themselves

Component RCMOc	Enabling/constraining Contexts	Mechanism "Resource"	Mechanism "Reasoning"	Outcomes
RCMOc 5b Positive Psychology Feedback (Negative)	Coachees who are closed to feedback	And who do not receive the opportunity to explore positive psychological feedback and engage in personal growth	Are more likely to feel alienated from the feedback instruments, challenge or ignore the information, uninformed by the new knowledge	And less likely to make the most of the opportunity to define/refine, pursue and achieve commensurate goals, or see the wider applications beyond themselves
RCMOc 6a Positive Learning (Positive)	Coachees who are open to a positive approach to reflexive learning, respond to structure and perceive a consistent development-focused organisational, sector and national climate	Who are provided with positive encouragement, time and a framework to self-reflect	Are more likely to be motivated to engage in reflexive learning, see the connection with wider learning policy and self-reinforce their learning	And devise their own methods to track their process of change and to define/refine and achieve realistic development goals
RCMOc 6b Positive Learning (Negative)	Coachees who are not open to a positive approach to reflexive learning and perceive an inconsistent organisational, sector and national development climate	Who receive the opportunity to engage in reflective/reflexive practice	Are more likely to feel uninspired by the opportunity and unwilling to devote the time	And either devise their own way of learning reflexively, do the bare minimum or do no reflexive learning at all
RCMOc 6c Positive Learning (Neutral)	Busy coachees who perceive little sector policy impact and that the recording of learning is not consistent in the organisation	And who experience patchy positive encouragement, time or use of a framework to self-reflect	Are more likely to feel enthusiastic initially then lose interest	And use reflexive learning for part of the time, not optimising its effectiveness

7.3 The impact on overall programme theory

I now bring the component theories together and consider the refinement process relating to the initial overall programme theory.

The initial theory as presented in Chapter 5 (p. 162) was as follows:

> "Coachees working with their coach in a positive psychology setting who are given the opportunity to develop their positive approach through a series of coaching sessions, positive organisational support and positive feedback, and engage in positive reflective learning will be more likely to be motivated to set, pursue and achieve personal and professional development goals and contribute to the organisation's developing culture".

The findings from the exploratory phase reported in Chapter 6 and the refined component theories as above led to an enhancement of the initial overall programme theory as follows:

> "Through the coaching programme, volunteer senior police leaders who are interested, have a growth mind-set, are in complex and challenging roles, are dealing with new circumstances and working in a conducive organisational climate are likely to develop their leadership capability with the support of a credible coach.
>
> If in the coaching programme the coach and coachee focus on the coachee's strengths in a positive psychology coaching setting, supported by positive organisational involvement and culture, the provision of positive feedback and engagement in positive reflexive learning, then the coachee will be more likely to raise their

knowledge, understanding and skills, self-confidence and self-efficacy, engage with the coaching, feel motivated and supported to define/refine, pursue and achieve cogent and stretching personal and professional development goals, and thereby contribute to the organisation's developing learning culture".

Whilst the evidence in support of the programme was generally compelling, because of the study's small scale and restricted range of outcome patterns I was unable to rule out completely that there might be alternative explanations for what I found. I therefore added two "rival" overall programme theories to the refined overall programme theory. Whilst there is no scope to study these rival theories in this thesis, they will need to be taken into consideration when designing future versions of the programme and exploring further in future evaluations. I have discussed this with the organisation as part of Phase 7 of the action research cycle. The proposed rival theories are as follows:

Overall programme rival theory 1: Participants may have set and achieved their goals in any event without undergoing the positive psychology coaching programme at all;

Overall rival theory 2: Participants may have set and achieved their goals even if the programme had been one based on a different kind of coaching, i.e. one without the positive psychology elements.

The overriding consideration when asking how any programme works is not just to study its individual elements but to demonstrate how the strategy, components, contexts, resource mechanisms and reasoning mechanisms all work together to lead to the desired outcomes (Pawson and Tilley, 1997). At the overall programme level, therefore, I brought together the refinements in the programme

component theories and the overall programme theory to develop the following visual model to show how the various high-level elements worked together. This is a representation of the refined overall programme theory:

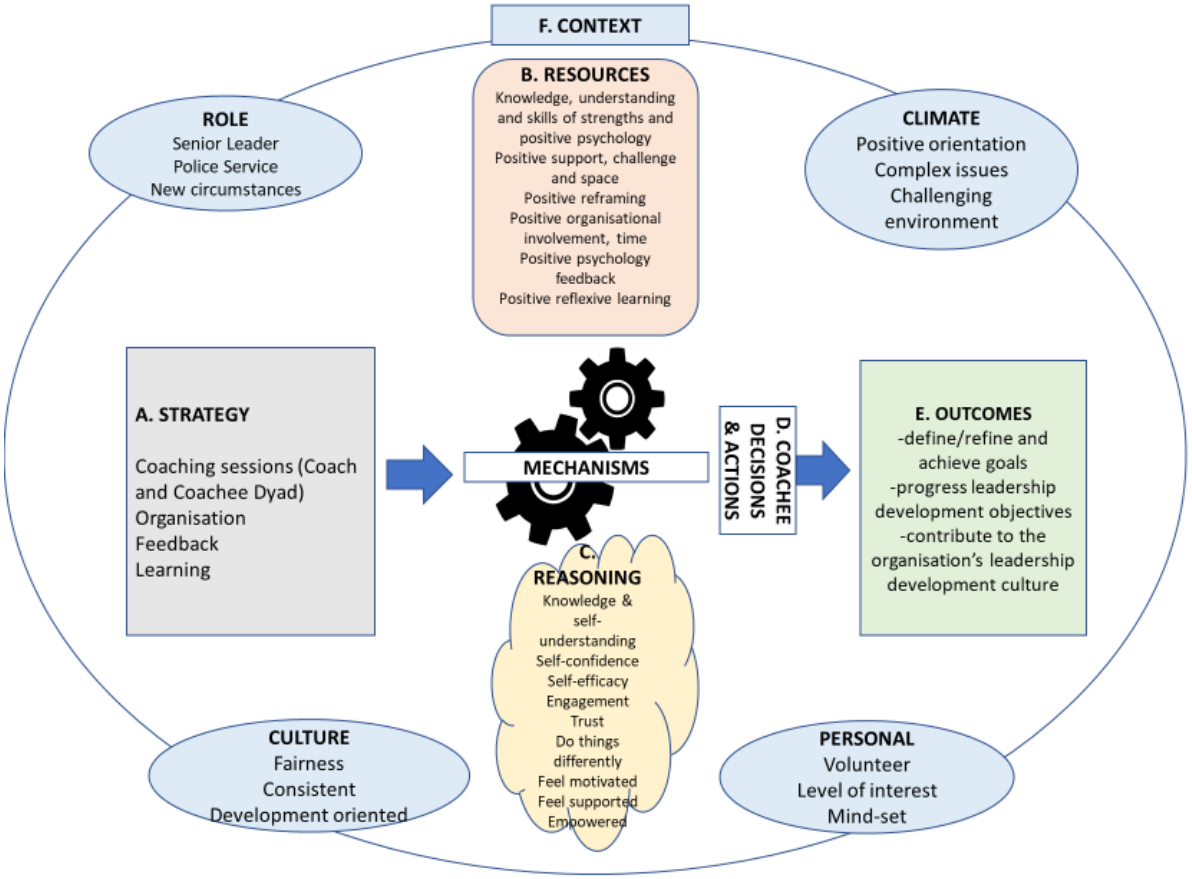

Figure 7.15: Visually modelling the refined programme theory (model format developed from Mukumbang et al, 2017, under Creative Commons Licence http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

As I explained in Chapter 3 (pp. 96 to 99), the realist approach to studying complex social programmes examines the relationships between context and the programme mechanisms that generate causal pathways towards programme outcomes, often referred to by way of a CMO (Context-Mechanism-Outcome)

configuration. Figure 7.15 depicts the refined overall programme CMO configuration for this coaching programme.

Working from the left to the right of the diagram, the first box (Box A “Strategy”) contains the features of the programme, which comprise the coaching sessions conducted in a coach-coachee dyad, organisational facilitation factors including the accommodation of the programme, the feedback measures coachees undertook and the coachees’ learning. These, however, do not constitute programme mechanisms in themselves but form the programme strategy that provides the programme resources shown in Box B “Resources”.

Boxes B, C and D constitute the programme’s mechanisms (the “M” in the CMO configuration concept). The components of the strategy give rise to opportunities for the six identified resource mechanisms of knowledge, understanding and skills; positive coaching relationship; positive reframing; positive organisational involvement; positive feedback; and positive learning, as shown in Box B “Resources”, to be provided to participants. The participants engage via reasoning mechanisms shown in Box C “Reasoning”, which, at the headline level are knowledge of self, understanding, self-confidence, self-efficacy, engagement, trust, doing things differently, feeling motivated, feeling supported, and feeling empowered. Because of the emphasis placed on human agency in creating change in realist programme research and discussed in Chapter 8 (pp. 304 to 297), a further step is included in Box D “Coachee Decisions and Actions” to demonstrate that coachees must make decisions and take actions in order to generate programme outcomes as an essential part of how the mechanism works.

The outcomes (the “O” in the CMO configuration) are shown in Box E “Outcomes”, and for this programme constitute the defining/refining and achieving of coaching goals, the progressing of the coachees’ leadership development objectives and the coachees’ contribution to the organisation’s leadership development culture.

This process all takes place in the setting of a context, Ellipse F “Context” (the “C” in the CMO configuration). In this study, the context was identified at four levels, the Personal, the Role, the Culture and Climate. Personal context factors were found to include being a volunteer for the programme, the level of personal interest and their mind-set. Role context factors were being a senior leader, working in the police service, and experiencing new circumstances. The cultural context included fairness, consistency and a development orientation. The climate factors were identified as a positively oriented organisation, dealing with complex social issues in a challenging environment. Context is important, as in realist research it is held that it affects fundamentally how the programme works by determining which mechanisms will “fire”, or activate, or not as the case may be (Pawson and Tilley, 1997), and to what extent (Dalkin et al, 2015).

I discuss this further in the next chapter, Chapter 8.

7.4 Chapter summary

In this chapter, I have demonstrated how the initial realist programme theory set out in Chapter 5 was refined based on the evidence from the exploratory phase of the study as presented in Chapter 6. The theory refinements are driven by the extent to which the initial theory was supported, refuted or clarified as a result of

the exploratory research phase and are therefore evidence-based. By bringing the elements of refined theory together, I have visually modelled the whole programme theory.

This chapter develops two of the thesis' main arguments. It provides an evidence base and detailed account of how this positive psychology coaching programme has worked in this context, for whom, and in what circumstances. It also shows how a realist research approach can provide a nuanced discourse able to address the complexity involved in positive psychology coaching.

In the next chapter, I discuss the exploratory study's findings that were presented in Chapter 6 and the outcomes from the theory refinement process as detailed in this chapter.

Chapter 8: Discussion

8.1 Chapter Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the findings that were presented in Chapter 6 and the theory refinements in Chapter 7, relating these to the positive psychology coaching literature. I start by re-visiting the aim and research question to bring them back into focus for the purposes of discussion and move on to a brief summary of the main findings. I then discuss how the programme worked, for whom and in what circumstances both at the programme component level and the whole programme level. I consider the role of goal pursuance as the main coaching outcome and its contribution to organisational leadership development. I also discuss the importance of context to the programme and demonstrate the implications of adopting a realist research approach. I then consider the contribution made by positive psychology coaching to the coaching engagement.

8.2 Revisiting the research aim and question

The aim of the thesis is to explore how positive psychology coaching might work through studying in-depth a programme for senior leaders in a UK policing. This programme utilises positive psychology executive coaching principles to encourage goals pursuance and thereby further the organisation's leadership development intentions. The research question is:

> "How can a positive psychology executive coaching programme work to support senior police leaders to set, pursue and achieve their personal and leadership development goals and contribute to the organisation's leadership development culture?"

I argue that the findings demonstrate how the research has addressed this question, as discussed below, starting with a short summary of the main points.

8.3 Summary of findings

At the headline level, the initial premise in the research question bore out in practice, with every coachee pursuing and achieving coaching outcomes that involved at least one personal leadership development goal and one organisational leadership development goal. At this simplest level of analysis I argue that the coaching programme "worked" in that it succeeded in encouraging participants to define/refine, pursue and achieve successful coaching goals as outcomes. The conclusion at this level, however, fails to address the "black-box" problem (Pawson and Tilley, 1997), i.e. understanding and explaining what goes on in the course of a programme to show how it works in a generatively causal way. I argue that this current research study has explored the issues posed in the research question, including what goes on in the positive psychology coaching programme "black box".

The idea of this study was to explore causal processes rather than to focus on specific outcomes. The more nuanced evidence gained in the exploration of the six programme components under study not only confirmed the initial proposition

but yielded insights that led to the refinement of the original programme theory. The resulting visual model in Figure 7.15 shown on page 282 in Chapter 7 brings together a suggested generative causal pathway that captures how this positive psychology coaching programme worked in this context, for whom and in what circumstances. It highlights the programme mechanisms that not only were observable (the “empirical”) but also those that might otherwise have remained hidden (the “actual” and the “real”) (Bhaskar, 1978). This gave the study a sense of “depth ontology” as discussed in Chapter 3 (p. 88).

8.4 How the programme worked, for whom and in what circumstances

I now discuss the findings as they relate to the programme components by way of building towards a consideration of the whole programme.

Programme Components

The study of the individual programme components afforded an opportunity to theorise and explore at a deeper level. It considered programme theory at three levels as identified in Figure 6.1 on page 202 in Chapter 6: overall programme, component and theme. It identified twenty-four additional resource mechanisms that may not otherwise have been ascertained. Reasoning responses were also identified, classified as either cognitive, affective, or behavioural.

1 Positive psychology knowledge, understanding and skills

In the first component, the resource mechanism offered the opportunity to coachees to gain knowledge and skills of positive psychology to enable them to optimise their coaching experience as well as providing transferable tools and techniques to use sustainably in their work and non-work lives. As a result of the research, the original theory for this component as presented in Chapter 5 was refined as described in Chapter 7 (pp. 256 to 258).

This resource mechanism prompted cognitive reasoning mechanisms that enhanced coachees' familiarity and skill in understanding the concepts of positive psychology and applying them in their leadership development activities. These progressive developments were observable as coachees moved through their coaching programme. In particular, the knowledge of their strengths was discussed by several coachees as a major influencing factor in their goal-directed behaviour. For some, it determined the nature of the goals that they chose to pursue.

Before conducting the empirical research, I had expected this component to focus mostly on the development of cognitive capability. This was borne out by the appeal positive psychology coaching seemed to have for those who enjoy exploring theory and taking an intellectual approach to leadership development. Less predictable in the earlier stages of the study, however, and discovered through the thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews, was the strength of feeling present in the emotional responses that was prompted by coachees' exposure to the knowledge resource. Jones (2017) notes the importance of developing self-confidence in the affective domain in the context of mentoring

female officers in the police service. This current study reflects Jones's (2017) findings as emotional responses principally concerned the raising of positive self-regard, such as in elevated self-confidence, self-esteem and self-belief, albeit in both female and male coachees. They also expressed the emotion of hope that was mentioned in Chapter 2, page 43 (Fredrickson, 2009; Snyder, 2002). This was particularly the case in the context of those leaders in unfamiliar circumstances, such as being new to the role and/or new to the organisation and relates to aspects of the general police culture literature concerning role clarity and feelings of insecurity noted in Chapter 1 (pp. 20-28). Bearing in mind the nature of the policing environment that existed at the time the research was conducted, the knowledge, understanding and skills component worked particularly effectively in the context of coachees who were facing challenging circumstances and operating environments.

The reasoning mechanisms worked well as coachees had volunteered to take part in the coaching programme and were interested and curious in the subject-matter of positive psychology. As noted in Chapter 6, pages 204 to 206, there was a variety of reasons for, and backgrounds to, their interest and curiosity. One of those reasons in particular resonates with the police culture literature, that of the propensity among police officers to favour pessimism, as Loftus (2010) observed and as mentioned in Chapter 1, pages 23 to 24. Respondents were drawn to the programme because of the positive psychology aspect, perhaps appealing as an antidote to their feelings of vulnerability and uncertainty driven by the prevailing organisational context, again noted in Chapter 1 (pp. 20-28).

The knowledge, understanding and skills element supported the claims made in the positive psychology coaching literature as identified in Chapter 2 (pp. 55 to

61). The fourth claim that I identified, that of positive psychology coaching providing scientifically researched concepts, tools and techniques, was particularly relevant here. During the course of the coaching programme, participants were exposed to a variety of different positive psychology approaches as discussed in Chapter 4, pages 139 to 143, some standard across all of the interventions and some tailored to coachees' individual circumstances. In the main, participants were attracted to these concepts and chose to try and use them not only in work settings but also in non-work ones. For some, the fact that the concepts, tools and techniques were grounded in scientific research and that they could engage in exploring the theories and evidence as part of their coaching served to engage their interest. This seemed to add an extra degree of validity to the coaching process for them, supporting Seligman's (2007) proposition that the scientific evidence base provides an aspect which might otherwise be lacking generally in coaching.

As I discussed in Chapter 2, pages 55 to 61, the positive psychology literature is consistent in terms of which positive psychology concepts, tools and techniques should be included in positive psychology coaching, for example, as seen in the conceptual accounts written by Linley and Kauffman (2007), Hefferon (2011) and Boniwell et al (2014). This view is supported by contributions relating to positive psychology coaching processes, for example, that of Passmore and Oades (2014). In particular, the use of strengths is a consistent feature. The participants in the coaching programme under study experienced, or had the opportunity to experience, most of the suggested positive psychology coaching approaches, and, with the exception of one respondent, who did not find the strengths approach in the Values in Action (VIA) measure appealing, the programme component of providing the opportunity to develop positive psychology

knowledge, understanding and skills was well-received. The element of strength identification and development was a cohesive and prolific theme throughout the respondents' accounts of their coaching experience, seen as acting as a positive and motivating feature. I therefore argue that the provision of scientifically researched concepts, tools and techniques, especially that of working with strengths, added a dimension to the coaching programme that achieved high impact. The coaching may not have been so well-received or as successful had positive psychology coaching tools and techniques not been included in the coaching approach.

2 Positive coaching relationship

In programme component 2, the positive coaching relationship stimulated the range of mostly affective reasoning responses that had been generally expected in the original theory presented in Chapter 5, pages 172 to 175, such as those around trust and motivation to engage with the coach and the coaching process. The refined programme theory for this component was reported in Table 7.1 on pages 276 to 279 in Chapter 7.

The findings echo the importance of the coaching relationship as one of the "active ingredients" in executive coaching (McKenna and Davis, 2009). This supports the literature relating to the role of trust in helping relationships (de Haan and Duckworth, 2012, and Wasylyshyn, 2003). As discussed in Chapter 5, pages 172 to 175, the coach-coachee relationship in positive psychology coaching is differentiated in the literature from other types of coaching by an emphasis in the

coaching relationship on positive aspects, especially strengths, positive emotion, positive language and an equal coaching partnership. These were found to be particularly important to respondents, especially the positive support and challenge, encouragement, confidentiality and safety. Two new themes emerged from the findings, those of professionalism and structure. Professionalism related to the status coachees afforded to the coaching relationship. Working with a professional coach rather than confiding in friends or colleagues elevated the process and enhanced the coachees' willingness to trust. Again, this accords with Loftus' (2010) account of police culture, which points out that typically police officers are "continually suspicious, lead socially isolated lives and display defensive solidarity with colleagues" (p. 1). It was as if the coachees were happy to accept a professional coach with whom they could form a trusting relationship and share confidences willingly, especially, as in this programme, if that coach is knowledgeable, experienced and already trusted as being part of the wider policing "family".

In terms of affect responses, self-confidence, self-efficacy and self-esteem featured prominently in respondents' accounts of reasoning mechanisms prompted by the coaching relationship resource mechanism. Bénabou and Tirole (2002) define self-confidence as simply "confidence in one's abilities" (p. 871). Bandura (1977; 1994) defined self-efficacy as the belief about one's capacity to influence the events in their own lives. Self-esteem has been described as a relatively stable belief about one's overall self-worth (Rosenberg, 1965). Branden (1969) identified two components in self-esteem; those of self-efficacy and self-respect, the latter of which was described as the belief that we are deserving of happiness, love and success. All of these relate to key aspects of wellbeing

(Green and Palmer, 2019), and it would appear that the coaching programme worked to enhance these essential positive senses of self in coachees.

A more cognitive element was introduced via the resource of structure that arose from the coaching relationship. This was particularly relevant to those affected by the context of pressure and high workload demands. Sometimes this manifested itself as less of a physical structure and more of a psychological one. A prominent feature here was the psychological contract formed between the coach and the coachee arising from the processes of goal setting and goal striving, coachees making promises to take action, and from the temporal deadlines provided by feeling one would have to account for oneself in future coaching sessions.

3 Positive reframing

The third programme component as presented as a candidate theory in Chapter 5 (p. 178) concerned the resource mechanism of the opportunity offered to coachees to reframe their thinking, resulting in the refined programme component theory as stated in Table 7.1 on pages 276 to 279 in Chapter 7.

Reframing is a large topic so it was necessary to narrow the extent of this exploration for pragmatic purposes. When scoping the project with the organisation, the inference was that the current state of thinking amongst senior leaders was negative and limited and the requirements of the organisation for their leaders of the future would be for imaginative, confident, positive thinking and decision making. This again echoes Loftus' (2010) paper where she

observes that “they [police officers] are mainly conservative in politics and morality” (p.1). The key evidential themes identified in this study would suggest that there is a readiness amongst those responding to embrace a more positive and radical approach to thinking and decision-making. The respondents’ themes included a positive perspective and an appetite for exploring, which indicated that, given the right circumstances, the senior leaders who participated in this study were open-minded. This reflected the conceptual and empirical work of Dweck (2006) on the importance of the possession of a growth mindset, as discussed in Chapter 5 (p. 176).

Respondents also highlighted the contextual constraints that currently exist, or are perceived to exist, in the organisation. Once again, respondents’ vulnerabilities were exposed; senior leaders felt able to explore their thinking by talking to me as an independent party with no risk of any direct impact on their future careers. Respondents thought it would be different if they had been working with internal people as their coaches, bearing in mind their level of seniority in the organisation, as deliberation and exploration in senior leaders could be misinterpreted negatively and have personal and professional repercussions. Policing is a rank-conscious profession, i.e. people are constantly mindful of their own and others’ position in the organisation, and, for many, symbols of their rank are displayed on their uniform for all to see. There are clear official and unofficial protocols about who will speak to whom and about what. It was telling that one of the themes related to “recognition”; some respondents interpreted the very fact that they had been selected for the coaching programme as an indication of their professional “worthiness” in the eyes of their superiors. This would suggest that senior leaders may not be confident in their positions and

in their own abilities. Executive stakeholders recognised that the organisation had a great deal of work to do to change the prevailing “blame” culture if they wanted to work towards becoming a “learning organisation” as envisaged by Senge (2006).

Once again, as well as cognitive reasoning, emotional responses of feelings of increased self-confidence and self-efficacy featured as important themes. The positive psychology element of the coaching supported these developments, providing a safe and conducive atmosphere to promote positive and creative thinking.

The positive reframing component provided evidence to support the first claim for positive psychology coaching that I identified in the literature and discussed in Chapter 2 (pp. 49 to 51). That claim was that positive psychology coaching provided a healthier approach to coaching than those of the medical model. Kauffman and Scoular (2004) observed that the role of the positive psychology coach, when all is not going well for the client in their executive lives, is to listen actively and ask questions to help the coachee re-focus on their strengths. Reframing also figures highly in solution-focused coaching (Greene and Grant, 2003; Cavanagh and Grant, 2010), which is highly aligned with positive psychology coaching, and also in Sims’ (2017) “TEARS HOPE” model of positive psychology coaching when working with clients who are experiencing difficult emotions. These approaches were used in the current coaching programme as part of the reframing component. Evidence gleaned from the interviews showed support for the claim that positive psychology coaching can be a valuable tool for

helping coachees to see things differently and to enhance their ability to embrace appropriate and positive explanatory narratives.

The first three programme components principally concerned the coaching sessions themselves. Considering them together, the evidence was supportive of the theories of how the coaching sessions might work to lead to successful positive coaching outcomes. I turn next to the fourth programme component, the resource that provided positive organisational support for the programme, in which the evidence was more differentiated.

4 Positive organisational involvement

The respondents were supportive of the ideas behind the original programme component theory as presented in Chapter 5, page 182, which relied very much on positive perceptions that the organisation was investing in them by providing them with the coaching programme, trust that they would use the investment wisely, provide them with positive role models and allow them to implement their learning, all within a conducive organisational culture. As described in Chapter 6, pages 226 to 232, the evidence of the respondents' experience differed from the theory, resulting in the refined programme component theory shown in Table 7.1 on pages 276 to 279 in Chapter 7.

Respondents gave examples of positive aspects, such as the work the organisation was doing around wellbeing. Respondents could see that the positive psychology coaching provision was consistent with this approach.

However, there was evidence of mistrust about the organisation's motives, which accorded with Loftus' (2010) view, that "[police] culture is marked by cynicism" (p. 1) and mentioned in Chapter 1 (pages 23 to 24). There was a suggestion of a difference between rhetoric and reality in the way respondents noted that the organisation was always piloting initiatives, but rarely "mainstreamed" any of them. Whilst the organisation may put out positive messages around development, people in general did not see it happening in practice. The availability of positive leadership development role modelling was seen as inconsistent. Some executive leaders were seen as inspirational role models, others not.

A clear theme of fairness and authenticity linked to a criticism of traditional notions of patronage in the police service emerged. Respondents perceived that the coaching programme offered a fairer way of helping senior leaders in the organisation to develop and progress than that of the current system, which relied on individuals either finding, or being chosen by, experienced and skilled internal mentors. The open attraction and selection processes attached to the positive psychology coaching programme were perceived as being more even-handed and offering a merit-based system rather than a patronage. As mentioned in Chapter 6, pages 231 to 232, some respondents perceived the fact that I was providing the programme at no cost to the organisation except for the coachees' time and effort as the organisation being inauthentic, whilst others did not.

The theme of positive organisational interest had affirmative effects in certain cases, and a demotivational effect in others. Respondents' prior experiences of their line managers' interest in their development played a part in this to an extent.

Where the line manager was perceived not to be overtly interested in their development throughout the coaching programme the respondent was more likely to look to the coach for their support. The allowance of formal time to take part in the coaching and to carry out agreed actions took on a greater significance in meaning. Where such time was not officially scheduled, it was interpreted that the organisation did not value or legitimise the activity. Again, this reflected the vulnerability of leaders at this level in that they felt the need for endorsement in a tangible way and for “permission” from their superiors to devote their time to the programme. This reflects the culture of policing discussed in programme component 6 on pages 243 to 244, in that unless scheduled “work-time” is allocated to development activity, officers and staff are generally reluctant to devote their own private time to it. The emotional response was reduced motivation to take full advantage of the coaching programme’s provisions, such as in researching topics of interest and engaging in recorded reflexive learning (see component 6, pages 301 to 303, later in this chapter). The evidence supported the theoretical propositions of immediacy, relevance and the need for personal development and achievement in adult learning (Knowles, 1980; Rogers, 1961; Maslow, 1943) as discussed in Chapter 5 (p. 179) and which underpinned the basis of the original programme theory.

The later positive psychology coaching literature highlights claim number 6 as discussed in Chapter 2 (pp. 62-65), that positive psychology coaching provides a coherent coaching process. However, the frameworks that currently exist, for example, those of Biswas-Diener (2010), Passmore and Oades (2014) and Burke (2018) that I discuss in Chapters 2 (pp. 62 to 65) and 5 (pp. 126 to 129) do not offer much to emphasise the importance of contextual factors such as

organisational culture and climate. The evidence from my study highlights a gap in that all stakeholders espoused the theoretical position but experienced it in inconsistent and sometimes unhelpful ways. The evidence seems to suggest that whilst positive psychology coaching can offer a coherent coaching process, at present the available frameworks place insufficient emphasis on contextual factors that, unless considered and taken into account, can militate against an otherwise successful programme.

5 Positive feedback

The fifth programme component as originally proposed in Chapter 5 (p. 186) looked specifically at the positive psychology feedback provisions that constituted a programme resource mechanism and resulted in the refined programme component theory reported in Table 7.1 on pages 276 to 279 in Chapter 7.

Three instruments were used in this study: the Values in Action (VIA) Inventory (Seligman, 2014), the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) (Briggs Myers, 2000) and a bespoke College of Policing 360-degree feedback instrument tailored for senior police leaders. In the event, and down largely to organisational availability reasons, so few respondents actually experienced the 360-degree feedback exercise that I did not include it in the analysis. However, all coachees completed the VIA and the MBTI. I backed up the VIA measure with a card sort exercise and a detailed feedback session. With one exception, all of the coachees found the measures useful, giving rise to feelings of increased self-knowledge and insight, not just in respect of themselves but also of the strengths and personality

characteristics of others and their teams. In the exceptional case, the VIA measure had an effect on their motivation that was neutral at best and off-putting at worst, partly relieved by engaging in the card-sort conversation. The instrument had clearly not appealed to them, explained by them by way of the look and feel of the website and the language used in the questionnaire.

The inclusion of the MBTI at the organisation's request turned out to be a powerful complement to the VIA. For some respondents, even though they had completed the MBTI before, for some many times, and had had feedback, the coaching provided the first time when they had had one-to-one feedback and the opportunity to explore their results in depth. The compatibility between the MBTI and the VIA that was anticipated in the pre-programme stage was borne out in the coaching and led to coachees' experiencing an increased sense of motivation to pursue more ambitious coaching goals. The importance of the context of open-mindedness (Dweck, 2006) was also apparent, as was evidence in support of Gregory et al (2011), who proposed that the role of the executive coach is to support the development of their coachees as pro-active consumers of feedback when engaging in their coaching endeavours.

6 Positive learning

The sixth and final programme component related to positive learning and led to the refined programme component theory presented in Table 7.1 on pages 276 to 279 in Chapter 7.

Whilst respondents agreed with the proposed theory stated on page 191 in Chapter 5, their lived experience was quite different, and shed some light on the various constraints they felt on their engagement with effective reflexive learning. Those who made use of the learning diary provided were in the minority, and those that did, used it minimally and for memo-like purposes only. The majority did not use formal means of conducting reflexive learning. Despite that, all of the coachees found and used their own means of learning. The fact that the formal architecture was in the main not used did not mean that learning did not take place. All respondents recognised the benefits of reflexive learning, especially when it is written down and evidenced. The constraining contexts of a hectic operational environment, competing demands and a chronic lack of time detracted from the reflexive learning activity. Prior negative experiences also played a role. It had been hoped that the positive reflexive learning process would help coachees self-reinforce, especially in the time between formal coaching sessions. That does not appear to have taken place in the majority of cases.

The organisational and sector contexts also acted as constraints. Respondents felt that there was patchy application of reflexive practice in the organisation. Some functions, such as firearms training, used it extensively, but there was a feeling that unless it was mandated, people would not engage in it. At a national level, the College of Policing is promoting reflexive learning as a means of pursuing continuous professional development (College of Policing, 2019). Respondents felt that this policy was not widely known and effective communication of it was lacking. I concluded that the positive learning programme component was perhaps the least effective, despite the fact that

some of the executive felt that this was the most important of all of the programme components.

As in leadership coaching (Spence et al, 2019), the role of learning is under-represented in the positive psychology coaching literature, especially when compared to the concept of wellbeing. For example, in Green and Palmer's recent book (2019) on positive psychology coaching in practice, there are 19 references to wellbeing in the index but no references at all to learning. However, in books belonging to the general coaching and mentoring literature, whole chapters are dedicated to the role of learning, for example, in Garvey et al (2018). This perhaps signals a gap in the positive psychology coaching literature in that learning should be recognised and studied more closely as an important mechanism in the positive psychology coaching process.

Having considered each of the programme components, I now turn to a discussion relating to how they all interacted to build a generative theory for the whole programme.

8.5 The Overall Programme Theory

The next logical step in this discussion is to consider the overall refined programme theory, which draws together the six programme components into a coherent whole to articulate a proposed generative causal pathway. The refined programme theory that provides an explanation of how the whole programme worked, for whom and in what circumstances was expressed on pages 280 to

281 in Chapter 7. I now discuss the main elements of the visual model that was derived from the evidence and shown in Figure 7.15 on page 282 in Chapter 7.

Programme strategy, resource mechanisms and reasoning mechanisms

The programme strategy consisting of coaching sessions performed via a coaching dyad, the formal organisational facilities, the feedback process and the learning process made available the six resource mechanisms to the coachees, as theorised on pages 160 to 165 in Chapter 5.

It was found that the resource mechanisms provided an effective set of opportunities for coachees to engage in reasoning mechanisms summarised as feelings of increased knowledge and self-understanding, self-confidence, self-efficacy; willingness to engage in the coaching programme and to trust the coach and process; feeing inspired to do things differently; feeling motivated, supported and empowered. When coachees made decisions and acted, these mechanisms led to the achievement of their coaching outcomes.

Agency and choice

In realist research, the role of human agency is pivotal, and for this reason there is a step in the visual model in Figure 7.15, page 282, Chapter 7, situated as part of the mechanisms and before the outcomes called “coachee decisions and actions”. In the coaching programme, the outcomes constituted the coachees

defining and/or refining coaching goals, taking forward their own leadership objectives and contributing to the organisations' emergent leadership culture as discussed in the next section. Jagosh (2019) and Pawson (2013) highlight the importance of the notion of "social contingency" in realist thinking. This concept suggests that the functioning of most social programmes depends on "human interaction or some form of psychosocial, logical or emotion-based decision-making" (Jagosh, 2019). The realist approach, therefore, places programme participants in a central position when it comes to determining whether or not programmes will work, manifest through the decisions they make and the actions they take. As Wong et al (2016) point out, "programmes 'work' by enabling or motivating participants to make different choices" (p. 2). Pawson (2013) reinforces the view that programmes only work if participants choose to make them do so:

> "Interventions do not work, it is the interpretations of their subjects that produce results. Programme subjects are active agents, not passive recipients" (p. 33).

Pawson (2013, p. 33) cites the work of Thaler and Sunstein (2008) on "choice architecture" to emphasise the crucial role of agency and choice in social programmes. In essence, participants in programmes have an array of choices that they can make in order to arrive at outcomes. In the current study, for example, these choices ranged from deciding to volunteer for the coaching or not, participate and engage with it or not, stay with it to the end or give up part-way, and put in the required time and effort to achieve their coaching outcomes or not. A view of the role of the programme itself and of the designers and deliverers could be that of providing coachees with a choice architecture and to shape the range of choices as architects, "organising the context in which people

make decisions" (Thaler and Sunstein, 2008, p. 3). This emphasis on choice and agency also figures in the positive psychology coaching literature, for example through the notion of Intentional Change Theory (Boyatzis, 2008), and as mentioned in Chapter 2 (pp. 67 to 73). This develops the concept of intentionality in motivation to suggest that personal goals are important in the change process, and that they work best in conditions of intrinsic motivation based on meaning, belief and personal passions (Boyatzis and Howard, 2013). In the current study, this intrinsic motivation was achieved through a sustained focus on the identification and use of coachees' personal strengths, vision and values. It therefore provided evidence to support the theory.

Recognising that this study worked with a small number of participants, the evidence showed that all of the coachees chose to exercise their power of agency to volunteer for the programme, start it, engage with it, complete it, invest their time and work to achieve the goals that were personally and organisationally relevant to them. They need not have done so and in that event, the outcomes could have been very different. A useful development of this research in future would be study larger programmes, where more differentiated choices and outcomes might occur.

Outcomes

Adopting goal pursuance and achievement as desired outcomes in this study might be regarded as a straightforward issue, but the role of goals themselves in coaching can be contentious, as I discussed in Chapter 2 (p. 67 to 73). Goal

setting has occupied a pivotal place in coaching (Clutterbuck and Spence, 2017), but there has been much debate about its effectiveness. As discussed in Chapter 2 (p. 68), the use of goals in coaching can be both helpful to kick-start the process, and not helpful if they not flexible enough to cater for changing circumstances (Ibarra, 2013). In the current study, some coachees came with ready-made goals, some did not; some changed their goals at various points through the coaching to suit changing priorities; some pursued several goals whilst some chose to work on two or three large goals. For some, part of the development process in the coaching involved learning how to choose, frame, set and work towards goals, whilst for others, the setting and pursuing of goals were very familiar procedures. It was particularly useful to accommodate a wide range of goal approaches and styles, each tailored to the individual's needs and preferences. The concept of goal setting became that of goal definition or refinement, again depending on the circumstances, whether a coachee's goals had been pre-set in some way or not. It proved to be a useful construct as a device to focus attention on maintaining a sense of purpose and direction for the coaching over the course of the coaching period, which in most cases was in excess of a year. It also provided a useful language in which to frame coaching discussions and review the progress that had been made in the period between meetings.

Adopting goals as an outcome provided a fruitful device to establish and maintain a sense of egalitarianism in the coaching agenda, ensuring that both personal and organisational ambitions were served. Coaching is sometimes accused of pursuing a managerialist agenda through goal setting zeal (Ordóñez et al, 2009) and in performance management regimes as part of the managerial discourse in

coaching (Western, 2012). It was important when asking the question, “who is the coaching for?” that the answer not only provided a balance between the agendas of the individual and the organisation in equal measure but was perceived by the coachees to do so. Hence, one of the programme’s objectives was to encourage coachees to pursue at least one goal of their own to further their own career or personal development, and one that would advance an organisational objective pertinent to their role. In that way, the organisation was keen to develop within its senior managers a growth mindset together with the skills to support it so they could both personally succeed and contribute to the organisation’s cultural development intentions.

Using goal pursuance as a device to signify progress also lent a sense of legitimacy to the coaching programme in the minds of the coachees. Due to the prevailing policing context of relentless demand, austerity and pressure described in Chapter 1 (pp. 20 to 28), participants felt guilty at using precious time and resources on developing themselves through engaging with the coaching programme. One of the participants described coaching as “self-indulgent”, but the general feeling was that because the organisation itself had offered the coaching opportunity it must have been seen as a good use of the coachees’ time. As a metaphor for focusing attention on purpose, creating a sense of egalitarianism and maintaining momentum throughout the programme, if used flexibly and for constructive reasons, I concluded that the mechanism of encouraging goal choice, pursuance and achievement in this particular programme and in the particular circumstances that prevailed at the time offered benefits that outweighed any potential disadvantages.

Context

Context is a key element that leads to explanations of why one programme in one set of circumstances might work but might not do so in another. Contexts can exist at different levels. Pawson (2013, p. 37) refers to the “four I’s”: individuals, interpersonal relations, institutional settings and infrastructure. In this study, I found that context was important at the personal and relational, role, culture and climate levels. Coaching programmes are complex and operate in complex environments. No doubt there were many more aspects of context that influenced the programme; however, I focused pragmatically on these four in order to keep the size of the study manageable. At the personal level, the programme seemed to work if the coachees had volunteered for the programme, were interested in it and were at least open to its possibilities. Due to the study’s small scale, I was unable to explore this against a larger population which could have included those who had not volunteered or who were ambivalent towards taking part. This could be a way in which my research could be developed in future. This programme was effective with coachees whose roles were in senior leadership, in the police service and facing new challenges either due to complexity, high demand or novelty of role and/or rank. It worked in an organisational climate that was perceived to be generally positive in its intent but facing complex issues in a challenging operating environment. This echoed the description of the general policing context included in Chapter 1 (pp. 20 to 28). The programme worked best when set in an organisational culture that was perceived to be fair, consistent and development orientated.

An important realist question is “would the programme work again if replicated elsewhere?” The answer depends largely on context. As Pawson puts it:

> “what works in Wigan on a wet Wednesday will often not work in Thurso on a thunderous Thursday” (Pawson, 2013, p. xvi).

This is particularly apt here. This current programme seemed to have worked because of the particulars of its context, for example, the backdrop of austerity, rising pressures, drastically diminishing resources and senior leaders’ increasing feelings of uncertainty and vulnerability. It could have been a case of “right place, right time” in circumstances where other sources of organisational support were perceived to be lacking or even non-existent. As one respondent said:

> “I think it [the coaching] has been a bit of a life-line, if I can put it that way. I think it has been a challenging period, and I think being able to discuss that in a safe environment has been very helpful” (Interview 15, lines 9-11).

The programme also probably worked because of its moment in time not only for individuals but also for the organisation and the sector, with national attention and discourse beginning to focus on wellbeing in the face of tightening resources and increasing demands. The service was beginning to ask what can be done and was engaging in a launch of new national wellbeing initiatives, as I discussed in Chapter 1 (pp. 24-25). As the findings in Chapter 6 (pp. 227 to 228) show, the fit of this programme with other initiatives in the organisation was seen to be important. The programme also probably worked because of a perception of a lack of role and structural clarity in the organisation. For example, some respondents struggled to see where they fitted in. As I discussed in Chapter 1 (p. 20-21), this could, in part, be as a result of the unusual governance structures that exist in policing, effectively a four-way system of accountability between the

executive leadership in the force, the locally elected Police and Crime Commissioner, the local Police and Crime Panel and the Home Office. For any or all of these reasons, if the programme were to be replicated, even in the light of the refined programme theory, it might not work in the same way, in the same organisation or in other similar organisations or sectors in different circumstances and/or at a different time.

Programme element interaction

The realist approach asserts that all of the factors in the generatively causal chain interact with each other to produce programme outcomes. They work in fine balance, and, sometimes inadvertently, unexpected consequences might occur along the way. This was illustrated forcefully to me in the case of the respondent who interpreted what, to me, was an ethical decision on my part not to charge the organisation for my work, in a way I had not expected. To them, the organisation was being opportunist, getting something for nothing. This played to their previously formed impressions of the motivation of the organisation and influenced their perception of it in a negative way. Another respondent interpreted the same organisational actions as supportive, because in their mind it had grasped an opportunity to provide a valuable programme to its senior leaders which they might not otherwise have had. Attribution theory (Kelley, 1967) could offer an explanation, which posits that individuals infer the causes of others' behaviour according to their own internal factors rather than to external ones. This example demonstrates how difficult it can be to design effective interventions that achieve intentional outcomes without the benefit of a sound programme

theory based on evidence. Even so, programmes might still not hit the mark despite the best of intentions. I argue that using realist evidence-based programme theorising reduces that risk.

Having examined the programme at the component and overall levels, I now discuss the effects that employing a realist research approach has had for the various stakeholders of this study.

8.6 The impact of employing a realist research approach

This research focused on the second of two 'hot topics' as discussed by Myers (2017), i.e. how coaching might work rather than whether it does work. I argue in Chapters 2 (pp. 74 to 79) and 3 (pp. 96 to 99) that asking such complex questions calls for a research approach that allows for equally complex exploration of the issues in detail and in context. I argue that I have demonstrated the value of adopting a realist research approach to the study of positive psychology coaching in a variety of different ways.

I discussed in Chapter 2 (pp. 74 to 79) two aspects of the research debate in coaching psychology, those of the type of research methods that should be used and the kind of research evidence that might be accepted as valid. Briner (2012) argues for positivist methods, in particular, randomised controlled trials, whilst others, for example, Ellam-Dyson (2012), advocate broader methods that can be of use not only to the scientific community but also to practitioners. The realist research approach is a pragmatic one. I argue that the realist methods used in my study are both robust and able to serve a practical purpose by providing useful

information to a number of interested parties. I can demonstrate this latter point by discussing here the implications of using the rich detail that a realist research approach affords to the benefit of a range of programme stakeholders. I comment on the potential impact adopting a realist research approach might have on coaching research generally in the conclusions chapter (pp. 341 to 345), Chapter 9).

The impact of the research on programme stakeholders

The study had an impact on a range of organisational stakeholders, highlighting potential issues and changes required in the approach to coaching in leadership development, and for which a realist approach was enlightening. As I explained in Chapter 4 (pp. 117 to 119), the organisational stakeholders to this study were identified according to Manzano's classification (Manzano, 2016) in four groups. The first group, the "architects", comprised the main sponsors and co-designers of the programme, such as the HR and leadership development functions. The second group encompassed the "practitioners", i.e. the line managers who managed the participants of the programme and managed the effects of the programme. The third group included the "participants" who took part in the coaching programme as coachees. The last category was the "evaluator"; even though this study was not intended to be a formal evaluation, I included myself in this category in my capacity as the researcher. I now consider the implications for each of these groups.

Architects

The study highlighted a number of points of learning about the design and delivery of the coaching programme. Here, the generation of a candidate programme theory, obtaining and analysing data as evidence and refining the programme theory were key steps. When considering and realigning future iterations of the positive psychology executive coaching programme, it was clear that the architects should take into account the detailed evidence provided by the study, including the refined programme theory. Doing so could pose a number of issues for the organisation as discussed below.

Decisions relating to who might benefit from a wider implementation of this coaching programme

A realist approach takes the view that any kind of social programme is unlikely to work for everyone in all circumstances all of the time (Pawson and Tilley, 1997). Whilst this programme appears to have worked for one group of people in a certain set of circumstances at a certain point in time, there can be no guarantees, even if it were to be replicated closely, that it would work for others in different circumstances, even in the same organisation. There was a great deal of evidence relating to what seems to have worked or not and in what circumstances for the people who took part in, or were key stakeholders of, this particular programme. In addition, and from a more prospective point of view as a result of my specific questioning of all stakeholders as to who they thought might benefit from positive psychology coaching and shown in Table 6.2 on pages 248 to 252 in Chapter 6, there was a view that everyone in the senior leader group would benefit. However, on the realist basis that programmes are unlikely to work for

everyone all of the time, a more helpful approach might be to identify the groups for whom it would more likely work from the evidence gained in the study. Those senior leaders, both officers and staff, might include volunteers, those with drive and ambition, open to positive psychology coaching, interested in working with strengths, working towards promotion, and with job/role autonomy. Newly appointed senior leaders might also benefit. This information should be useful to the organisation when considering future iterations of the programme or making decisions as to whether, and to whom, its reach should be extended.

The voluntary nature of the programme

It is worth pausing here to consider further the "volunteer" argument. Whilst there is an emphasis on voluntarism in the mentoring literature, there is less of a focus on it in coaching (Garvey et al, 2009). Bluckert (2006) includes it in his concept of 'coachability' in executive coaching, in the sense that coachees would be difficult to coach if they had poor levels of motivation for coaching, maybe through not being a volunteer. Including a provision in the programme design that participants should be volunteers avoids the "sheep dip" accusation made against generic leadership development that I discussed in Chapter 1 (p. 12). There was evidence to suggest that the positive reaction to the current programme could have stemmed in part from the fact that volunteers were sought, and therefore arguably participants were keen to come to coaching with an open mind. The common features driving the volunteering in this programme appeared not only to be an interest/curiosity in the coaching itself but also in the positive psychology aspect, for a variety of different reasons already discussed. These proved to be powerful motivators to engage in the coaching and pursue action towards

successful coaching outcomes. I argue that volunteering and interest should continue to be stressed as important qualifying factors in future programme marketing and recruitment campaigns in order to attract prospective coachees who might benefit most.

External versus internal coaches

The use of an external coach was shown to be preferable at this level in the organisation for a number of reasons. These included the provision of a safe and confidential space for senior leaders to explore ideas with a person who has no influence over their careers. However, the evidence pointed to a preference for an external coach with at least a working level of policing organisational and functional knowledge. How that could be achieved and suitable coaches identified would need to be carefully planned. It is recognised that there could be budgetary considerations to make and if future programmes were to be extended to larger numbers, then possibly alternative approaches may be necessary. These could include the use of skilled and trained internal coaches or manager-coaches, although the organisation would need to remain mindful of a potentially negative impact on honesty and courageous thinking, and the effect on the balance of power relations between the parties.

Feedback instruments

The evidence demonstrated the importance of the choice of feedback instruments to ensure they are appropriate to the coaching aims and to the styles and preferences of the participants. The programme used the VIA strengths

measure, MBTI and 360-degree feedback where available. There was some evidence of a less than favourable response to the VIA as an instrument. Other strengths measures are available that might be more appropriate for future coachee populations. The MBTI appeared to stimulate lively and fruitful coaching discussions, but again, depending on the needs and preferences of the coachees, other measures might suit better. A caution might be that some personality measures can be perceived by coachees as negatively oriented and, without due care and consideration on the part of the coach, could work against the spirit of positive psychology coaching. Depending on the kind of feedback that is generated and how it is delivered to the coachee, the same could be said about 360-degree feedback measures, and their use in this context and the way in which the information is communicated would need to be carefully considered in future iterations.

Reflexive learning

The evidence continued to emphasise the importance of reflexive learning, but also highlighted the tangible barriers of finding time and space, not only for the coaching itself but also for action, reflection, learning and recording. Closing the perceived gap between the organisational rhetoric ("we believe in this…") and the operational reality ("…but we have no time for it") is crucial. Any future iterations would need to be very clear about the time and effort expectations on both coachees and the organisation, the definition of what qualifies as "work" and "non-work" time, and in particular about the provision of resources and structures to ensure that reflexive learning takes place.

Coaching as a viable senior leadership development tool and positive psychology coaching versus other "brands" of coaching

There was a great deal of evidence from the study to suggest that combining positive psychology and executive coaching in this programme produced beneficial outcomes for both individual participants and the organisation more widely. However, some respondents questioned the role of positive psychology in coaching, and indeed coaching itself, in the process of achieving outcomes. This led to the proposal that two rival theories might be able to explain the changes that were observed. The first was that individuals might have achieved their outcomes without participating in the positive psychology coaching programme at all. The second rival theory was that they might have achieved their outcomes as a result of a programme that used a different approach to that of positive psychology coaching. Because of the small scale of the study, it was impractical to examine these theories but they remain as possible alternative explanations to be explored in further studies. The implication is that if the organisation wishes to run similar programmes in the future, they should consider very carefully the appropriateness of coaching as a leadership development tool. If the decision is made to use it again or to use it more widely, they should weigh positive psychology coaching against the full range of other coaching "brands" to choose the one(s) they think would be most appropriate and effective in achieving the objectives for intended coachees and the organisation.

One of the respondents provided an interesting post-script to this discussion in an email exchange with me during a member-checking exercise. I had mentioned the fact that there could be rival explanatory theories in a report to the

organisation towards the end of the study, a draft of which I had put out to the stakeholders for consultation. They said:

> "With regard to the rival theories you refer to, for what it is worth, I definitely think the positive psychology approach made a real difference to me in terms of putting into action goals I do not think I would have done with the same success with a different approach" (anonymised email correspondence, 5th October 2018).

Practitioners

Embedding a consistent positive psychology coaching culture

The executive leaders managing the senior cohort in the organisation in future programme iterations would need to consider how to embed a coaching culture at least at the senior level in the organisation if not more widely. This should both enhance the process of positive and more overt role modelling and ensure that line managers consistently show an interest in the professional development of their staff who are undertaking coaching. This could be achieved via organisational briefings and training for line managers, and by the coaches themselves in the contracting process, possibly through 3-way contracting and/or re-emphasising the importance to coachees of securing the support and involvement of their managers before, during and after the coaching engagement.

Integration of coaching with organisational and national OD strategy

There was evidence, especially in the organisational involvement component, to suggest that engagement with the coaching programme needs to be perceived

as compatible and relevant to other aspects of national, organisational and local developmental strategy. The implication for the organisation is the importance of having a clear, published, overarching and strategic approach, together with a consistent and effective communication strategy. This would need to be addressed in a much more focused and co-ordinated way in any future programme iterations.

Participants

The implications for participants are that by utilising a realist approach to the design and improvement of the programme, constantly asking what works for whom in what circumstances and why, they will experience coaching that will be more effective and better serve their needs. By identifying the progress of the underlying programme theories as the programme moves through future cycles of deliveries, evaluations and re-design, it should be possible to track the success of the programme and make evidence-based changes to improve the programme every time it is run. This continuous improvement approach would be to the ultimate benefit of coachees and the organisation.

Evaluators

A major implication for evaluators is the value of adopting a realist approach to the evaluation process, despite the amount of work, time and effort that is involved. Evaluating a programme that is underpinned by a well-thought out programme theory has the benefit of a prior determination of what the programme is trying to achieve, with whom and in what circumstances. Doing so provides a

more robust set of criteria upon which to base an evaluation study. In particular, there is a great deal of added value to be gained by the evaluators from being involved in the design phase from the beginning and by incorporating a realist informed programme theory determination phase at the beginning of a new coaching programme rather than attempting to apply and rationalise realist principles to the programme *post hoc.*

The fact that the theorising in this current exploratory study was conducted at the middle range theory level means it could be used by way of cumulation (Pawson and Tilley, 1997), as mentioned in Chapter 3 (p. 107). By applying a process of abstraction in cases where the learning can be transferred between programmes, the need to start theorising from a blank sheet of paper every time is avoided. Whilst it is fair to say that there are no guarantees that results will be replicated, it may well be that the CMO configurations evidenced in the programme may have applicability to others in the same programme "family" and *vice versa*. Whilst the circumstances of similar programmes can be different, the learning from prior programmes in terms of the programme theories can be used to inform future ones.

I argue that adopting a realist research approach to the study has resulted in tangible benefits to those involved. I now turn to the contribution that positive psychology has made to this coaching programme.

8.7 The contribution of positive psychology coaching to the programme

The aim of the project was to examine how positive psychology coaching might work in a real-life setting. Having discussed above how the programme actually worked, I turn now to consider what this can tell us about the themes I identified as claims made in the positive psychology coaching literature, by applying the findings from the research project. In Chapter 2 (pp. 47 to 67), I presented six themes that summarise how writers appear to portray the underlying theory of positive psychology coaching. Here I propose the ways in which the evidence gleaned in this study support these notions, or not as the case may be, for each theme in turn, before offering some overall observations.

Theme 1: A "healthy" coaching approach

Positive psychology coaching works by offering a "healthier" approach to coaching than traditional medical models, say Kauffman and Scoular (2004). The key to this approach is to assume that a psychologically healthy coach works with a psychologically healthy coachee, coaching from a strengths-based perspective rather than adopting a "doctor-patient" position. This was supported by the current positive coaching programme. For example, one respondent commented:

> "I think the whole process of it [the coaching], just having a formal process means you make time to think about things, articulate things, re-play things, consider things, reflect on things. It's probably something that I do, but don't do enough in a positive sense. If I've reflected on something on my own it's more of an "oh God, why did I do that?" negative kind of thing, whereas a coaching session, because it's about that positive framing, has enabled a different sort of reflection" (Interview 15, lines 13-19).

As noted in Chapter 2, earlier notions of positive psychology have focused on happiness and positive emotions, and for that it has been the subject of some criticism. As also discussed in Chapter 2 (pp. 50 to 51), Sims (2017) has echoed recent developments in positive psychology thinking that has argued for a more balanced approach to the positive/negative debate. As the concept of a positive psychology "second wave" (Lomas and Ivtzan, 2016), or PP2.0 (Wong, 2011), develops, which advocates the embracing of the "dark" sides of life as well as the "light", positive psychology coaching may also mature to accommodate not just the positive but what Sims (2017) calls "working with difficult emotions" (p. 66). This was evident from the data in the current study in several ways, for example, how the coaching approach needed to allow for the expression of the vulnerabilities, anxieties and stresses some of the coachees were experiencing at the time. These were caused by heavy workloads, demands from service users, the nature of the work, senses of insecurity, frustration and lack of control and empowerment, lack of trust and diminished self-esteem and confidence. If, in the coaching, I as the coach had insisted on taking an unduly positive approach without also working with coachees' difficult emotions then the coaching may not have worked in the largely constructive way that it did. By encouraging the coachees to embrace and learn from their negative work and life experiences as well as their positive ones, develop their self-awareness and confidence, re-frame their thinking and focus on flourishing and not necessarily on happiness in its own right, both the "light" and "dark" aspects of their coaching work were addressed. This provided a sense of balance and authenticity in the coaching. In discussing the findings of my study in Chapter 6 (pp. 197 to 254), it was noted that in the coaching programme coachees brought many issues that were emotionally laden

and found that this nuanced positive psychology approach helped them to work them through.

As also mentioned in Chapter 2 (pp. 51to 52), Green and Palmer (2019) offer their opinion as to who would best benefit from positive psychology coaching. They comment that coachees who are generally in good or functional mental health may gain from positive psychology coaching, but it may not be suitable for those with serious psychologically clinical conditions. This may well be where a boundary between positive psychology coaching and therapy might lie, and where coaches making use of the positive psychology approach would need to apply their professional judgement as to its appropriateness for their client. The contribution made by my study is to theorise how the “healthy” approach to coaching might work and then explore the evidence produced in the detail of how it works in practice.

Theme 2: An egalitarian coaching relationship

The positive psychology coaching literature suggests that positive psychology coaching works through an egalitarian coaching relationship (Kauffman and Scoular, 2004; Freire, 2013; Grant and Cavanagh, 2011). The positive coaching relationship element in the current programme provided evidence to support that theme. By using a co-active coaching approach (Whitworth et al, 1998) the coaching in the current study found the right tone with the senior leader coachees, who were skilled and knowledgeable people in their own right. This echoes the findings of Stokes (2015), who observes that coachees are more agentic in their own right than has been traditionally acknowledged in coaching discourses.

Several respondents observed in the interviews that had the coaching taken a different approach, for example, the coach acting as “teacher”, then it would not have worked for them. The approach taken in the programme provided support for Grant and Cavanagh’s (2011) contention discussed in Chapter 2 (pp. 52 to 53) that the role of the coach is to support and scaffold the coachee’s search for meaning, particularly in complex environments. The fact that all respondents reported positively when asked about their experience of the coaching relationship provides evidence to support the claims for positive psychology coaching in the literature that it promotes an egalitarian coaching relationship.

Theme 3: Bringing together theory and practice

One of the key tenets in the earlier positive psychology and coaching literature is the synergy created by putting the two disciplines together. The main contentions are that positive psychology generally has the theoretical underpinning and research base that coaching lacks, and coaching has the practice opportunities that some say positive psychology needs to become not just an academic social science but also an applied one (Linley and Harrington, 2005; Grant and Cavanagh, 2011). Seligman (2007) concludes that positive psychology coaching brings together theory and practice to overcome deficits in each. An example of how this theme might work was provided by Freire (2013), as discussed in Chapter 2 (p. 50). She describes the theoretical concepts of Authentic Happiness Coaching, flow and co-active coaching in terms of their utility to coaching practice to provide benefits to the coachee.

The knowledge, understanding and skills and positive feedback programme components relate clearly to the suggestion in the literature that positive

psychology coaching brings together theory and practice. It does so by the very nature of its design and delivery, which stands on the twin pillars of positive psychology and coaching. The theme is rich in concept in the literature but short on detail as to how this fusion might work. My study provides the wealth of detail that is necessary to amplify this conceptual theme.

Theme 4: Scientifically researched concepts, tools and techniques

Many positive psychology coaching writers suggest that positive psychology coaching provides scientifically researched concepts, tools and techniques in a consistent way, both in the naming and nature of those concepts, tools and techniques, especially Hefferon (2011) and Boniwell et al (2014). Many of the positive psychology concepts and measures have been developed and tested in what are regarded as scientific studies, employing positivist methods such as the large-scale psychometric surveys used in the development of the MBTI and the VIA. However, they need a cohesive means to be applied in coaching practice in order to realise their utility in everyday situations. Several writers see coaching as scientifically inferior to positive psychology, for example, Seligman (2007), due to the perceived lack of a coherent body of coaching theory. Other writers see the relationship as more equal. As an example, Grant and Cavanagh (2011) suggest that coaching can offer as much to positive psychology as positive psychology can provide to coaching. One of the key areas is through the mechanisms of feedback. Here, the scientifically researched concepts of, say, the VIA, are applied in a professional coaching setting leading to fruitful coaching conversations. In the current study, the respondents expressed favourable views as to the utility of the feedback in their coaching experience, not just about the

data the measures produced but also about the concepts and ideas prompted through the act of completing the measures and receiving and discussing the feedback. The notable exception, as discussed above, was that VIA did not receive such a positive reception from everyone. This served as a reminder that, whist the positive feedback measures worked for some, they did not work for all.

Another note of caution to sound is that some positive psychology research conducted in the positivist tradition has been challenged. Friedman and Brown (2018) challenged the famous “happiness ratio” work of Fredrickson (2009), which had been taken to be a rigorously researched “given” for a number of years in positive psychology. This is a reminder that whilst it can be beneficial for coaches to incorporate scientifically researched concepts in their work or to ally themselves intellectually to a legitimate scientific discipline, it does not take away the need to satisfy oneself constantly of the quality and provenance of the knowledge and traditions they espouse.

Theme 5: Positive outcomes and wellbeing

Positive psychology coaching leads to positive outcomes and well-being, say Linley and Harrington (2005) and Green and Palmer (2019). I would hope that all coaching approaches would wish for these outcomes on behalf of their clients, but possibly many do not have them as front and centre as positive psychology coaching might have them. This echoes positive psychology’s clinical roots, despite having come into being as an antidote to it. The recent developments around Positive Psychology 2.0 or PP2 (Wong, 2011) perhaps bring the approach back into a more therapeutic space. One of the observations I made in delivering this current programme was a potential tendency of some coachees to

pathologise the coaching process, to see it as “fixing” them in some way. This can be exacerbated by some writers’ calls for positive psychology coaches to have to be qualified psychologists or qualified in positive psychology coaching (Green and Palmer, 2019; Lomas, 2019). Some professional bodies representing psychology seek to control who can name themselves as psychologists, for example, the British Psychological Society. I suggest that coaches who use the positive psychology coaching approach certainly need to be “psychologically minded” (Bluckert, 2006, pp. 87-92), knowledgeable about positive psychology concepts, tools and techniques (Burke, 2018) and, in particular, coaching, in order to engage in positive psychology coaching, but not necessarily needing to be professionally qualified as a psychologist.

These considerations echo Western’s coaching discourse work (Western, 2012), especially when he talks about the “Psy Expert” discourse. The recent PP2 developments (Wong, 2011) could arguably be acting to pull positive psychology coaching away from its focus on the “celebratory self” and more towards the “wounded self”. In the current study, there was a great deal of contextual evidence about the circumstances in which senior leaders in the police service find themselves. These include feelings of vulnerability, self-doubt, lack of clarity, pressure and being overwhelmed. It is possible that this tough environment lent itself well to the scientific credentials and approach that positive psychology coaching in particular could offer. Taking the realist principle further, this might suggest that a similar approach may not work so well for those in different circumstances, either in the same organisation and sector or in different ones.

The whole programme provided evidence that positive outcomes and an enhanced sense of wellbeing were achieved through the coaching. The

experience was that the positive psychology element was a main contributory factor.

Theme 6: Coherent process

It has been suggested that positive psychology coaching provides a coherent process that leads to successful coaching outcomes (Kauffman, 2006; Biswas-Diener, 2010; Oades and Passmore, 2014; Burke, 2018), in that it leads to a set of coaching processes that provide an internal integrity that can be sustained as participants progress through the programme. The study at the whole programme level as represented in Figure 7.15 on page 282 in Chapter 7 provided support for this. The experience of the current study is that positive psychology provided a consistent theme and focus for the coaching, giving it a sense of internal cohesion. Recent positive psychology coaching publications have provided some suggested intervention types and designs. As mentioned in Chapter 2, pages 64 to 65, Burke (2018) was the first writer to publish a practice framework to describe and prescribe key positive psychology coaching features. The detail of how these features might work in the context of a whole programme, however, was absent, leading to an opportunity for my work to make a contribution in this area. This recent focus in the positive psychology coaching literature on coherence of process is welcomed and the publications by Kauffman (2006), Passmore and Oades (2014), Biswas-Diener (2010) and Burke (2018) have been very useful for the purposes of programme design. I am less convinced, however, that coherence of process is a particularly distinguishing feature of positive psychology coaching. I am sure that other coaching approaches that are embedded in well-designed programmes could equally perform a similar role.

Exploring alternative coaching approaches for coherence in coaching programmes was beyond the scope of this small-scale study but could readily form the basis for future research.

Bringing the six themes together, I argue that the general approach that positive psychology coaching brought to the intervention proved to be appropriate in the circumstances of this particular programme, for that set of coachees, in that moment in time and in the policing context that prevailed. It provided a genre of coaching that appeared to fit with the general direction of travel that the organisational culture and national climate were taking. It was perceived to add value by way of its positive orientation and its focus on well-being, and its ability to generate goal directed behaviour. Generally speaking, the positive psychology theories, tools and techniques were well received, stimulated interest and provided a consistent theme that sustained the focus of the coaching throughout. The egalitarian and psychologically healthy approach to the coaching relationship was particularly well regarded. However, I do not agree with the proposition that positive psychology theory should replace all other theories of coaching or that coaching is, in effect, an applied positive psychology. Positive psychology coaching relies on a set of psychological theories, some of which have been researched under the discipline of positive psychology but also in others. I see the body of research in positive psychology coaching as proxy research, that is, it has been "borrowed" from other disciplines. The body of theory that exists in coaching could also be seen in this way. I argue that positive psychology does not resolve the coaching theory question quite as Seligman (2007) and others

might claim. In my view, coaching still needs to develop its own theoretical base but it will always be broad and flexible enough to benefit from the theories of other disciplines and approaches. I can see the advantages of using positive psychology coaching as this study has shown, but I remain to be convinced that positive psychology coaching should be adopted as an appropriate coaching style in all situations for all coaches and coachees in all organisations at all times. Other styles could be just as effective, or indeed more so in different circumstances. Organisations who wish to adopt a positive psychology style of coaching therefore need to make carefully considered decisions as to its appropriateness and fit.

8.8 Chapter summary

In this chapter I have considered five topics: a re-visitation of the aim and research question, a summary of the main findings, a discussion of how the programme worked, the implications of adopting a realist research approach for stakeholders and the contribution made by positive psychology to the coaching engagement. I have also made some observations about the appropriateness of the positive psychology coaching approach, arriving at the view that, whilst it has a great deal to offer to coaches, coachees and organisations in certain kinds of contexts, rather than representing a universally applicable genre it should be regarded as one approach amongst a range of alternative coaching styles to be considered carefully to suit the particular set of the circumstances pertaining to the programme in question.

I have advanced the thesis' arguments in this chapter by discussing how positive psychology brought theoretical and practical value to the coaching programme and how it was appropriate to employ it in this context, especially with its focus on well-being. I have also demonstrated how a realist approach provided a rich and detailed account of the programme to demonstrate how the programme worked, for whom and in what circumstances.

I now turn to draw some conclusions in the next chapter. In doing so, I include a consideration of the contribution this study makes, the strengths and limitations of the research approach I have taken and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 9: Conclusions

9.1 Chapter introduction

In this chapter, I bring together the themes and arguments that I have discussed in detail in earlier chapters, summarise the results that have been obtained, demonstrate how they address the research question and how I have contributed to the academic debate. I provide a critique of the research approach I used and review the criteria against which realist research should be judged. I also discuss the implications for the wider stakeholders of coaching, the limitations of the research and the challenge of some of the ethical issues that I faced before suggesting the direction in which future research in this area might take. My reflexive account forms an integral part of my thesis and appears in Chapter 10.

9.2 Study conclusions

The research question asked how a positive psychology executive coaching programme could work to support senior police leaders to set, pursue and achieve their personal and leadership development goals and contribute to the organisation's leadership development culture. In my review of the literature, I concluded that there are six main themes relating to the contribution positive psychology claims to make to coaching, as I discussed in Chapter 2 (pp. 47 to 67). The research project was based on a realist action research methodological orientation. The study sought to examine how a positive psychology coaching programme works through a programme strategy that provides opportunities as resource mechanisms to the coachees, for whom reasoning mechanisms occur.

Coachees use their own personal agency to make decisions and take action to achieve coaching outcomes (Pawson, 2013; Jagosh, 2019). I argued that in the particular circumstances of the programme a positive psychology coaching approach might be an effective one to adopt. Through the results reported and discussed in Chapters 6, 7 and 8, it was possible to demonstrate how the positive psychology coaching programme worked by examining the generative causal pathways for six programme components and to arrive at a refined theory for the whole programme.

Bringing together the evidence gleaned from the programme research participants, I showed how the programme components of knowledge, understanding and skills of positive psychology; a positive coaching relationship; positive reframing; positive organisational involvement; positive psychology feedback and positive learning worked together in context, leading to coachees' reasoning, decision-making and action-taking that generated successful coaching outcomes. In the components of positive psychology knowledge, understanding and skills; a positive coaching relationship; positive reframing and positive psychology feedback, the evidence largely supported and fine-tuned the proposed programme theory. In the components of positive organisational involvement and positive learning, the evidence was mixed and led to major refinements to the original programme theory.

To summarise, the evidence showed that the main programme components and the whole programme worked in the following ways:

1. ***Knowledge, understanding and skills of positive psychology:*** as reported in Chapter 6 (pp. 203 to 211), the resources provided by this

component worked in the context of volunteer coachees, coachees with new and challenging circumstances and interested and curious coachees so they engaged with the coaching process, increased their knowledge and understanding, raised their self-confidence, self-esteem and self-belief. They felt motivated to make decisions and take action to define/refine and achieve development goals.

2. ***Positive coaching relationship:*** as reported in Chapter 6 (pp. 216 to 220), the resources provided by this component worked in the context of coachees open to positive psychology coaching and a positive coaching relationship, and having complex work roles to raise their self-confidence and self-efficacy, build trust in the coach and engage in the coaching process. They felt motivated to make decisions and take action to define/refine, pursue and achieve cogent and stretching development goals and develop their leadership ability and resilience.

3. ***Positive reframing:*** as reported in Chapter 6 (pp. 221-226), the resources provided by this component worked in the context of coachees who are open-minded with a growth mindset to explore their thinking, develop a new perspective and raise their self-confidence and self-efficacy. They felt motivated to make decisions and take action to do things differently and define/refine and achieve aspirational leadership development goals.

4. ***Positive organisational involvement:*** as reported in Chapter 6 (pp. 226-236), the resources provided by this component worked with coachees who perceive the organisational culture as positively supportive, fair, consistent and development-orientated, and see a purpose for their positive psychology coaching to feel supported and valued, that their development is taken seriously, raise their organisational awareness and efficacy and feel inspired. They felt motivated and engaged enough to make decisions and take action to define/refine and achieve their development goals.

5. ***Positive psychology feedback:*** as reported in Chapter 6 (pp. 236-241), the resources provided by this component worked in the context of coachees open to feedback with complex, challenging leadership roles to raise their self-knowledge, confidence and efficacy, respond positively to feedback and see the wider organisational perspective. They felt motivated to define/refine, pursue and achieve commensurate goals with wider applications beyond themselves.

6. ***Positive learning:*** as reported in Chapter 6 (pp. 241-247), the resources provided by this component worked in the context of coachees who are open to a positive approach to reflexive learning, respond to structure and perceive a consistent development-focused organisational, sector and national climate to feel motivated to engage in reflexive learning, see the connection with wider learning policy and self-reinforce their learning. They felt motivated to devise their own

methods, track their process of change and to define/refine and achieve realistic development goals.

7. ***Whole programme:*** as reported in Chapter 8 (pp. 280-274), the evidence showed that as well as producing generative causal pathways of their own, the dynamics of these individual components worked inter-relatedly in a complex state of balance. A refined overall programme theory suggested that the programme resources afforded by the six components worked in four aspects of context, those of the personal, the role, the organisational and sectoral climate and the organisational and sectoral culture. The resources led to coachees raising their knowledge, understanding and skills, their self-confidence and self-efficacy. They felt motivated to engage with the coaching and motivated and supported. They made decisions and took actions to define/refine, pursue and achieve cogent and stretching personal and professional development goals and contribute to the organisation's leadership development culture. The importance of the cognitive and emotional reasoning mechanisms was evident in all of the causal relationships at programme component and whole-programme levels and reflected the senior leaders' feelings of vulnerability in the operating environment at the time. The negative effects of imbalances in the process, such as coachees' perceptions of the organisation's intentions, were highlighted.

The conclusion is that, in this programme, not only did the positive psychology executive coaching approach work to achieve successful coaching outcomes, but the study uncovered valuable detail as to how it helped coachees to bring about personal and organisational change. It did so by drawing together a set of resource mechanisms and reasoning mechanisms operating in the kind of context that allowed them to “fire”, or activate, to lead to coachees’ taking decisions and engaging in actions to achieve successful coaching outcomes.

As part of the analysis, I also explored and developed arguments relating to the claims positive psychology coaching makes in the literature, concluding that there is a great deal about it that might appeal to coaches, coachees and organisations. However, it may be that positive psychology coaching as an approach is more appropriate in some kinds of contexts, such as the operational environment experienced by the senior police leaders in my study. There was insufficient evidence due to the nature and scope of my research to support the contention that it could form the theoretical and scientific “backbone” to coaching (Seligman, 2007) in all circumstances. Until such evidence is obtained, rather than advocating the use of coaching based on positive psychology as a universal solution, it perhaps should be considered as one possibility against a range of alternative coaching approaches depending on the context of the programme’s situation.

A further conclusion is that by using a research orientation based on an objectivist ontology and a subjectivist epistemology, I was able to argue that a realist research approach is an appropriate way to explore a complex social phenomenon such as that of an executive coaching programme. I was able to demonstrate that by working at the middle range level of theory, the learning from

the study might be helpful to the stakeholders of present and future iterations of the current programme and perhaps even more widely to similar programmes in other settings, not through a process of generalisation but through that of cumulation.

9.3 Contribution

The main contribution of my study is in the advancement of knowledge in positive psychology coaching. As observed in Chapter 1 (p. 13), there is a lack of published studies on how positive psychology coaching programmes work. To the best of my knowledge, my study is the first to have considered this question on a whole-programme basis. The detailed results provide valuable new insights into the workings of an executive coaching programme based on positive psychology principles. It also provides an evidence-based set of programme theories that can be used to inform future similar programmes, contributing to theory development. This work can inform future research in the ways I describe in section 9.8. My research also contributes to knowledge about how a positive psychology coaching programme works in the policing sector in England and Wales, which, as far as I can tell, has not been done before. As well as developing theory, my research has a practical application, particularly to the organisation in which it took place. It has informed their policy and practice in the use of coaching in senior leadership development locally. It also has the capacity to influence national police leadership development policy, providing an example from which other coaching programmes in other forces could be developed. I have also made a contribution to practice more generally by theorising, exploring and refining theory to show how a positive psychology coaching programme works,

highlighting what appears to work well and what does not, often in unexpected ways, in fine detail. The context-mechanism-outcome configurations may have a wider applicability for coaching practitioners. For example, a mechanism that might on the surface initially be expected to act in a certain way might do so in an unexpected or diminished manner in practice, as illustrated in the refined theories noted in Table 7.1 (pp. 276 to 279) and in Figure 7.15 (p. 282). Awareness of this will be a useful prompt to practitioners to dig beneath the "taken-for-granted" when devising and delivering coaching programmes.

This thesis is concerned predominantly with developing new knowledge in the field of positive psychology coaching. However, in so doing, it has utilised a research orientation that has rarely been applied in psychology in the past, that of realist research. There have been only a few published realist studies, for example, Greenwood (1994) in the fields of identity and emotion, and Kovacs and Corrie (2017a), which was a realist evaluation in the field of executive coaching psychology. There are no applications of realist action research in psychology as far as I am aware. I argue that I have made an additional contribution to the discussion about extending realist research approaches beyond those of realist review and evaluation. I have done this by developing and applying realist action research to study a positive psychology coaching programme and also by doing so in a UK policing context. This thesis also makes an additional contribution to the development of coaching programme design by demonstrating the utility of a theory-led approach when designing new coaching programmes.

As already discussed, it has been argued that positivism is the dominant discourse in organisational and management research (for example, Gill and

Johnson, 2010) and much of conventional psychology (for example, Luthans et al, 2015). I have also argued that a positivist approach to researching positive psychology coaching programmes can be problematic, as much of it has sought to exclude or control for context in the quest to discover universal truths. I have therefore argued that my research provides an alternative, inclusive and more naturalistic discourse about how positive psychology coaching actually works in context and, by doing so, I have moved the academic and professional discussions forward.

9.4 General implications for coaching stakeholders

I commented in Chapter 8 (pp. 312-321) on the implications of my research on the stakeholders of coaching in the organisation in which it took place. I now turn to a consideration of its implications more widely on coaching. As Ely and Zaccaro (2011) point out, it is important to consider the effectiveness of executive coaching from the perspective of stakeholders, of whom there are many. To provide a focus for the purpose of this argument, I have identified the main stakeholder groups as organisations, participants, coaches, coaching researchers and educators, and coaching bodies.

Organisations

As designers of positive psychology coaching programmes and, in many cases, the commissioners of deliverers of such programmes, the implications of my research on organisations are that the decisions they make need to be based on

a knowledge and evidence base, not only of the positive psychology coaching genre itself, but also of the way in which such an intervention might work in terms of its context, mechanisms and potential outcomes. The use of *a priori* theorising and existing programme theory allows the organisation to make more informed decisions as to how their programmes might work and how positive psychology coaching programmes that have been designed and delivered successfully in other similar contexts could transfer to their own. This is particularly important in sectors or industries that are susceptible to new management fads and fashions and where members often wish to follow what their peers declare as “best practice”. My research shows that it is important for programme architects and other organisational stakeholders to question such assumptions closely, such as asking whether or not positive psychology coaching is the right approach given their general culture and wider management practices. My research provides examples of heuristics that might be useful in a theory-led approach. By being clear, through careful prior theorising, as to what the programme can reasonably be expected to do and how, an advantage of such increased awareness could be the production of programmes that better match and achieve stakeholders’ requirements. It would also allow more detailed commissioning, and the setting of better critical success criteria and processes for evaluation. A further advantage would be the opportunity for continuous improvement from the learning gained from running each programme when engaging in a series of subsequent iterations. This would be facilitated through the act of constantly refining the programme theory.

Participants

For coachees, such deliberation and consideration should result in a more appropriate experience of the coaching programme. Working with a coach who understands in detail what the programme is trying to achieve and how it might achieve it should enhance the effectiveness of the coaching intervention. For example, my research has highlighted how important it is for coachees to feel supported and engaged in legitimate activity throughout their coaching programmes. A greater degree of clarity attained through theorising would facilitate such positive organisational involvement. If the organisation understands how the programme is likely to work and communicates effectively that understanding to line managers, they will be able to provide appropriate support to coachees throughout the engagement and the right environment to encourage the transfer of learning. These features may lead to a more satisfying coaching experience for coachees, line managers and the organisation and a better chance that the transfer of learning will take place.

Coaches

Increasing understanding of how positive psychology coaching programmes work should enable coaches to make decisions as to whether or not the approach is an appropriate one for them to practise, given their world view, interests, background, training and experience. This study provides coaches with a wealth of detail about the topic to help them develop their practice. Such detail provides an opportunity for coaches to decide where to invest their own coach development activity, for example, to develop their 'psychologically-mindedness' (Bluckert, 2006) by training in positive psychology coaching and seeking

appropriate supervision. Many coaches are likely to encounter coachees who bring with them negative emotions and experiences to coaching, especially when they operate in challenging organisational and/or role contexts. By helping coaches to understand the finer detail of how positive psychology coaching programmes are likely to work, this study may contribute to their decision-making on where their boundary of expertise lies in order to appreciate where their coaching should end and referral to other forms of help should begin. The knowledge gained from the study may also help coaches engage in more detailed contracting with their coachees and the organisation so that all parties are better informed about what to expect from a positive psychology coaching approach.

Coaching researchers and educators

The new knowledge that my research has generated adds to the coaching, coaching psychology and positive psychology coaching literatures. As such, it could contribute to the subject-matter of what is taught and researched, providing a useful addition to the coach education and training curriculum and research agenda in universities and coach training providers. It also introduces a novel way in which to conduct positive psychology coaching research, providing opportunities for further exploration building on my study as suggested in section 9.8. This study could, therefore, provide a broader and more inclusive approach to coaching psychology research, not just through the new knowledge it has generated but also through the different research approach that has been applied.

Coaching bodies

My research might also have some utility for the professional bodies that seek to regulate the practice of coaching and psychology. The new knowledge may contribute to their notions of what constitutes the competent professional in their fields. This is particularly relevant to the debate concerning the extent to which coaches should or need not be qualified psychologists. My research has shown that, in order for coaches to incorporate positive psychology principles into their professional practice, they should be psychologically minded (Bluckert, 2006) and possess knowledge and skills in coaching, positive psychology and positive psychology coaching. In my view, shaped by my experience of conducting the study, the practice of positive psychology coaching need not be restricted only to professionally qualified psychologists. The outcomes of my research, by focusing on the detail of how positive psychology contributes to coaching programmes, may add to the ongoing debate as to where the boundaries between coaching and coaching psychology might lie (Lomas, 2019) or indeed whether or not such boundaries should exist at all (Passmore et al, 2018). This debate in turn has implications for what, if at all, should be the appropriate requirements for the professional training, qualifications and restrictions relating to the coaches who practise them.

9.5 Critique of the research approach

Advantages

The advantages of using a realist action research approach were many. First of all, it allowed me to use an approach that matched my ontological and epistemological beliefs. It also yielded a richer and more detailed account of how the programme worked than perhaps would have been available using other methods, whilst also retaining a degree of rigour. It allowed an exploration beneath the surface to look inside the “black box” of how the programme worked. It afforded a depth ontology and a liberating opportunity to use the process of abstraction in my thinking in my search for possible explanations for generative causal relationships.

The approach accommodated an examination of the context in which the programme took place. This proved to be relevant in the resultant explanation, given the personal, organisational, sectoral and societal circumstances in which the programme was conducted. A realist approach also allowed the use of flexible research methods and a process of iteration, which may not have been possible under other paradigms.

Lastly, the concept of cumulation makes possible a degree of transferability of the lessons learned from the study to other programmes. As the programme theories were devised at the middle range level, it is possible to say that there could be the potential for limited but illuminating applicability where the learning permits. This is different from the view of transferability in both positivist and post-modernist approaches. The claim is not the same as the one that is made for

universal generalisability but it is proposed in the pragmatic recognition that at the middle range what is learned about how a specific programme works may also have a utility beyond the specific set of circumstances in which the programme was studied.

Limitations and challenges

All research approaches have their limitations. Realist research approaches deal with complex concepts, which call for complex data and analysis. It advocates an iterative approach, which is time-consuming and intellectually demanding. When placed in the context of a time-bound PhD programme conducted by a single researcher, combining the principles of realist review, realist evaluation and action research into one study placed particular demands and resource pressures upon me. It was difficult to know when to stop. I therefore had to take a pragmatic approach, which is accommodated in realist thinking. An example of this was my decision to run just one full cycle of action research, taken with the agreement of the organisation. In order to maintain the momentum and empower the organisation to continue with further versions of the programme, I worked with the key stakeholders to explain the findings and implications, provided comprehensive and evidence-based recommendations and helped them to work up a plan for them to implement after my research with them had ended.

The lack of recognition of realist approaches in the field of psychology could be a barrier when I am disseminating the findings of my research. I am, however, heartened by the fact that reports of research based on methods other than those driven by positivism are beginning to appear more frequently in coaching

psychology journals and professional publications. I am therefore confident that my chances of being heard are better now than they might have been in the past.

I summarise by saying that adopting a realist stance to research is not a “soft option”. I took a decision to work in an unfamiliar paradigm driven by my dissatisfaction with traditional approaches to psychological research, and there have been times when I have questioned my wisdom due to the hard work and persistence that it required. On reflection, the learning has been enormous and the results worthwhile, so in the end it was a good decision for me, and, I believe, for the study itself.

9.6 Ethical considerations

An early challenge arose when I was deciding what kind of research approach to take. I did consider a quasi-experimental approach making use of control and experimental groups, which, had I pursued that route, would potentially have raised a number of ethical issues that would have needed to be addressed. For example, giving an experimental group a treatment that I thought could have been beneficial but not giving it to a control group could have be problematic. Techniques to address that dilemma were considered, such as the use of a waiting list to provide the programme to the members of the control group on a later occasion. The time frame for the project and the organisation’s requirement to complete the study as quickly as possible for operational reasons militated against this option. In the event, and in consultation with the organisation, I decided that, as there is little known about how positive psychology executive

coaching actually works, plus the fact that this issue has not been researched before in this type of organisational setting in the UK, I should conduct a more in-depth study with a small number of volunteers, where all of the participants could receive the programme.

The fact that I incorporated action research as an orientation in the research design brought many benefits, such as the ability to use co-operation as a means to produce knowledge, but it also posed some ethical challenges, to which I now turn. As Gill and Johnson (2010) point out, action research presents some ethical issues due to its dual aim of creating new knowledge and solving organisational problems. They identify a number of potential pitfalls; here I summarise the ways in which they affected my work and how they were addressed.

The first challenge Gill and Johnson (2010) highlight is how acceptable the organisation is to the researcher. An example of that could be a mismatch in values between the two parties. The fact that I had worked in policing at a senior level for several years meant that I was fully aware of its benefits and failings. I was in a position to make an informed choice to conduct my research in a policing organisation as my own values supported its general organisational purpose and intent.

The second challenge turned out to be more difficult and concerned what Gill and Johnson (2010) refer to as confidentiality and participant protection. The organisation itself was large but researching a senior leadership cohort meant that the target population was much smaller and those in distinctive roles would be easily identifiable. Because the subject-matter of my research was viewed by the organisation as highly sensitive, the commissioners and participants did not wish to be identified in any way in publications. I have therefore not identified the

organisation or participants in this thesis and information about them has been restricted to the most basic level. Other measures I have taken include identifying participants by interview number only and I have removed any personal or other identifying details from transcripts and reports with the participant's explicit knowledge and consent. As a further protection, I analysed the data and wrote reports and papers at the programme level rather than at the individual level.

Action research involves intervention in organisational life and it is about changing things (Gill and Johnson, 2010). The coaching programme and my research contained elements of both. I have tried to ensure that the coaching and research did not present risks to the well-being of the participants as far as I was able. However, I cannot guarantee that there will be no adverse effect on others, such as the coachees' staff, because of actions taken by coachees resulting from the coaching intervention. Through dialogue in the coaching sessions with the coachees, I have tried to keep a check on this, but it has not been easy to control for outside those coaching conversations.

The fourth ethical challenge observed by Gill and Johnson (2010) arises from the fact that the researcher and participants work together and have expectations of each other that may differ. In order to address this concern, I had explicit conversations about the study and the various roles and responsibilities with the organisation and participants through the contracting process. I have been careful to separate my roles of coach and researcher by offering participants the opportunity to withdraw from the study not only at the coaching stage but also again at the research interview stage, and by asking for their honesty and candour in responses to my research questions. I have also made it clear that the programme design was a joint effort between me and the organisation in order

to minimise any perceptions of pressure to produce socially acceptable responses in my favour, thinking that I was the sole architect. I gave the organisation and participants access to ethical codes of conduct containing routes to external adjudication in the event of any perceived breach on my part.

Working closely with an organisation in action research can pose ethical issues when it comes to negotiating, maintaining and closing down access to the organisation, as Gray (2009) has highlighted. I had to bear this in mind constantly to ensure that at all stages the relationship remained constructive. Particular issues arose about the speed of the research, especially around the time it took for detailed analysis and reporting towards the end of the project when the business needs of the organisation vastly outpaced the demands of rigorous PhD research. Through frequent conversations, meetings and interim reporting, I worked with the organisation to handle this and, in the event, I achieved a positive withdrawal at the end of the research.

9.7 Meeting the success criteria for research quality

In this section I return briefly to my discussion in Chapter 3 (pp. 106-108) concerning the selection of success criteria when judging the quality of a piece of research. It was noted in that chapter that positivism is still largely seen as the dominant discourse in business and management research, as well as in psychology. The success criteria for positivist research have traditionally been regarded as validity, reliability and generalisability. As Johnson et al (2006) point out, applying the same positivist criteria to all research studies might not be

appropriate for work conducted in other paradigms, especially in those that use qualitative methods. Instead, studies should demonstrate “critical trustworthiness”, evidenced by reflexivity, critical interpretation, democratic research design, anticipatory accommodation and catalytic validity. I explained those terms in Chapter 3 (pp. 106-108) and here I express how I have addressed each of them in my study.

To respond to the notion of reflexivity, my position is that I believe that as a researcher I was unable to conduct my study whilst leaving behind my own biases, influences and values. I did not take a neutral stance but instead I reflected upon and acknowledged the influences that have impacted on my involvement in the research. In recognition of this, I include a reflexive account that addresses these issues in Chapter 10.

Research that is conducted in the critical realist tradition needs to demonstrate evidence of critical interpretation. As discussed in Chapter 3 (p. 105), whilst realist action research is aligned to scientific realism that itself has roots in critical realism, it does not espouse emancipatory, power and political concerns to the same extent. However, the criterion of catalytic validity calls for the encouragement of research participants to improve their self-understanding and challenge the “taken-for-granted” to lead to change. I argue that my project has had this criterion in mind throughout, from the aims and objectives of positive psychology coaching itself to the way in which the programme was been designed, delivered and researched.

There are several aspects of my study where I have endeavoured to take an egalitarian approach to the coaching and to the research, for example, where coachees were encouraged to pursue personal leadership goals as well as

organisational ones so that everyone would benefit. In a similar vein, I responded to the “democratic research design” requirement by adopting the action research approach and working closely with the stakeholders throughout the design, delivery and research aspects of the study, as described in Chapter 4 (pp. 122-156).

I have already mentioned the concept of cumulation in realist research in respect of anticipatory accommodation. This can be likened to the positivist concept of generalisability, but instead of searching for universal truths that can be applied in all circumstances, anticipatory accommodation refers to the transferability of learning from one context to another where it is appropriate to do so. I would argue that it was possible to do this from my study through identifying the lessons learned at the middle range and considering them for other programmes where they might fit. This is a more pragmatic approach to generalisability, and claims made for it in the research have been couched in such terms.

Taking these considerations into account, I argue that I have demonstrated critical trustworthiness in my study.

9.8 Recommendations for further research

There are several ways in which the research could be developed in the future. This study was limited by scale and resources, but I have been able to begin an exploration of how a positive psychology coaching programme might work. For pragmatic reasons, I restricted my study to a small number of factors to keep it manageable and I have been very clear that my findings are only partial. I heeded

the advice of Ray Pawson, a key figure in realist research. When asked how doctoral researchers should go about handling the large volume of data that realist studies tend to produce, he responded:

> "Go down to a few theories you feel are fruitful and think of the specific (and limited) amount of materials that will help you test those particular ideas. You end up with 'a partial exploration of a partial set of ideas' about an intervention/programme/transition. And that is the definition of a PhD" (Pawson, 2019).

A similar observation could be made about the small numbers involved in my study, although I appreciate that in this kind of research respondent numbers are not all-important. However, research into larger programmes where a greater variety of coachees are involved, perhaps including those who do not volunteer or neither volunteer nor have a particular interest in positive psychology, might result in more differentiated outcomes so that detailed comparisons can be made.

Although my study makes use of realist research methods, it was intended as a realist exploration and not a formal realist review or evaluation. Extensions to it might include the future conduct of full realist reviews and evaluations in respect of similar programmes. I would suggest, therefore, that there is much scope for further research into other potential positive psychology coaching programmes, theories and explanations to build on the start I have made.

I situated my research in the context of senior police leadership in England and Wales. However, I researched the topic in one force. Other potential avenues for further research would include studying the topic in the sector either as a whole, in other geographies or by way of comparison in a group of forces. There is also scope to extend the research to other sectors and industries.

My research captured a moment in time and provided a limited opportunity to include a small longitudinal aspect. Learning and changed behaviour brought about through coaching can mature over the passage of time. A useful development of my research would therefore be to include a longer-term evaluation of the effectiveness of a positive psychology coaching programme.

My study examined how a new coaching programme worked but my approach could be applied to existing programmes. I used a methodological orientation that has had little exposure in the coaching field so far, but one that has produced encouraging results. Whilst my research was focused on positive psychology coaching, an extension of it would be to employ similar methods to study how and why programmes work in other genres of coaching.

9.9 Chapter summary

In this chapter, I have summarised the various themes and arguments that I have presented in the thesis in order to bring them to a conclusion. I believe I have demonstrated how I have answered my research question and shown how I have contributed to the academic debate.

I contend that I have researched a topic that is of interest to coaching academics and professionals using methods that provide a means of detailed exploration of how and why a positive psychology coaching programme might work. I have put forward and researched a suggested programme theory that I believe adds to existing knowledge in its own right. If developed in the future, this could provide the basis of a research agenda to explain what goes on in positive psychology

coaching programmes and other genres in a range of different circumstances. I believe this constitutes an original and independent contribution to the positive psychology coaching literature.

In this chapter, I have brought to a close the arguments that I introduced in Chapter 1 (p. 35) and developed throughout my thesis. I believe I have demonstrated that:

1. Positive psychology can bring theoretical and practical value to the study and practice of executive coaching, with caveats over its claims to be universally appropriate or applicable;
2. Positive psychology coaching, with its focus on well-being, can be an appropriate genre to employ in leadership development in the police service in England and Wales in the right circumstances, bearing in mind its challenging cultural and operational contexts;
3. My study has responded in detail to address an identified gap in positive psychology coaching research by studying how a positive psychology coaching programme works, for whom and in what circumstances; and
4. A realist approach leads to a more nuanced discourse to positive psychology coaching research to address its complexity, which is helpful in contributing both to existing knowledge and to practice.

My reflexive account appears in Chapter 10, which follows.

Chapter 10: Reflexive Account

10.1 Chapter introduction

As I was writing this reflexive account, I was reminded of Alice in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* when she said, "it's no use going back to yesterday, because I was a different person then" (Carroll, 1865). I am certainly not the same person today as I was when I started my PhD journey for a variety of different reasons, some of which I describe below.

When I studied the research philosophy literature as part of my PhD programme and subsequently made my decision to commit to a realist research approach, I understood and accepted the responsibility that came with it. As Johnson and Duberley (2003) point out, those who do research inevitably take a philosophical position in the choices they make in order to conduct their enquiry, whether they are aware of doing so or not. Johnson and Duberley (2003) argue that it is incumbent upon the researcher to surface and think about the taken-for-granted assumptions and values that underpin such choices by way of the practice of reflexivity. Not to do so is, in their words, "an abdication of intellectual responsibility which results in poor research practices" (Johnson and Duberley, 2003, pp 1279-1280).

In this chapter, I reflect upon the various influences that I brought with me into the research process, the bearing I have had upon it and the impact it has had on me. I have already mentioned in Chapter 3 (p. 82-96) how I went about making my ontological and epistemological choices when I embarked upon my research project. In this chapter, I build on those observations through my

personal reflections on my role in choosing what to study and how to study it. I subscribe to the view expressed by James and Vinnicombe (2002) that conducting research is profound and personal depending on the researcher's worldview, interest, positioning relating to research data and individual characteristics. I found this to be a useful framework upon which to base my reflexivity.

My reflections touch upon my key career influences, background and values, my interest in the policing sector, the population I wanted to study, my beliefs about the nature of senior leadership and my assumptions about the nature and value of coaching. These lead to a brief consideration of the assumptions about positive psychology coaching that I brought to the project and the impact I have had on both the coaching programme and the research. Lastly, I reflect upon the methodological orientation I chose and how it has affected me as a researcher.

10.2 Worldview

I start my reflexive account with my worldview. I have had a lifelong career in leadership development, culminating in a very rewarding spell of 13 years working with a number of the country's senior police officers and staff. I acknowledge that most of my working life has been spent as a senior manager in mostly large organisations, and inevitably my views of what constitutes a rewarding leadership career has been shaped by this relatively privileged position. It has also nurtured in me a desire to help the senior leaders with whom I work to develop themselves into the very best leaders they can become. I have a strong work ethic and believe that everyone has talents that they can develop to be the best version of themselves. I am pragmatic, have a strong sense of

independence and a focus on solutions. I believe that we as human beings have agency and that achieving success is largely down to oneself. I also believe that we can choose to thrive rather than just survive. This can sometimes make me come across as unsympathetic when I believe that coachees have the capability to find the solutions within them but choose not to do so. Through reflexive practice, I have worked on my ability to understand the client's point of view more fully and accept that I need to work to their needs rather than my own.

Coming from a working-class but aspirational family background, and through seeking and making the most of the educational and developmental opportunities available to me, I have worked hard to progress my career. My values and beliefs have inevitably affected my approach to coaching, and ultimately to my interest in positive psychology coaching research. I recognise that I have biases and preferences for certain topics to the exclusion of others, and these have influenced what I have chosen to research, how I decided to research it and with whom I decided to work. My research was personally "vested" from the start, defined as much by what I chose not to research as what I did select to study. I fully acknowledge that my background, beliefs and values have formed the lenses through which I looked to determine the way in which I constructed the research project and interpreted its findings. The implication of this is that mine may not be the only legitimate account; others may have done the research differently and may have interpreted the findings in a different way. By committing to an objectivist ontology but a subjectivist epistemology I accept that. By engaging in epistemic reflexivity as described by Johnson and Duberley (2003), however, it has served to raise my awareness of the implications of my choices and actions and provided a language through which to articulate it.

10.3 My interest in positive psychology coaching

I now turn to my interest in the topic. When I came to my decision to research positive psychology coaching, I was enthusiastic but cautious. I had spent a great deal of my time when studying psychology noticing just how negative and deficit-based the discipline had become, and this disappointed me. I had heard of positive psychology coaching as a relatively new approach, and it seemed to have an intuitive appeal as a potential antidote to the negativity. I had also heard about its criticisms, for example, those of Megginson (2010) and Ehrenrich (2010) mentioned in Chapter 1 (p. 17). These critiques also made sense. I became intrigued about how a positive psychology coaching approach would work in an organisational programme setting. I wanted a hands-on, immersed experience, so I decided that I wanted to be involved not only in researching it but also by taking an action-oriented approach.

When the notion of “positive psychology 2.0” (Lomas, 2016) came along, it began to make even more sense in the way it integrated the positive and negative aspects of life in a holistic way. It seemed to offer a more mature, balanced and adult approach to a style of coaching that is predicated on positive psychology. I wanted to find out how a positive psychology approach could make a difference to coaching. I was intrigued by Seligman’s claim (Seligman, 2007), and reinforced by others, for example Kauffman (2006), that positive psychology could provide the theoretical and evidential backbones that coaching appeared to lack. I wondered if there could be some truth in that, or whether it was a claim made without foundation.

A major benefit for me has been the huge learning exercise in respect of the subject matter of my research. Prior to commencing the PhD process, I knew very little about the theory behind positive psychology approaches to coaching despite applying some of its tools and techniques in my coaching practice. I therefore immersed myself in reading into the background as much as I could, something that I probably would not have done in quite the same way in other circumstances. Another major learning exercise in the PhD was to go back to the literature to construct a positive psychology coaching framework for the programme and realising that at that time there was very little material that could help. Synthesising and developing my own framework provided a level of insight that I would not otherwise have had. Making it come to life and being able to observe the effects it had with the coachees, the organisation and myself was a very powerful experience. The opportunity to develop and deliver a positive psychology coaching programme, working closely with stakeholders and coachees in an organisational setting has had a profound impact on my own coaching practice.

I was keen to do the research in the policing sector, not only because of my coaching work experience in policing but also because I believe in the social good that underpins policing's aims and objectives. I also have a preference for working with senior police leaders, in that I believe the impact of the quality of senior leadership can be beneficial or deleterious as the case may be in a very direct way for a whole range of organisational and societal stakeholders. I was cognisant of the fact that I have a good national standing and a reputation for helping senior police leaders achieve their leadership development aims. I reflected on the fact that my experience could be helpful in a practical way to the coachees in achieving their coaching goals. My reputation could, however, have

skewed the balance of power in the coaching relationship in my favour, which was not my intention. I took several deliberate measures as mentioned in Chapters 4 (pp. 145-146) and 9 (pp. 348-351) to ensure that coachees perceived the coaching relationship as egalitarian. For example, I relied on confidentiality reasons to deflect questions relating to my previous work with other senior leaders in the service. Using the process of reflexivity after each coaching session helped me to keep this potential problem in perspective and at the forefront in my coaching.

Following the research project, I still do use positive psychology coaching in the coaching programmes that I devise and deliver, but now with a greater degree of awareness of its advantages and disadvantages. I have moved on from the pre-understanding that I had before engaging in the research. I do not use it for all clients. I do so only for those for whom it is appropriate, and often the decision is negotiated with the clients themselves. I engage in *a priori* theorising before working with a client or group to try to determine what the programme is meant to achieve and how it might do so. I apply the tools and techniques of positive psychology with more confidence and from a better-informed position. I conduct my coaching in the knowledge of wider contextual factors, ensuring that other organisational processes are conducive to the style of coaching and that the culture and climate are complementary. I have changed my view of how I introduce and encourage reflexive learning with my clients, especially those in the police service, cognisant of the outcomes of my research with its emphasis on the need for many in the sector to work and learn “in the moment”.

10.4 Research position

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, page 14, my academic background is in psychology and law, and steeped in positivist methods. In previous research endeavours, I have tended to use the scientific approach, using top-down, hypothesis-driven, cause-and-effect methods and positivist quantitative measures. Previous studies I have conducted have sometimes included a small qualitative element, for example, through conducting interviews in order to "flesh out" the results of a quantitative analysis. I have, however, been sceptical about applying strict scientific methods to the study of human behaviour. I have been also sceptical of some of the more unstructured phenomenological approaches, largely because of the often-rehearsed positivist arguments of the lack of rigour, validity, reliability and generalisability in such an approach. In the past, a particularly influential view that kept me in a positivist position for many years, because I saw myself first and foremost as a social *scientist,* was that of Kenneth Gergen and his contention that social psychology (which had embraced phenomenological approaches more readily than perhaps some other branches of psychology) can aspire to be no more than a historical account and not a scientific endeavour (Gergen, 1973; 1985). Again, for me, phenomenology does not offer a complete explanation. One of the most revealing aspects of learning for me in this research project was the discovery that an alternative position exists in philosophical terms in the form of critical theory, critical realism and pragmatism. I now know that my worldview and beliefs about the nature of truth and how we can access it fits an objectivist ontology and a subjectivist epistemology. I found this revelation liberating, and it has had a profound effect on my thinking about, and confidence with, research and the creation of new knowledge. It led to my adoption of a realist research approach that not only could respond to the nature of my research question,

asking “how programmes work”, but also, through the notion of scientific realism, provided the degree of rigour that suited my preferences and position. I have reflected often on this and have concluded that my new knowledge about the philosophy of research has had a great impact on my approach, not just to my research choices and coaching practice but to life more generally.

One’s reflexive position, as Johnson and Duberley (2003) point out, also has important implications for one’s role as a researcher. They provide a useful taxonomy, shown in the diagram below, that I found enlightening when considering my own position:

Type of reflexivity	*Aims*	*Processes*	*Outcomes*	*Role of researcher*
Methodological	To nurture and sustain objectivity	Analysis of researcher behaviours to erase methodological lapses	Technicism/ scientism which preserves privileged knowledge	Disinterested and sceptical expert
Deconstructive/ hyper	To display and overturn constructive processes so as to invoke temporary alternative voices	Autopoietic deconstruction of deconstructions based upon duality of awareness	Discursive unsettling, repudiation of authoritative textual monologue and the development of new literary forms	Flaneur eliding with de-centred discourse deconstructor/ narrative therapist
Epistemic	To emancipate by reclaiming control over social, ethical and metatheoretical subtexts of discourses	Dialogic sociorational analyses of the actors’ and researcher’s habitus	Denaturalization and the development of transformative redefinition/ interventions ideally grounded in consensus	Committed process facilitator aware of his/her own habitus

Figure 10.1: The implications [of reflexivity] for management research (Johnson and Duberley, 2003). Reproduced with the kind permission of John Wiley and Sons Ltd

The role of the researcher ranges from the “disinterested and sceptical expert” in positivism to the “flaneur eliciting with de-centred discourse, deconstructor/narrative therapist” (p. 1293). Neither of these positions appealed to me for the reasons I have articulated above. For epistemic reflexivity in critical theory, critical realism and pragmatism, the role of the researcher is that of “committed process facilitator aware of his/her own habitus” (p. 1293). This fitted much better with how I saw my own role as a researcher, i.e. as an equal participant in the coaching and research processes and cognisant of my dispositions formed through my background and experiences. Being able to identify my position within Johnson and Duberley’s (2003) classification in such a way provided further confirmation that the philosophical commitments that I knew I held but struggled to define could indeed possess a degree of coherence and legitimacy.

10.5 Individual characteristics

I was particularly struck by an account in James and Vinnicombe’s (2002) chapter of an application of the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) – itself an instrument used widely in the positive psychology approach to coaching and indeed in my project - as a model to understand the importance of personal preference in making research decisions. Whilst a detailed description of the MBTI concept is beyond the scope of this thesis, in essence it measures preference as personality characteristics in four dimensions: extroversion and introversion; sensing and intuition; thinking and feeling; and judging and perceiving. Based on Jungian personality type theory (Jung, 1921/1971), it assesses our preferences in the ways we notice, take in, organise and process data from the world and the way

we prefer to make decisions. This has, on the face of it, a relevance to the world of the researcher.

I considered what impact my own MBTI profile might have on my research methodology positioning and my choice of research methods, in terms of what is likely to resonate with me and the possible tensions that might result when choices do not match my preferences. My extroverted preference means that I prefer to live my life in, and draw energy from, the external world. This could explain why I am so drawn to action research; I am keen not to stand back and observe but to be an integral part of the intervention and its solution.

When taking in information, I have a preference for intuition, which means I prefer to frame a bigger picture, see possibilities, patterns and futures and make sense of the world. Ideas and theories are attractive to me, sometimes to the detriment of my eye for detail. One implication of this is that I prefer to take a "top-down" approach to research through *a priori* theorising rather than one of devising theory from the data. Realist research approaches make use of both types of thinking, but in scientific realism *a priori* theorising plays a prominent part, contributing to its appeal for me.

When making decisions, I tend towards a "feeling" approach rather than a thinking one in MBTI terms. Values and beliefs are important to me, as is a concern for the impact a decision might have on people and organisations. When I am designing a coaching engagement, my concern is for the individual and also the organisation in which they work. As James and Vinnicombe (2002, p. 95) observe, "feeling researchers are more likely to want to immerse themselves personally and use their experiences to help them interpret the data from their

respondents". This was borne out in the preferences that underpinned my research design.

My preference for order and structure ("judging" in MBTI terms) in the way I live my life, and from a research point of view, in carrying out the various tasks involved, has steered me towards a planned and managed style of project. There was one particular moment when my preference for order and structure was challenged and I had to adopt a more flexible approach. The organisation's urgency to start the coaching programme straight away as soon as agreement to enter into a research relationship had been reached meant that some steps had to be taken out of sequence, and some decisions made at, for me, an uncomfortable speed. This took me out of my "comfort zone". For example, I had to start the coaching programme very early on in my studies and work out the finer aspects of design along the way. In consultation with my supervisors, I decided that it was better to take the opportunity when it was offered and suffer the discomfort, rather than to risk letting it pass and seeking another opportunity at a later time when all of my thinking and planning could have been in a more orderly place. The realist research approach to structured and rigorous theory-building and methods of investigation also suits my judging preference.

The conclusion I came to after conducting my self-analysis was that I should take an active, strategic, structured and pragmatic approach. Looking back, that was an insightful decision. As an experienced MBTI practitioner, I am aware of the benefits and the criticisms made of the measure. In a coaching practice context, I weigh up the balance of benefit that an individual coachee would derive from the quality of the coaching conversation that might flow from its use and recognise that it is not appropriate for everyone. I applied the same logic when it came to

this exercise – in effect an act of self-coaching - focusing on the quality of the "conversation" that derived from the outcomes of the measure rather than on the measure itself. I welcomed the fact that I was able to put considerations about my general personality preferences into practice in such a novel and informed way.

10.6 Chapter summary and concluding remarks

In this chapter, I have presented just a small selection of the many aspects of learning and reflection that I have noted along my PhD journey. I have commented on my worldview, interest, positioning relating to research data and individual characteristics as they relate to my research project. I have considered the effects I have had on the research due to my career influences, background and values, my work in the policing sector, my interest in police senior leadership development and my approach to executive coaching. I have reflected upon the effect my study has had on my knowledge of and practice in positive psychology coaching. I have also reflected deeply about the realist research approach I chose to adopt, and the impact it has had on me as a researcher.

My conclusions are that it has been a demanding but fascinating project from beginning to end. Supported throughout by my supervisors, I have learned a great deal about the subject matter, about the advantages and drawbacks of situating research in organisations and the benefits of the methodological orientation that I chose to take. It has been a most rewarding and life-changing exercise.

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Appendix 1

Organisational Meeting 1 – Topic Guide

Session	Topics	Questions
Organisational meeting 1 **(at the start of the programme before any coaching meetings take place)**	• Work with the organisation to formulate the scheme and scheme theory • Expectations • Scheme design • Communications plan • Recruitment of volunteers (suggest 6 senior managers initially)	1. What is the context of the coaching programme?* 2. What is the state of affairs that the organisation thinks this coaching programme could address?** 3. How does this coaching programme fit with other organisational aims and initiatives?* 4. Will the participants/organisation have done something similar before and if so what happened? 5. What do we hope to achieve through this coaching programme (theories of change/outcome)?* 6. How do you think participants' work will be different once the programme is implemented?** 7. Is this new programme going to work for everyone?** 8. What types of people and places do you think it might be more effective?** 9. How do you think the coaching element of the programme will affect the outcomes? 10. How do you think the role of the organisation will affect the outcomes? 11. How do you think the feedback provided

		(strengths, MBTI, 360) will affect the outcomes? 12. How do you think the use of a learning diary will affect the outcomes? 13. How do you think the policing sector climate will affect the outcomes?

*Questions adapted from Chadwick-Coule, T., and Garvey, B. (2009). *London Deanery Mentoring Service: A Formative and Developmental Evaluation of Working Practices and Outcomes.* Draft report: Sheffield Business School at Sheffield Hallam University.

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Appendix 2

A Positive Psychology Coaching Programme to Develop Police Executives: A Realist Approach

Information for Participants and Consent Form

Background and Aim

It can be argued that senior leaders in the police service in England and Wales are currently under unprecedented pressure due to financial, operational and political demands. It is more important than ever that the right people with the right skills achieve the right senior leadership posts in order to lead their organisations successfully. Therefore, effective senior leadership development can be considered as essential.

Many police forces use executive coaching as a senior leadership development method. This can be an expensive activity, in terms of time as well as cost. Little research appears to have been conducted in the policing sector to determine whether or not such executive coaching is effective.

There appears to be a convincing body of research evidence already that demonstrates that coaching in itself is effective (for example, Theeboom et al, 2014); however, more research into the process and the relationship dynamics involved is required (Stober, 2010). The aim of this research, therefore, is to investigate the effectiveness of a particular coaching approach that is informed by the principles of positive psychology, identifying what works for whom, when and in what circumstances, when applied in the context of senior police leadership.

Research team

This is a doctoral research project being undertaken at [university] by [name of researcher] (the coach/researcher), an experienced executive coach who works predominantly with clients in the police service. It is supervised by [names of supervisors], both of whom are well-established academics.

The Study

The study involves the university and [organisation] developing and evaluating a scheme to run a small programme of executive coaching for volunteer senior police leaders based on positive psychology principles.

As a Participant, What is Likely to be Involved?

There is likely to be a small cohort of volunteers, drawn from [the organisation's senior officers and staff (superintendent and above and police staff equivalent). You will be offered a one-to-one coaching engagement with the coach/researcher, using a positive psychology approach. The coach/researcher will carry out all of the research meetings and coaching sessions.

The coaching engagement will entail five personal coaching meetings over a 4-month period, plus a follow-up coaching meeting 5 months later to focus on your longer-term learning. The follow-up meeting will include a personal de-brief on your participation in the study. Individual meetings are likely to last for around one and a half hours each. This would mean an estimated time commitment in meetings for you of, say, 9 hours over a 10-month period. In addition, there is likely to be a time commitment involved when you are carrying out your agreed coaching and learning actions.

Some of these coaching meetings will include a research interview. Data collected for the study will consist of the confidential and anonymised content and process of the coaching and review meetings. You may also be asked to keep a confidential reflective learning diary throughout the coaching engagement.

The coaching engagement will be based on issues to be determined by you. However, you are encouraged to discuss and agree your overall coaching objectives for the exercise with your line manager or another nominated individual, to ensure maximum benefit for you and for the organisation.

Location

The coach/researcher is happy to conduct the coaching meetings on [the organisation's] premises, or at other locations by mutual agreement. Public liability insurance and professional indemnity insurance are in place.

Participation

Participation in the study is entirely voluntary. You are asked to sign and date a copy of this document to indicate your consent.

You are free to withdraw from the study at any time with no detrimental consequences. You also have the right at any time to withdraw your consent retrospectively, and to require that any information you have supplied be destroyed.

You have the right to refuse to give any specific information that the coach/researcher may request.

To the research team's knowledge, there are no anticipated risks attached to your participation in this study. There are no financial implications on your part and the benefits are that you will receive a tailored and professional executive coaching engagement free of charge. No financial or other inducement or recompense related to your participation will be made.

The data you provide will contribute to the outcomes from the study, which are to provide insight into the coaching interventions to employ, with whom and in what circumstances so that police organisations are better placed to optimise the benefits from their efforts and investment, and individuals derive the most from their coaching.

Confidentiality

Throughout the study, the processes and outcomes of the scheme will be analysed and evaluated using a recognised set of research methods, tools and techniques, and a summary of the anonymised general findings will be made available to you, the other volunteers and to the force. The detailed content of the coaching meetings will remain confidential to the individual and the coach/researcher. Examples of exceptions to this include instances where the release of the information is required by law, relate to illegal activity, danger to yourself or others or where agreed between you and the coach/researcher.

Analyses and findings will be written up and published on an anonymised basis. The coach/researcher may audio-record the coaching meetings and coaching review meetings with your consent and for research purposes only. These recordings will be kept in a safe and confidential manner and destroyed after use.

The reflective learning diaries will form an important part of the research data. They will be collected and retained on a confidential basis. Again, these are solely for the purposes of the research project and will be anonymised, kept in a safe manner and destroyed after use.

Copies of any transcripts or notes of your meetings can be provided to you for comment before analysis, and proposed publications resulting from the study can be submitted to the organisation for comment if required. Reference to any source data will be anonymised and the names of individual participants will not be published.

The study will comply with the Data Protection Act (1998) and the Freedom of Information Act (2000).

Ethics

This research project is subject to the research ethics policy and procedures of [the university] and full ethics approval has been granted. It is also subject to the British Psychological Society's and the European Mentoring

and Coaching Council's Codes of Ethics. Copies of the Codes can be obtained from the following sources:

- British Psychological Society's Code of Human Research Ethics: www.bps.org.uk
- European Mentoring and Coaching Council: www.emccuk.org

Principal Investigator and Contact Details

The Principal Investigator and main contact for this research project is:

Principal Investigator
Contact details]

If matters cannot be resolved directly with the Principal Investigator, please contact:

[Director of Studies
Contact details]

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Confirmation of Participant's Consent

I confirm that I give my informed consent freely to participate in the research project entitled "A Positive Psychology Coaching Programme to Develop Police Executives: A Realist Approach"

Signed …… Date …….

Please print your name …….

Signed by the Principal Investigator …… Date ……

Name of Principal Investigator [the researcher]

Appendix 3

Participant Research Meeting 1 – Topic Guide

Session	Purpose	Questions
Participant research meeting 1 (takes place after coaching meeting 5)	Work with the participants to test and develop initial scheme theory Q1 – check with participants how they feel about the change in my role and give them the opportunity to decline to provide data Qs 2 -3 Introductory questions designed to stimulate conversation Q4 Exploring known and unintended outcomes Q5 Exploring different contexts Qs 6-11 Exploring mechanisms based on initial programme theory Qs 6-8 Exploring CMOs relating to the coaching sessions element of the programme (CMO nos 1a-f)	1 Up to this point I have been your coach, and now I am the researcher in this study; how do you feel about this? Please be open and honest in your responses. You may withdraw from the study now if you wish. 2 What has been your experience of the coaching programme so far? (introductory question) 3 What did you wish to achieve through undertaking this coaching programme (theories of change/outcome)? 4 Have you noticed any changes in the way you go about your work that are different because of your participation in the coaching programme? Can you give me any examples? (or thoughts in case of negative/neutral answer) 5 How do you think that the coaching programme would work in similar or different ways with other senior leaders in the organisation, or in other parts of the organisation? Can you give me any examples? 6 You'll probably remember that the coaching programme consisted of four main elements: the coaching itself, the role of the organisation, the role of the feedback (VIA, MBTI, 360 etc) and the learning diary that you have been keeping throughout. Just thinking about the coaching sessions, how do you think knowing about strengths and positive psychology affected the way in which you decided on and pursued the goals you have been working on through the coaching

	Q9 Exploring the CMO relating to the organisational involvement element (CMO nos 2a-b)	programme? Can you give me any examples? There is some evidence in the literature to suggest that coachees that are interested and curious in the positive psychology coaching approach who develop knowledge and skills of strengths and positive psychology are more likely to raise their self-awareness, engage in the coaching process and be motivated to set and achieve goals. How does this match your experience, or not as the case may be? 7 Staying with the coaching sessions and turning to the coaching process itself, how do you think this has impacted on the goals and outcomes you have achieved from the coaching programme? I'm thinking about positive support, challenge, encouragement, safe and confidential time and space, trust. Can you give me any examples? Research suggests that those who are open to the idea of positive psychology coaching who experience a positive and supportive coaching relationship build trust in the coaching process and are motivated to set and achieve stretching and cogent goals. How does this match your experience or not as the case may be? 8 Again, staying with the coaching sessions, how has having a positive external perspective from an external coach affected your work on the goals you have set yourself and pursued as a result of the coaching? Can you give me any examples? Our thinking here is that coachees who have a growth mindset and who have the opportunity to reframe their thinking, are more likely to test their logic, see things differently, raise their confidence and increase risk taking and be motivated to set and achieve aspirational goals. To what extent has this been your experience? 9 How do you think the role of the organisation has affected the goals you

	Q10 Exploring the CMO relating to the feedback element (CMO nos 3a-b) Q11 Exploring the CMO relating to the learning diary element (CMO nos 4a-b)	have chosen and pursued as a result of the coaching programme? I'm thinking about positive things such as investment of time and resources in you, trust to use the time wisely, senior leaders as role models, having the opportunity to put your development into practice, a conducive organisational culture. Can you give me any examples? Some research I have read suggests that a supportive, consistent and development-orientated culture can lead to coachees' perceptions of investment, trust, role modelling and the availability of an opportunity to put learning into practice. They are likely to feel valued, take their development seriously and feel inspired, motivating them to engage with the coaching and set and achieve their development goals. To what extent does this match your experience? 10 How do you think the positive feedback you received from psychological measures such as strengths (VIA), MBTI, 360 has affected the goals you have set and pursued through the coaching programme? Can you give me any examples? The thought behind this is that coachees who are open to feedback and gain information through self-awareness measures, increase self-awareness and make better informed leadership choices. They are more likely to use this information to set themselves stretching development goals. What is it about this, if anything, that has worked for you? 11 How do you think the use of a learning diary based on positive psychology principles has affected your choice of goals and the way you have set about them during the coaching programme? I am thinking about the approach to development within the organisation, the police service in general and national initiatives such as CPD. Can you give me any examples? The thinking there is that if the organisational and sector climate is focused on development then the encouragement in coaching programmes

	Q12 Wrap-up and close	to use a framework to self-reflect coachees will be more likely to structure their self-reflections, self-reinforce the learning, track their process of change and set and achieve realistic development goals. To what extent has this been your experience, or not? 12 That's the end of my formal questions. Is there anything that you think I've missed, or anything you'd like to add?

Resources used and acknowledged in generating the questions:

Chadwick-Coule, T., and Garvey, B. (2009). *London Deanery Mentoring Service: A Formative and Developmental Evaluation of Working Practices and Outcomes.* Draft report: Sheffield Business School at Sheffield Hallam University.

Dalkin, S. (2016). The Realist Interview. Presentation at the CARES Summer School, University of Liverpool, 8th to 11th August 2016.

Jagosh, J. (2017). Enhancing technique for realist qualitative interviewing. Presentation at the CARES Realist Interviewing Workshop, University of Liverpool, 27th April 2017.

Manzano, A. (2016). The craft of interviewing in realist evaluation. *Evaluation,* 1-19. DOI: 10.1177/1356389016638615 evi.sagepub.com.

Pawson, R. (1996). Theorizing the interview. *British Journal of Sociology,* 47, 2, 295-314.

Appendix 4

Experts' Meeting 1 – Topic Guide V1

Session	Topics	Questions
Experts' meeting 1	• Aim: work with external coaching experts to develop the programme theory • Review positive psychology coaching programme model • Review logic chain • Review and test programme theory Q1 tests out the original aim and get an external perspective Q2 tests out the PPC principles developed to underpin the coaching Q3 tests the initial logic chain (share model) Q4 provides an overview of the programme components and tests Propositions 1a/1b – strengths and positive psychology knowledge and skills	1 The initial issue was described to me as that the coaching programme would be a contribution to a programme of organisational change by increasing senior leaders' focus on setting and achieving their personal and professional goals; no specific problems, but a general feeling that more could be done. Have you come across such programmes before? From your experience, how do you think this might work, for whom and in what circumstances? 2 Looking at the underlying principles of positive psychology coaching that we developed to underpin the programme, to what extent do they represent your understanding of PPC? 3 Looking at our first attempts to define the "logic chain" underlying the programme (inputs, activities, outputs/outcomes), how plausible do you think it is as a programme? 4 Looking at the programme design, you'll see that the coaching programme consisted of four main elements: the coaching itself, the role of the organisation, the role of the

		feedback (VIA, MBTI, 360 etc) and the learning diary as a means of tracking learning and change. Just thinking about the coaching sessions, how important do you think knowing about strengths and positive psychology might affect the way in which coachees decide on and pursue their goals? [Response, then:] There is some evidence in the literature to suggest that coachees that are interested and curious in the positive psychology coaching approach who develop knowledge and skills of strengths and positive psychology are more likely to raise their self-awareness, engage in the coaching process and be motivated to set and achieve goals. How does this match your thinking, or not as the case may be?
	Q5 tests Propositions 1c/1d – supportive and positive coaching relationship	5 Staying with the coaching sessions and turning to the coaching process itself, how do you think a positive and supportive coaching relationship will have impacted on the goals and outcomes coachees will have achieved from the coaching programme? [Prompt if needed] I'm thinking about positive support, challenge, encouragement, safe and confidential time and space, trust. [Response, then:] research suggests that those who are open to the idea of positive psychology coaching who experience a positive and supportive coaching relationship build trust in the coaching

		process and are motivated to set and achieve stretching and cogent goals. How does this match your thinking, or not as the case may be?
	Q6 tests Propositions 1e/1f – opportunity to re-frame thinking positively	6 Again, staying with the coaching sessions, how do you think having a positive external perspective from an external coach will have affected coachees' work on the goals they have set and pursued as a result of the coaching? [Response, then:] our thinking here is that coachees who have a growth mindset and who have the opportunity to reframe their thinking, are more likely to test their logic, see things differently, raise their confidence and increase risk taking and be motivated to set and achieve aspirational goals. To what extent does this match your expectations?
	Q7 tests Propositions 2a/2b – positive organisational involvement	7 How do you think the role of the organisation will have affected the goals coachees will have chosen and pursued as a result of the coaching programme? [Prompt, if needed] I'm thinking about positive things such as investment of time and resources in them, trust to use the time wisely, executive leaders acting as role models, having the opportunity to put their development into practice, a conducive organisational culture. [Response, then:] some research I have read suggests that a supportive, consistent and development-orientated culture can lead to

	Q8 tests Propositions 3a/3b – positive psychology self-awareness tools Q9 tests Propositions 4a/4b – positive psychology learning diary	coachees' perceptions of investment, trust, role modelling and the availability of an opportunity to put learning into practice. They are likely to feel valued, take their development seriously and feel inspired, motivating them to engage with the coaching and set and achieve their development goals. To what extent does this match your expectations? 8 How do you think the positive feedback coachees will have received from psychological measures such as strengths (VIA), MBTI, 360 will have affected the goals they will have set and pursued through the coaching programme? [Response, then:] the thought behind this is that coachees who are open to feedback and gain information through self-awareness measures, increase self-awareness and make better informed leadership choices. They are more likely to use this information to set themselves stretching development goals. What is it about this, if anything, that accords with your expectations? 9 How do you think the use of a learning diary based on positive psychology principles will have affected coachees' choice of goals and the way they will have set about them during the coaching programme? [Prompt, if needed] I am thinking about the approach to development within the

	Q10 – tests the candidate overall programme theory of change Q11 - Wrap-up and finish	organisation, the police service in general and national initiatives such as CPD. [Response, then:] the thinking here is that if the organisational and sector climate is focused on development then the encouragement in coaching programmes to use a framework to self-reflect, coachees will be more likely to structure their self-reflections, self-reinforce the learning, track their process of change and set and achieve realistic development goals. To what extent does this accord with your thinking? 10 The provisional overall programme theory of change is: "people tend to be motivated by doing what they are interested in and good at. If in the coaching programme the coach and coachee focus on the coachee's strengths in a positive psychology coaching setting rather than using a deficit approach, supported by organisational involvement and culture, the provision of feedback and engagement in reflective learning, then the coachee will be more likely to be motivated to set, pursue and achieve cogent and stretching personal and professional development goals". How reasonable a starting theoretical position do you think this is, or not as the case may be? 11 That's the end of my formal questions. Is there anything that you think I've missed, or anything you'd like to add?

Resources used and acknowledged in generating the questions:

Chadwick-Coule, T., and Garvey, B. (2009). *London Deanery Mentoring Service: A Formative and Developmental Evaluation of Working Practices and Outcomes.* Draft report: Sheffield Business School at Sheffield Hallam University.

Dalkin, S. (2016). The Realist Interview. Presentation at the CARES Summer School, University of Liverpool, 8th to 11th August 2016.

Jagosh, J. (2017). Enhancing technique for realist qualitative interviewing. Presentation at the CARES Realist Interviewing Workshop, University of Liverpool, 27th April 2017.

Manzano, A. (2016). The craft of interviewing in realist evaluation. *Evaluation,* 1-19. DOI: 10.1177/1356389016638615 evi.sagepub.com.

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Appendix 5

Organisational Meeting 2 – Topic Guide

Session	Topics	Questions
Organisational meeting 2 **(following coaching meetings 1-5 and research meeting 1)**	• Work with the organisation to develop the scheme and scheme theory • Realist diagnostic evaluation principles • Review logic chain • Review and test programme theory Q1 tests out the original brief and get further underneath what's going on here Q2 tests out the assumptions made about the overall organisational context Q3 tests the initial logic chain (share model) Q4 provides an overview of the programme components and tests Propositions 1a/1b – strengths and positive psychology knowledge and skills	1 The initial issue was described as the coaching programme would be a way of increasing senior leaders' focus on setting and achieving their personal and professional goals; no specific problems, but a general feeling that more could be done. Is there any more detail to this, to establish the "problem" that the programme is designed to solve? 2 What is the organisational context in which the programme sits? 3 Looking at our first attempts to define the "logic chain" underlying the programme (inputs, activities, outputs/outcomes) to what extent does it describe the programme? 4 You'll probably remember that the coaching programme consisted of four main elements: the coaching itself, the role of the organisation, the role of the feedback (VIA, MBTI, 360 etc) and the learning diary as a means of tracking learning and change. Just thinking about the coaching sessions, how important do you think knowing about strengths

		and positive psychology affected the way in which coachees decide on and pursue their goals? There is some evidence in the literature to suggest that coachees that are interested and curious in the positive psychology coaching approach who develop knowledge and skills of strengths and positive psychology are more likely to raise their self-awareness, engage in the coaching process and be motivated to set and achieve goals. How does this match your thinking, or not as the case may be?
	Q5 tests Propositions 1c/1d – supportive and positive coaching relationship	5 Staying with the coaching sessions and turning to the coaching process itself, how do you think a supportive coaching relationship will impact on the goals and outcomes coachees will have achieved from the coaching programme? I'm thinking about positive support, challenge, encouragement, safe and confidential time and space, trust. Research suggests that those who are open to the idea of positive psychology coaching who experience a positive and supportive coaching relationship build trust in the coaching process and are motivated to set and achieve stretching and cogent goals. How does this match your thinking, or not as the case may be?
	Q6 tests Propositions 1e/1f – opportunity to re-frame thinking positively	6 Again, staying with the coaching sessions, how do you think having a positive external perspective from

		an external coach affected coachees' work on the goals they have set and pursued as a result of the coaching? Our thinking here is that coachees who have a growth mindset and who have the opportunity to reframe their thinking, are more likely to test their logic, see things differently, raise their confidence and increase risk taking and be motivated to set and achieve aspirational goals. To what extent does this match your expectations?
	Q7 tests Propositions 2a/2b – positive organisational involvement	7 How do you think the role of the organisation will have affected the goals coachees will have chosen and pursued as a result of the coaching programme? I'm thinking about positive things such as investment of time and resources in them, trust to use the time wisely, executive leaders acting as role models, having the opportunity to put their development into practice, a conducive organisational culture. Some research I have read suggests that a supportive, consistent and development-orientated culture can lead to coachees' perceptions of investment, trust, role modelling and the availability of an opportunity to put learning into practice. They are likely to feel valued, take their development seriously and feel inspired, motivating them to engage with the coaching and set and achieve their development goals. To
	Q8 tests Propositions 3a/3b – positive psychology self-awareness tools	

		what extent does this match your expectations? 8 How do you think the positive feedback coachees will have received from psychological measures such as strengths (VIA), MBTI, 360 will have affected the goals they will have set and pursued through the coaching programme? The thought behind this is that coachees who are open to feedback and gain information through self-awareness measures, increase self-awareness and make better informed leadership choices. They are more likely to use this information to set themselves stretching development goals. What is it about this, if anything, that accords with your expectations?
	Q9 tests Propositions 4a/4b – positive psychology learning diary	9 How do you think the use of a learning diary based on positive psychology principles will have affected coachees' choice of goals and the way they will have set about them during the coaching programme? I am thinking about the approach to development within the organisation, the police service in general and national initiatives such as CPD. The thinking here is that if the organisational and sector climate is focused on development then the encouragement in coaching programmes to use a framework to self-reflect, coachees will be more likely to structure their self-reflections, self-
	Q10 – Wrap-up and finish	

		reinforce the learning, track their process of change and set and achieve realistic development goals. To what extent does this accord with your thinking? 10 That's the end of my formal questions. Is there anything that you think I've missed, or anything you'd like to add?

Resources used and acknowledged in generating the questions:

Chadwick-Coule, T., and Garvey, B. (2009). *London Deanery Mentoring Service: A Formative and Developmental Evaluation of Working Practices and Outcomes.* Draft report: Sheffield Business School at Sheffield Hallam University.

Dalkin, S. (2016). The Realist Interview. Presentation at the CARES Summer School, University of Liverpool, 8th to 11th August 2016.

Jagosh, J. (2017). Enhancing technique for realist qualitative interviewing. Presentation at the CARES Realist Interviewing Workshop, University of Liverpool, 27th April 2017.

Manzano, A. (2016). The craft of interviewing in realist evaluation. *Evaluation,* 1-19. DOI: 10.1177/1356389016638615 evi.sagepub.com.

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Appendix 6

Organisational Meeting 3 – Topic Guide

Session	Topics	Questions
Organisational meeting 3 **(following initial analysis of research results)**	• Work with the organisation to review initial findings • Review programme theory • Agree next steps relating to Phase 6, developing future policy and practice	1 Review the initial outcomes as outlined in the second interim report 2 Are there any immediate issues that flow from the findings so far? 3 Further updates when analysis is complete 4 How would you like to take the project forward into the final phase, i.e. making decisions about developing the pilot into a programme and how that might look? 5 Confidentiality, anonymity and publication 6 Arrangements for handover and future meetings 7 Any other business

Appendix 7

Organisational Meeting 4 – Topic Guide

Session	Topics	Questions
Organisational meeting 4 **(following final analysis of research results)**	• Work with the organisation to review findings • Review refined programme theory • Agree next steps relating to Phase 6, developing future policy and practice	1 Review the refined programme theory 2 Conclusions and recommendations 3 Taking the project forward i.e. making decisions about developing the pilot into a programme 4 Arrangements for handover and any future meetings 5 Any other business

Appendix 8: Thematic Context-Mechanism-Outcome Configurations

Thematic CMOc Number	Enabling/constraining Contexts	Mechanism "Resource"	Mechanism "Reasoning"	Outcomes
TCMOc 1a (Positive): Knowledge and skills of strengths and positive psychology	Coachees who are interested in positive psychology coaching, are curious and engaged	And who have the opportunity to learn about positive psychology, use its tools and techniques to discover and understand their strengths and how to shape goals that play to them	Are more likely to improve their self-awareness, self-understanding, self-esteem and confidence, develop focus, feel driven to achieve, approach things differently, approach issues knowing they have the tools to deal with it, identifying strengths early on brings confidence to address them, raised self-esteem, be kinder to oneself, reduce self-criticism, feel motivated by enjoying the exercises, challenge the "can't do" mindset and learning more about the positive psychology approach	And are motivated to define/refine and achieve stretching goals, take a more positive and pro-active approach to addressing them, broaden behaviour in role to include softer skills, more willing to recognise strengths in others, shape a new leadership approach to help other people and not just focusing on the technical part of the job
TCMOc 1b (Negative): Knowledge and skills of strengths and positive psychology	When a deficit approach to coaching is adopted	Coachees who are offered the opportunity to focus on their deficiencies	Are more likely to dwell on the "gap", spend time addressing their weaknesses, feel unmotivated	Leading to slow and ineffective goal pursuance and achievement

Thematic CMOc Number	Enabling/constraining Contexts	Mechanism "Resource"	Mechanism "Reasoning"	Outcomes
TCMOc 1c (Process): Knowledge and skills of strengths and positive psychology	Coachees who are new to coaching	And who receive the opportunity to gain knowledge, understanding and skills about goal-setting and positive psychology principles, receive an explanation of the principles of positive psychology coaching, its tools and techniques and help from the coach with working through the process	Are more likely to feel motivated to learn and practise goal setting, that the process is de-mystified, overcome uncertainty and doubt, commit to coaching, feel they can be honest and develop understanding	And use their new knowledge and skills to shape, pursue and achieve their goals
TCMOc 2: Opportunity to explore theory	Coachees who are interested in the understanding behind the action, the interplay between theory and practice in positive psychology	Receive the opportunity to explore positive psychology theory and ways of applying it to inform action	Are more likely to use abstract models to see the "big picture", approach their issues with clarity, feel motivated to engage in the coaching	And be more efficient in goal definition/refinement, pursuance and achievement
TCMOc 3: Volunteer coachees	Curious volunteers	Who receive the opportunity through positive psychology coaching to learn, enhance thinking and	Are more likely to engage a positive mindset	And feel motivated to define/refine and achieve goals

Thematic CMOc Number	Enabling/constraining Contexts	Mechanism "Resource"	Mechanism "Reasoning"	Outcomes
		improve their leadership skills		
TCMOc 4: Strengths-based self-reflection	Volunteer coachees who are interested in self-development	Who are encouraged to focus on their strengths and provided with the opportunity to self-reflect	Are more likely to increase their sense of confidence, self-reassurance and self-belief, focus on their strengths, feel invigorated, empowered, motivated to plan and act	And engage in learning, define/refine, pursue and achieve goals with longer-term perspectives
TCMO 5a (Positive): Positive support, challenge and encouragement	Coachees who strive for stretching/daunting goals, are open to a positive psychology coaching approach and see the coaching relationship as conduit to career development	And who are provided with positive support and challenge, encouragement, a coaching environment of high expectation, a sustained environment of belief in the coachee, positive encouragement to think things through and the opportunity to focus on career development	Are more likely to develop self-confidence, self-efficacy, trust in the coach and process, raise their bar, build self-belief, feel motivated to think for oneself, feel able to express oneself and feel motivated to develop their career	And develop and achieve their goals, achieve more, better, quicker in more creative ways, the coach and coachee work collaboratively towards goals, focus on their career development and develop their leadership ability to impact at higher level

Thematic CMOc Number	Enabling/constraining Contexts	Mechanism "Resource"	Mechanism "Reasoning"	Outcomes
TCMOc 5b (Negative): Positive support, challenge and encouragement	Coachees who strive for stretching goals	And who are provided with a coaching relationship perceived to be demanding and overly driving	Are more likely to engage in negative self-talk, avoid the coaching sessions, feel overwhelmed	And fail to achieve their goals, experiencing coaching as not a pleasure
TCMOc 5c (Negative): Positive support, challenge and encouragement	Coachees who do not have the positive psychology coaching made available to them	And who lack the opportunity to reflect on their and work on goals with the coach	Are less likely to feel motivated to consider their impact or motivated to plan their actions	With goals not defined/refined, and if they are, possibly not achieved
TCMOc 6: Professionalism	Coachees who are open to developing a professional working relationship with their coach	And who are provided with the opportunity to have positive professional conversations about their issues	Are more likely to feel they are in a professional working relationship, able to trust the process, feel they can get on with the coaching work in confidence	And learn, take a constructive attitude to others and mature in their leadership approach
TCMOc 7a (Positive): Confidentiality, trust and safety	Coachees who are open to a coaching relationship, willing to trust, working with external coach with contextual knowledge, open to positive psychology coaching, who find talking about themselves uncomfortable, coachees feeling unsupported elsewhere or	And who are provided with a confidential safe environment, a positive trusted space and understanding, a comfortable environment, a clear explanation of the process, positive and non-judgemental support, an opportunity to discuss work relationships	Are more likely to feel able to engage with the coach and process, build trust and confidence, feel reassured, enjoy a positive experience, feel able to be open and honest, motivated to fulfil their potential, increase their confidence in talking about oneself, feel motivated to explore issues, feel as though	And will understanding their strengths and development areas (leading to goal achievement), define/refine and achieve goals, recognise strengths in others, see difference positively, develop healthier and stronger work relationships, explore ideas and approaches,

Thematic CMOc Number	Enabling/constraining Contexts	Mechanism "Resource"	Mechanism "Reasoning"	Outcomes
	experiencing a lack of organisational clarity	confidentially and provided with a rehearsal space for confidential, impartial conversations	there is a place to express ideas, emotions and opinions and rehearse logic and actions; feels as though the organisation is supporting them through the provision of coaching	facilitate open, transparent and difficult effective conversations and make a valued contribution to the organisation
TCMOc 7b (Negative): Confidentiality, trust and safety	Coachees who are not open to the coaching relationship, unwilling to trust or are uncomfortable with the coaching relationship and process	And who perceive that the opportunities are offered in an unsafe environment with no sense of confidentiality	Are more likely to be unwilling to engage with the coach and process, expose themselves to honest discussion about strengths and areas for development, feel unable to be open and honest and fail to build trust	And are unlikely or unwilling to engage or set and achieve goals
TCMOc 8: Structure	Task-driven coachees who are open to and willing to engage with a positive psychology-based coaching relationship, are keen to focus on a complex	And who are provided with the opportunity to build confidence, structure, positive encouragement to set and pursue goals, the encouragement to set and stick with an agenda	Are more likely to respond to a sense of rigour and review, feel motivated to engage in goal-focused behaviour, feel motivated to see the project through, keep on track, respond to an	And achieve a thorough and considered pursuit of their goals, see the value in taking a positive approach, all aspects of the project completed, goal achieved

Thematic CMOc Number	Enabling/constraining Contexts	Mechanism "Resource"	Mechanism "Reasoning"	Outcomes
	project, seek structure from coaching	for change, opportunity for focus, structure from coaching, encouragement to plan and act and a timetable of meetings	exploratory environment and meaning making, feel motivated to achieve through a "psychological contract" with the coach to complete their agreed actions, feel a sense of not wanting to let the coach down, guilt, pride, feeling a sense of focus and find time to work on goals	and progress goals more quickly
TCMOc 9: Positive perspective	Coachees who are "stuck" or seek alternative viewpoints, open to external perspective, in a long-established culture not open to challenge, with a growth mindset, newer to coaching, who are stretched and see problems rather than opportunities	And who are provided with opportunities for a reality check, to validate their approach, consider a wider perspective, step back and reflect, receive positive prompting and a positive, grounded external perspective	Are more likely to recognise and manage their emotions, see things in perspective, respond to a broader perspective, consider decisions more fully, explore different ways of working and doing business, reframe their thinking, make decisions with more confidence and sense of self-efficacy, feel comfortable and confident of being	And unblock thinking, define/refine and achieve goals more efficiently, effectively and confidently, taking quicker decisions and actions

Thematic CMOc Number	Enabling/constraining Contexts	Mechanism "Resource"	Mechanism "Reasoning"	Outcomes
			understood, feel time spent efficiently, see it as reinforcing positive encouragement from internal sources, see opportunities rather than threats, experience "light-bulb" moments, see wider goals and personal growth	
TCMOc 10: Coach credibility	Open-minded coachees	Who are provided with the opportunity to receive an external perspective from a credible external coach	Are more likely to see things differently, feel motivated to achieve, respond to the "infectious" nature of positive psychology coaching	And achieve their goals
TCMOc 11:Recognition	Coachees who are unsure of their standing in the organisation	Who are provided with recognition by having the opportunity to engage in the positive psychology coaching programme for senior leaders	Are more likely to feel a sense of worthiness, validation of their "place" and status in organisation, feel special	And be motivated to define/refine and achieve stretching goals
TCMOc 12: Exploring	Where the organisation is perceived to be a "learning organisation", coachees wo are looking for coaching on wider managerial topics, coachees newer in role, who enjoy a thinking	And are provided with the opportunity in trust and confidence to explore courageous thinking positively, time and space to discuss non-technical aspects of the job, to hold positive	Are more likely to raise confidence to do things differently, assess risk accurately, consider other stakeholders' positions, feel motivated to develop goals more thoroughly,	And be motivated to try new things, define/refine and pursue ambitious goals for self and organisation, contribute to the "learning organisation", engage in

Thematic CMOc Number	Enabling/constraining Contexts	Mechanism "Resource"	Mechanism "Reasoning"	Outcomes
	approach to practice, have complex issues to resolve and seek intellectual stretch	and open conversation with another, safe space to consider theory as well as practice in positive way and discover strengths and aspects of personality with the coach	feel that they could be totally honest with no implications for their career, feel safe, increase confidence, develop curiosity and academic interest, feel a sense of legitimacy via organisational investment in coaching	bolder decision making and action
TCMOc 13a (positive): Organisational development	Where the organisation is transparent, promotes and supports positive decision making and action, encourages learning, links coaching positively to OD strategy, has a positive, supportive and consistent organisational culture, and sees coaching as support for	And the programme provides coachees with the opportunity to consider their issues in a wider organisational context, to explore organisational culture, that focuses on issues of the coachees' choice, and provides an official endorsement for engaging in the coaching process	Coachees are more likely to feel more confident of the boundaries, that engaging in the coaching is a legitimate activity, enter the positive psychology coaching process quickly, increase motivation, feel part of something bigger, make a difference, motivated to take part, motivated to be more ambitious in	And engage, define/refine and achieve more ambitious/courageous goals, cascade the approach to their teams, and contribute to the development of future coaching programmes and organisational development

Thematic CMOc Number	Enabling/constraining Contexts	Mechanism "Resource"	Mechanism "Reasoning"	Outcomes
	coachees new to the organisation or role		decision making and action, feel reassured and supported	
TCMOc 13b (negative): Organisational development	Where there is mistrust in the organisation's processes and the sector operates within a tight system of external scrutiny, the organisation is perceived as always running pilots but not mainstream development initiatives and the organisation does not integrate coaching with positive strategic organisational development	And it provides an unconvincing organisational intent and/or an inconsistent performance management process, negative messages about investigation and sanction regimes, negative messages about commitment and negative and confusing messages about how coaching fits with other initiatives	Coachees are more likely to feel vulnerable, suspicious and mistrustful, more likely to play safe in taking decisions and actions, look for perfection, feel vulnerable to external scrutiny, feel their job security and reputation are threatened reputation, de-motivated, perceive the organisation as inconsistent, insincere, inconsistent and lacking in transparency	And either define/refine and pursue overly safe goals or avoid goal-setting and action with the potential for maximum achievement not realised
TCMOc 14a (Positive): Positive role models	Coachees who have positive and supportive organisational and local line managers who present positive executive role models seen to be promoting development	Who are provided with the opportunity to see exemplars of development-orientated executive behaviours and inspirational encouragement and support	Are more likely to feel inspired, feel it is the norm to take one's own development seriously, encouraged to engage in self-development, feel inspired, raise their feelings of self-efficacy, feel familiar with the positive approach, understand how it fits in,	And be motivated to define/refine and achieve stretching and innovative goals

Thematic CMOc Number	Enabling/constraining Contexts	Mechanism "Resource"	Mechanism "Reasoning"	Outcomes
			settle into the coaching quicker, and engage	
TCMOc 14b (Negative): Positive role models	Where executive leaders are not seen as leadership development role models	And the opportunity provided is for negative role modelling	Coachees are more likely to perceive no or negative impact	And either rely on their own self-motivation or fail to define/refine development goals
TCMOc 14c (Neutral): Positive role models	When some executive leaders act as exemplars for positive self-development and some do not	Coachees are provided with patchy role modelling	They might sometimes feel encouraged to engage in self-development and sometimes not, may feel neutral	And rely on their own sense of self-motivation to define/refine and achieve their coaching goals
TCMOc 15a (Positive): Fair and authentic coaching opportunity	When the coaching is offered even-handedly, not dependent upon patronage and can be used as continuing professional development	And coachees are provided with a positive opportunity to apply discipline in pursuing their chosen goals and to focus on what matters to them	They are more likely to feel valued and selected on the basis of their potential, feel included and feel that the coaching has integrity with wider professional aims	And be motivated to engage, define/refine and achieve goals
TCMOc 15b (Negative): Fair and authentic coaching opportunity	When there is inconsistency between organisational rhetoric and reality and the organisation is perceived to be taking up a free coaching offer to run the coaching programme	Coachees are provided with mixed messages of "getting something for nothing"	They might be more likely to feel suspicious about organisational motives and feel undervalued	And rely on their own self-motivation to define/refine and achieve coaching goals, with the full benefit of the coaching not realised

Thematic CMOc Number	Enabling/constraining Contexts	Mechanism "Resource"	Mechanism "Reasoning"	Outcomes
TCMOc 16a (Positive): Positive organisational interest	When organisational and line management show interest and express encouragement	And coachees are provided with support	They are more likely to feel as though it is OK to spend time on coaching, feel valued, feel supported and that the activity is worthwhile	And be motivated to engage, define/refine and achieve coaching goals
TCMOc 16b (Negative): Positive organisational interest	When the organisation and/ or boss does not demonstrate a positive interest in coachees	They are provided with negative messages about the value of the coaching,	More likely to feel under-valued, under-supported and under-recognised, reduce their motivation	And rely on self-motivation with the potential for sub-optimal achievement
TCMOc 17a (Positive): Time	When the organisation trusts the coachees to find time for development and allows time for coaching,	Coachees who are given autonomy to make their own decisions about time for development	Are more likely to perceive a sense of trust, feel motivated to find time, even if it is in their own time, feel it is legitimate to spend time on coaching and feel valued,	And coachees find time for development, achieve their coaching objectives, are motivated to engage, define/refine and achieve coaching goals
TCMOc 17b (Negative): Time	When the organisation does not build in time for development	Coachees perceive time as a lack of resource,	Are more likely to feel overwhelmed, less motivated to engage fully,	And their Potential for maximum achievement may not realised
TCMOc 18: Put learning into practice	In a supportive organisation	Coachees who are provided with positive opportunities to put their learning into practice and encouragement to record it	Are more likely to feel invested in, valued, feel the effort is worthwhile and has value	And be motivated and engaged to define/refine goals and achieve them

Thematic CMOc Number	Enabling/constraining Contexts	Mechanism "Resource"	Mechanism "Reasoning"	Outcomes
TCMOc 19a (Positive): Strengths feedback	Coachees in challenging leadership roles who are open to feedback and learn something new, coachees feeling unsure of role boundaries or less experienced leaders	Who are provided with the opportunity to discover their strengths	Are more likely to develop insight, be reminded that they are not using that strength, see it as a "wake-up call", feel motivated to change behaviour, engage in deeper exploration, raise their self-awareness, confidence, self-efficacy, apply focus, feel empowered and legitimate	And define/refine the size and scale of goals commensurate with their strengths or based on the (re)discovery of the strength, define/refine transformational rather than transactional goals, apply the process to other settings including non-work life, deepen their consideration of their goals, define/refine and achieve more complex and stretching goals, take bolder decisions; recognise strengths in others and be motivated to develop others
TCMOc 19b (Negative): Strengths feedback	Coachees who are unfamiliar with the measure and perceive a lack of face validity	And who are provided with the opportunity to discover their strengths	Are more likely to be put off by the language used in the measure and the lack of structure and explanation in the report	And need the coaching conversation and validation to make sense of the output and may make full use of the opportunity to discover their strengths
TCMOc 20: Personal growth	Coachees who are open minded	And who have the opportunity to receive positive feedback	Are more likely to be receptive to feedback, open to development	Take the opportunity to grow and develop through pursuing their coaching goals

Thematic CMOc Number	Enabling/constraining Contexts	Mechanism "Resource"	Mechanism "Reasoning"	Outcomes
TCMOc 21:Self-knowledge	Coachees who are new to the organisation or role	And who have access to new or refreshed feedback	Are more likely to engage in self-reflection, raise self-awareness, feel motivated to examine leadership style	And define/refine and achieve leadership goals, change behaviour, encourage staff to engage in feedback process for themselves
TCMOc 22: Explore feedback	Coachees who are willing to be courageous in seeking feedback, take a holistic view, prefer to explore the detail in the feedback and context through the coaching; or coachees who have had negative work experiences or who have a negative bias in their view of themselves, are open to feedback and coachees who are in complex and challenging roles	Who are provided with the opportunity to explore a range of feedback from different sources, to explore the wider context, to re-balance, focus on positives, to consider a range of alternative views in a supportive environment and experience encouragement through the feedback	Are more likely to reframe the negative in positive terms, see the connections with other aspects of business, see more than just the feedback results, appreciate its applicability, re-balance their thinking, discover their strengths, increase their confidence; reframe their self-opinion; see the bigger picture, re-balance their development objectives, broaden their thinking; feel motivated and energised, raise their confidence, self-awareness, shift their focus from weakness to strengths and build on strengths	And apply their strengths to get the best out of the feedback, and in other contexts, apply the insight to make better informed leadership decisions and action, improve their health and wellbeing, try new things, set and achieve goals, consider personal impact on others, try different leadership approaches, extend positive psychology principles the beyond work environment

Thematic CMOc Number	Enabling/constraining Contexts	Mechanism "Resource"	Mechanism "Reasoning"	Outcomes
TCMOc 23a (Positive):Positive learning framework	Organised coachees with a preference for order, who see the process as a means of tracking change and value beyond the coaching, understand how it is to be used and buy in to it	And are provided with the opportunity to use a learning diary as a framework to guide positive reflexive learning, the opportunity to tailor the reflexive learning process to suit their own personal preferences and the opportunity for the coaching process to continue between sessions	Are more likely to feel motivated to engage in reflective process in their own way, focus their mind, see it as preparation for future sessions, feel motivated to review and reflect, see the benefit and value, not only for the immediate purpose but also for others, self-coach, change their mind-set, reframe perceived constraints, feel motivated to find the best way to structure their self-reflection, recording and learning, put things into perspective, feel motivated to introduce more objectivity, to ask questions, reflect-on-practice and in-practice	And engage in reflective learning to keep track of their coaching sessions, and in reflexive learning to shape and achieve their coaching goals

Thematic CMOc Number	Enabling/constraining Contexts	Mechanism "Resource"	Mechanism "Reasoning"	Outcomes
TCMOc 23b (Negative): Positive learning framework	When there is a negative perception in the organisation about recording learning, reflecting and writing or coachees have had a negative prior experience of recording learning, do not see the relevance and purpose in recording and engaging in reflexive learning, or tend to become negative when engaging in singular reflection	And are provided with a positive framework or learning diary to structure reflexive learning, and positive encouragement	Are less likely to feel motivated to engage in a reflective process, more likely to be put off by the format, experience negative memories of previous occasions and lack of success, do not see the relevance, have no perception of value, do not feel motivated to put the time and effort into recording learning, and may ruminate when reflecting alone, and become de-motivated	They may choose simple goals, or may not use reflexive practice, they may not use recording of learning as part of their reflexive learning and may not realise the full potential of their coaching engagement
TCMOc 24a (Positive): Time and effort	Busy coachees who need structure and encouragement to engage in reflexive learning	Who are provided with the opportunity and time to reflect at the end of the coaching session and review at the beginning of the next and coach support in between	Are more likely to make connections with other working practices, e.g. de-briefs, responding to in-the-moment review	And engage in reflexive learning to set and pursue coaching goals

Thematic CMOc Number	Enabling/constraining Contexts	Mechanism "Resource"	Mechanism "Reasoning"	Outcomes
TCMOc 24b (Negative): Time and effort	Where the organisation does not allow busy coachees time to reflect	And they are offered the opportunity to use private time out of the coaching environment to engage in positive reflexive learning and to use learning diary as framework to guide positive reflexive learning	They are more likely to feel unmotivated to find time to engage in and record reflective process, see recording learning as separate to the coaching, see it as getting in the way, perceive it as too much like everyday work, see the diary process as not appealing, may feel motivated to engage in reflective process cognitively as an alternative or to engage in an alternative process	They may choose simple goals, not use reflective practice or might not use a written form of reflective practice, they may design own process, or do the bare minimum
TCMOc 24c (Neutral): Time and effort	Busy coachees	Who are provided with the opportunity to use learning diary as a framework to guide positive reflexive learning	Are more likely to feel enthusiastic initially, but less so when time pressures get in the way	They may only record their learning for some of the time and not achieve the optimum benefit from the reflexive learning process

Thematic CMOc Number	Enabling/constraining Contexts	Mechanism "Resource"	Mechanism "Reasoning"	Outcomes
TCMOc 25a (Positive): Positive reinforcement	Coachees who see the relevance and purpose in reflexive learning and to whom reflection comes easier	And who are provided with positive reinforcement through engaging in reflexive learning	Are more likely to see the relevance, feel motivated to put in time and effort, regard it as different to dealing with concrete issues, feel encouraged to review their learning, gain perspective, reflect on past successes, see things more philosophically, make connections,	And use reflexive learning to define/refine, pursue and achieve their coaching goals, track their emergent learning and self-reinforce their learning
TCMOc 25b (Negative): Positive reinforcement	When the organisation espouses theory of reflective learning but does not allow the resources to operationalise it and coachees don't see the relevance or purpose in recording reflexive learning	And they are provided with reinforcement through engaging with the framework	They are more likely to cut corners or ignore it, not see the relevance, have no perception of value, see it as artificial, not feel motivated to put in time and effort into recording learning	And choose simple goals or not use reflective practice, do not use recording learning as part of their reflexive learning to define/refine and pursue coaching goals
TCMOc 26a (Positive): Learning policy	When professional development policy aligns with the reflexive learning element in the	And coachees are provided with the opportunity to relate positive learning	They are more likely to see the connection with external professional body policy, perceive it	And engage in reflexive and recorded learning to define/refine and achieve coaching goals

Thematic CMOc Number	Enabling/constraining Contexts	Mechanism "Resource"	Mechanism "Reasoning"	Outcomes
	coaching, reflexive learning is consistent with emerging OD climate and there is sector and organisational read-across in OD initiatives	processes to national professional development initiatives and to use a learning diary as a framework to guide positive reflexive learning	as relevant and current, see the connection with emerging internal leadership processes and perceive it as relevant and valuable	
TCMOc 26b (Negative): Learning policy	Where there is patchy take up of professional body policy in the organisation and the recording of learning is not consistent throughout the organisation	Coachees are provided with the opportunity of sector promotion of positive reflexive learning and CPD and to use a learning diary as a framework to guide positive reflexive learning	It is more likely that the concept will not be reinforced externally or internally, coachees will feel unaccustomed or motivated to putting in time and effort, feel discouraged from investing in the practice of recording learning	And may not record their reflexive learning, or use reflexive learning to define/refine and pursue their coaching goals
TCMOc 26c (Neutral): Learning policy	Where there is no sector policy impact on the organisation and the recording of learning is not consistent throughout the organisation	Coachees are provided with the opportunity to relate their positive learning processes to national initiatives and to use learning diary as framework to guide positive reflexive learning	They are less likely to respond to this guidance from the professional body and feel unaccustomed to the practice of recording learning	And they may record their learning for some of the time; when they did it was effective but not sustained