

From Aha to Ta-dah: Linking Insight to Behaviour in a Life Coaching Intervention for Women



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BACKGROUND & RATIONALE

- Solving a problem with insight provokes a change of mind and concomitantly, behavior
- Characteristics of insight include being stuck on a problem, having a sudden resolution accompanied by emotion, confidence in the answer, and new perspective on a topic
- Measures of neural activity during moments of insight have generated more precise understanding of brain activation with the highest jolt of electrical current occurring during insight¹
- While life coaching efficacy is now supported by over 40 randomized controlled trials², neuroscience can help refine the understanding of how coaching works
- If sudden insight represents a quantum leap in understanding³ then studying the relationship between insight and behaviour during coaching may reveal more about the role of the coach in promoting change.



STUDY OBJECTIVES



- The primary aim of the research was to determine whether having moments of insight during coaching led to more significant and sustained behaviour changes
- Secondary aims included whether insight was being evoked by coaches; whether some people were naturally more inclined toward it; and whether problem-solving ability, psychological well-being, and mindfulness scores improved after a life coaching intervention

DESIGN AND METHODS

- The study followed a naturally occurring life coaching program using mixed methods in a convergent parallel design⁴
- Consenting participants (n=8) and coaches (n=7) tracked moments of insight after each coaching session
- Problem-solving ability was measured pre-and-post intervention by a timed test of compound remote association (CRA) word problems⁵
- Validated questionnaires of psychological well-being and mindfulness were administered at baseline and post intervention
- Life satisfaction was measured using the Wheel of Life® along with a personal strength profile (non-validated)
- Sustainability of goal achievement and behaviour change were assessed using a survey 8 weeks later.

RESULTS

- Insights increased significantly during life coaching, 5 times higher than in the previous 6 months
- Analysis of qualitative data showed a narrative pattern between moments of insight and goal progress (93%), direct evidence of behavior change (56%), and direct reference to coaching in the generation of insight (33%)
- Mindfulness and ability to solve (CRA) problems using insight improved, but not significantly
- Measures of life satisfaction and personal strength (non-validated) also increased
- There was no difference in positive well-being scores.

Insights Reported	Time Period	Insights	Mean	P Value
	Prior 6 months	5	0.83 (SD 0.41)	
	During coaching	27	4.50 (SD 3.08)	<0.05

Presence of Emotion	Non-insight	Insight	Total	P Value
Yes	4	20	24	
No	4	0	4	
Total	8	20	28	<0.05

Validated Measure	Mean Before Coaching	Mean After Coaching	P Value
CRA Problem Solving	2.20 (SD 1.79)	4.00 (SD 2.00)	=0.23
Mindfulness	44.50 (SD 10.37)	52 (SD 9.42)	=0.15
Positive Well Being	41.13 (SD 4.81)	41.81 (SD 8.13)	=0.81

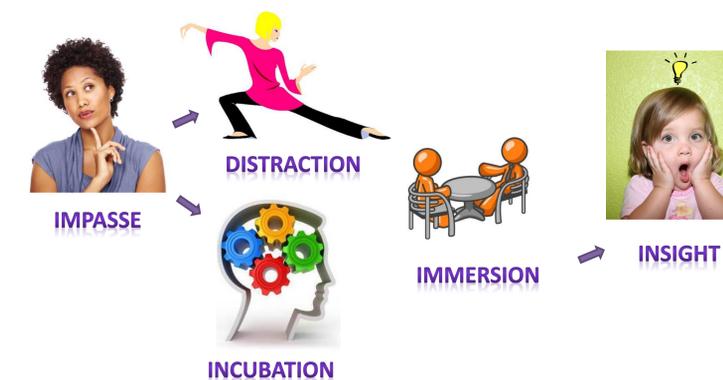
INSIGHTS EVOKED DURING LIFE COACHING

Goal	Impasse	Insight Evoked	New Awareness	New Behaviour
Quit Smoking	I would have a puff of smoke and feel really guilty and think I screwed up. I might just as well become a smoker again.	(My coach) said you put so much pressure on yourself like – who has the rules of the quitting book – is the way she put it.	I think it really got in my head if I slip up it doesn't mean that I've failed completely.	A big one was to quit smoking and I have to say I have been successful with that.
Putting Myself First	(My coach) coached me in digging deeper and always bringing me back to the person I am and want to be.	I had a moment of sudden insight when we started to described the values as a '10' vs where I was in them right now.	It made me realize that I can take steps to get to that '10' and that they will fluctuate.	I am getting a bit better just having the boundaries.
Career Enjoyment	I was stuck in the poor me and what am I going to do?	It was an eye opener. What happens if I lose my job?	It was about changing how you look at things.	Now, for the first time in a year, I'm over a 100% in sales.
Personal Dev.	I never felt smart enough.	Ahhh - this is what happens.	All these times I struggle is because of what happened.	I am trusting myself and trying things out.

DISCUSSION

- A neuro-scientific understanding of insight makes it increasingly possible to postulate how mental functions take place during life coaching. The anterior cingulate regulates attention in the brain¹ and it may be that the coach is evoking insight using the same modulation between left and right brain in promotion of less obvious solutions.
- Since participants experienced moments of insight, increased mindfulness, and ability to solve CRA problems using insight after life coaching, the coach may be performing the priming function that helps participants become more receptive to possibilities. Further research monitoring brain activity during coaching would be important to confirm this coaching potential.

PHASES OF INSIGHT



TAKE HOME MESSAGE

- Moments of insight occurred with significantly greater frequency during Co-Active Life Coaching, and insight could be tracked to sustained behaviour changes in relation to identified goals.
- Coaches appear to help evoke insight and co-facilitate the link from insight to behavior change.

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