

Perhaps it's because I am writing this on a Monday morning, when I often feel a little fragile, but I've been wondering about fear: the fear of taking an opportunity and of losing some of the things that keep you safe; the fear of proclaiming your passion and speaking your mind; the fear that arises when a frenzy of counting devalues you; the fear of losing territory when territory equates to identity; the fear of not knowing, where to take the session, where in the future to take yourself. And I've been wondering about the fear that seems to be keeping a couple of my clients from saying what they don't want to hear themselves telling me. Sometimes coaching becomes an invitation to consider our fear, for both coach and client; the fear that is the pin the holds us in our stuck place. It's an invitation that can bring fear's presumptions into the light of compassionate scrutiny and allow, from behind the disguise of our business vocabulary, a more human language to be spoken. Somewhere within, beneath or around our fear is something that contains its very opposite; where resides the possibility of renewal and a growing light. *Ken Smith*



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Mindful Leadership – Training the Brain to Lead

Guest feature from Michael Chaskalson

Mindfulness is a theme growing in prominence in the world of coaching, as a way for coaches to develop aspects of their practice and as something to introduce to clients. At July 2010's Network conference Michael Chaskalson revealed a little of what it means to be mindful. Here he tells us more about its benefits.

Some people seem to be born happy. Some seem born to be great leaders. How much of this is down to how the brain is wired – and how much of it can be changed?

Since the early 1990s, neuroscientists have broadly accepted that people who show more activity in the left prefrontal cortex of their brains tend to feel that they have their lives under control. They experience a sense of personal growth, meaning and purpose. They have good personal relationships and accept themselves for who they are. They take what may be broadly characterised as an "approach" orientation to life. Such happy people tend to be good leaders.

Those whose right prefrontal cortex is more activated, on the other hand, are by contrast more discontent and unhappier. They often feel that their lives are out of control and they are disappointed with how things have turned out for them. They tend to be dissatisfied with their personal relationships and with their work and they rarely feel emotional highs. People at this end of the emotional spectrum are more "avoidance" oriented. They tend to be less effective leaders.

Taking readings across a general population group, you get a bell curve distribution, with most people in the

middle, experiencing a mixture of approach and avoidance attitudes, having a mix of good and bad moods, left and right prefrontal cortex activation. Those relatively few people who are farthest to the right will be most likely to experience a clinical depression or anxiety disorder over the course of their lives. While those lucky few farthest to the left rarely experience troubling moods and recover from them very quickly.

For many years neuroscientists attributed this distribution of happiness and its associated qualities across populations to what they called each individual's "affective style" – their emotional disposition. Crudely put, the thinking went that whether your outlook on life was sunny or bleak was pretty much stable. You could get highs or lows depending on changing circumstances but, like a rubber band snapping back into position, you will tend to return to your happiness "set point" depending on your basic affective style.

In 2001 all of this thinking began to change. Professor Richard Davidson, who since 1984 had pioneered the

study of brain asymmetry, came to study the brain activity of highly experienced meditators. To his enormous surprise and interest, his first subject showed a left prefrontal cortex activation that simply went off the charts. Studies with other highly experienced meditators confirmed these findings. Could mental training, Davidson wondered, shift the happiness “set point”? And, if so, was it really a “set point” after all?

But it is one thing to investigate the brains of really skilled meditators, quite another to see if those changes can be replicated in an ordinary population group.

A tentative answer to that last question has come from a study that Davidson did in collaboration with Jon Kabat-Zinn, founder of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. Kabat-Zinn teaches mindfulness meditation skills to patients with chronic diseases of all kinds, to help them better handle their symptoms. In an article published in *Psychosomatic Medicine* in 2003, Davidson and Kabat-Zinn report the effects of training in mindfulness meditation to workers in Promega – a high-pressure biotech business in Madison, Wisconsin.

One group undertook an eight week course in mindfulness training. A comparison group of volunteers from the company received the training later, and, like the first course participants, were tested before and after training by Davidson and his colleagues.

Mindfulness training involves learning to pay attention: on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgementally to whatever arises in the field of your experience. Derived from the Buddhist meditative traditions, the mindfulness approach to leadership, personal effectiveness, emotional intelligence and stress reduction is finding its way increasingly into secular contexts.

Before the course, the whole Promega group – as with many who work in high pressure environments – was tipped on average toward the right in the ratio for the emotional set point and complained of feeling highly stressed. The group who received the mindfulness training, however, reported afterwards that their moods had improved. They felt more engaged in their work, energized and less anxious. This was born out by their brain scan results. Their emotions ratio shifted significantly leftward. What is more, these results persisted at the three month follow-up. It seems that their set point had changed.

Mindfulness also improved the robustness of their immune systems, as gauged by the amount of flu antibodies in their blood after receiving a flu shot. Other studies seem to suggest that if people in two experimental groups are exposed to the flu virus, those who have learned mindfulness will experience less severe symptoms. The greater the leftward shift in the emotional set point, the larger the increase in the immune measure.

Davidson’s results suggest that, given the proper training, the emotional set

point can shift. Mindfulness training can help you to become happier – and it can make you a better leader.

It's hard to define the essence of good leadership, but if you've ever worked under one you'll know how satisfying that can be. Good leaders make work enjoyable, however demanding it is. They inspire their teams to give of their best, skilfully drawing on the talents and temperaments of their subordinates. You could describe what they do as the creation of resonance because they draw out and amplify the qualities of those around them. People who do this tend to be highly "approach" oriented. Dissonant leaders, by contrast, drain the enthusiasm of teams and organizations. They lower morale and make those around them unhappy. They tend to be very "avoidance" oriented.

Richard Boyatzis, professor of organizational behaviour at the Weatherhead School of Management, specialises in the study of leadership. Good leaders, he says, attain resonance with those around them through self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. All of these are, to some extent or other, mindfulness skills.

But the demands of leadership produce "power stress", a side-effect of being in a position of power and influence that often leaves even the best leaders physically and emotionally drained. As a result leaders can easily find themselves

moving from an "approach" orientation to their task – emotionally open, engaged and innovative – to an "avoidance" orientation that is characterised by aversion, irritability and close-mindedness.

Mindfulness training strengthens the tendency towards the approach mode of mind. This is because it teaches one to take an interest in all aspects of one's experience and to "approach" it, treating it with acceptance and curiosity. A formal training in mindfulness skills provides one with the tools to switch from an avoidant mode of mind into an approach one.

Mindfulness training teaches one to embrace and understand the entirety of each moment. It is not a neutral or blank state however. Real mindfulness is imbued with warmth, care, and interest. It consists of an engaged interest with whatever is before one, and where there is interest a warm, natural, and unforced attention follows.

The pressures that pull managers into dissonance are increasing. This is fed by a number of issues. Time compression, the demands of multitasking and the feeling that the world is increasingly unsafe are huge pulls toward dissonant experiences.

To be effective with other people, you need to intentionally work towards resonant relationships. Training in mindfulness, one discovers tools for self-renewal that lead to greater life-satisfaction and significantly higher levels of effectiveness at work.

Further Reading

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This article was first published in the August 2007 Newsletter of the Association of Business Psychologists

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Association for Coaching UK Conference 2010: Leadership Coaching – developing elite performance

Ken Smith

In the sauna-like conditions of the University of East London's conference centre, over 300 coaches gathered in July for the first single-themed conference run by the AC UK.

Proceedings commenced with an account from Adrian Furnham of University College London, of the "Dangers of Derailing Behaviours", where with caustic wit and extensive data he gave voice to what many of us feel is unspeakable: that a fair number of the leaders in our organisations are likely to have crossed the threshold into psychological disorder. This is in part the consequence of leaders overplaying the strengths that have helped them achieve their positions at the top. As well as selecting for those characteristics known to be associated with effective leadership, Adrian contended that we need to pay equal

attention to selecting out for those we don't want in our leaders.

Jonathan Passmore, from the University of East London, abandoned the woeful PA system to complement Adrian's theme of the mutli-faceted and malleable nature of leadership, by asserting that it is a mistake to look for a perfect leader; instead we should be open to a variety of perfections. The search for a universally applicable model of flawless leadership is illusory and unhelpful. He reinforced his point with three examples, from RBS, BP and Haringey Social Services, where very different challenges would call for

different types of learning from the leaders involved.

In the knowledge that the 21st century will be a time of ever greater instability and more rapid change, Alex Linley, from the Centre of Applied Positive Psychology, saw Theory X, where the leader is clever and highly motivated and the worker is not, as needing to be replaced by a new strengths-based model of leadership. Drawing on research in positive psychology, Alex took us through a framework of six principles, ranging from cultivating an abundance mindset, which directs attention to possibilities and creates new energy, to organisational stewardship, where leading organisations carries a responsibility for their impact on the physical environment, the well-being of employees and on society.

Christine Williams of NASA balanced these theoretical inputs with her case study on setting up a leadership development programme for systems engineers there. The question NASA wanted to answer was: how do you persuade excellent technicians deeply immersed in their discipline to get other people to do things better? Christine emphasised the need for effective and active sponsorship and for aligning the individual and organisational aims for coaching. Unusually, her programme included agreed protocols for using the corporate intelligence gathered through coaching.

The after lunch slot fell to the University of Sydney's Anthony Grant,

often described as the modern father of coaching psychology. At the heart of his session was the proposition that ROI is a profoundly misleading and inadequate measure of coaching effectiveness. Instead he wanted to see more evaluation studies using a broad range of methods in combination to demonstrate the value of coaching, where both quantitative and qualitative were held as valid.

Knowing what the sponsor wants, staying goal-focussed, measuring outcomes – including factors of well-being and organisational culture, as well as coachees' narratives of benefits gained – and tracking progress, were key activities with evaluation.



Ian Roberts, from The Thinking Partnership, provoked us to consider more deeply what we mean by "authentic". This perhaps overused epithet concentrates too much on our seeking happiness through finding a role and situation where we can be true to ourselves; a very, even excessively, individualistic focus. Authenticity could be differently defined as being created in the relationship between you and others. In the face of at times brutally combative questioning, Ian very skilfully used the exchange between himself and the audience to demonstrate in the moment the model he was offering us, where authenticity exists in the space between defiance and compliance.

The day concluded with Katherine Tulpa considering how best to coach top teams. As many of us were by this time wilting in the heat, Katherine

bravely invited some interaction between us, with her questions on what makes the top team different to other populations for coaching; and why so many top teams find it difficult to work well together. Drawing on her

own practice she offered us a series of tips, not the least of which was making sure we scope the work fully first and build relationships with individuals before engaging with the full team.

Developing "Coachability"

Guest feature from Stuart Hadden

Coaching is recognised in our lives and work more now than ever. There is, however, a broadening gap between coach and coachee: for the coach there are qualifications, accreditation and supervision; but what is there to help the coachee make the best of the relationship?

Any effective relationship should have more of the focus with the coachee, with the coach and process sitting very much in the background. I'm currently researching how the coachee's ability to develop their *skills as a coachee* can be accelerated.

In essence these skills comprise the ability to learn. Given that coaching can be one of the most profound of learning experiences, there is a need for the coaches to be equipped to make the most of it. You will know when coachees have developed these skills when they demonstrate the ability to self-coach. Maybe with this intent, aspiring coachees can have their own books to read and their own network to join?

Drowning in the process

Appreciating the process of coaching is one thing but to really understand and demonstrate the skills of being a coachee is where true impact of coaching can be achieved. Coach and coachee can quickly establish the

process for what they are about to embark on; but imagine a situation where a coachee shows up fully armed with the skills to be a coachee.

I recently began competing in triathlons; swimming was my weakest discipline so I sourced a coach. Imagine if my coach had only agreed the process with me. 'OK you need to be at the pool between 3 - 4pm every Wednesday for the next 8 weeks. Don't forget your goggles and spare change for the locker. Jump in at the deep end and we'll begin.'

You can imagine the impact this would have, but this is on the whole how many coaching relationships start and why many of them fail. Instead my swim coach did all of the above and then he began to discuss with me the skills that I required to be an effective coachee, such as determination to repeat drills and being patient. I was still in at the deep end, although now I felt as though I had a bit more buoyancy. Over the next couple of

weeks my swimming improved dramatically. Maybe this would have happened anyway, but maybe is not good enough when two people commit their valuable time to a common cause.

Concepts for coachees

Please mind the gap - While coaches enter the coaching relationship raring to go, this isn't always true for the coachee. There is a gap of understanding and skill and it's important to fill it. I am not suggesting that coachees need the same development time invested in them as coaches; but I am suggesting that they need some time; time spent on an investment that can accelerate the learning and bring quicker and deeper results.

Sustainable development - If coaching can meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the coachee to meet their own needs in the future, then we can call it a success. If coaching can meet the needs of the present **and develop the ability of the coachee to meet their own needs in the future** then we can call it an overwhelming success. For this to work, both coach and coachee must attend to their development prior to embarking on a coaching journey. Historically this has not always been the case. If you look at any change then it is likely to have followed one of two models - top down or bottom up. We are suggesting simultaneous change; in coaching this is what we need to activate a chain reaction.

Triple whammy – from my research I have realised that all coachees are in fact working on three levels, not one or even two. They are, consciously or otherwise,

- attending to the progress of their goals - skills development.
- improving their skills as a coachee - developing coachability.
- coming full circle and developing as a coach.

Bring it on – So filling the gap, accelerating the relationship, delivering greater impact and improving our return on investment, means providing...

- pre work for coachees to develop *readiness* for coaching.
- a resource for coachees to make informed *choices* about coaching.
- *advanced* warning system for the skills required by coachees.
- an opportunity to *develop* the skills that are required of effective coachees.

All this can be achieved if coachees anchor their approach to one attitude: one which they can develop and shape themselves, now, before, during or after coaching. It doesn't matter as long as they are prepared as a coachee to bring it on.

Possibilities, perception and performance

Our evolving model gives us the opportunity as coaches to review our past, find our present location and map out our future intentions:

Consider Possibilities Aware

- As coachee you will be considering all your different possibilities and in doing so awareness of yourself and others will increase.

Challenge Perception Adapt

- As coachee you will be challenging your perception and adapting yourself accordingly.

Change Performance Action

- As coachee you will be changing your performance and taking action.



Future research: This resource is a collaboration between Stuart and others. Having conducted over 80 interviews with HR professionals, the next phase of the research will see him continue these interviews and begin to work with groups of coaches and coachees. If you would like to be involved or have any feedback on this article please email stuart@stormbeach.co.uk www.stormbeach.co.uk

Coaching at The Prince's Trust: Team Challenge 172

Joanna O'Brien

There has been a lot of publicity lately in the media about the Princes Trust. I was very fortunate to be allowed to contribute to a Trust scheme this year by undertaking a secondment from May to July. Initially there is a lot of information about it and I was very well briefed. Nothing really can prepare you fully, however, except actually going through the experience.

My role was as a paid employee in a coaching role for the participants on the scheme. The scheme is designed to equip young people for employment and comprises the following;

- Stage 1: Induction day
- Stage 2: Teambuilding residential
- Stage 3: Project Planning
- Stage 4: Community Project
- Stage 5: Challenge Planning round
- Stage 6: Team Challenge
- Stage 7: Final Review & presentation

I work in the Career Consultancy Service in MoD identifying training and personal development for MOD civilians. With the current and anticipated restrictions on expenditure the secondment offered me a real developmental opportunity to hone my coaching skills in a potentially challenging setting and to be in a much more informed position when taking with colleagues and clients about the Trust and its work.

The Princes Trust "Team 172" consisted of 13 individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds. Their ages ranged from 17 to 25 and all were unemployed and some had never experienced work. A majority of the participants had learning difficulties or conditions such as ADHD and were in the Autistic spectrum disorder categories. My approach was clearly going to be planned to suit individuals so I started out by getting to know each individual and establishing trust and rapport.

Once they discovered I was a career consultant working for the MOD, I was strangely inundated by requests for help in writing CV's. The really

interesting part for me took place during the preparation for employment stage. I also found that I had to help participants find unique ways to overcome genuine "obstacles" in finding work. This was not mere reluctance to find a job but often was founded on inbred fears of failure, lack of motivation or parental guidance (no parental guidance in many cases). Attempting to coach people who were under peer pressure to "drop out" and a great deal of pressure to take easy routes in terms of money making such as drug trafficking or remaining on the dole, seemed incredibly daunting to me at times.

It seems that traditional approaches to coaching would not work best here; the Trust emphasised that I would be a role model, so as individuals approached me I decided that I would be honest about my own background and share how I had overcome obstacles along the path. While on the residential in Wales, I admitted to sheer terror at the thought of rock climbing but I dug deep into my NLP reserves and climbed steadily up, well past the level expected of me. I froze at the top however and had to be hoisted down, but it served as an example demonstrating that if someone of my age (and I am afraid that this is definitely top secret) can overcome fear, then they could too.

I used a tool called "My World as it is Now" to help individuals to draw pictures of their current situation. Not only did this give them a concrete, pictorial representation of their situations but allowed them to use both right and left brain thinking; I encouraged them to acknowledge their emotions while also drawing

pictures of ways to overcome obstacles. Applying logic to situations, I encouraged them to “think” about issues as opposed to reacting emotionally to areas such as rejection, failure and often despair.

This exercise naturally led into a “Future Fantasy” exercise where they were coached to draw pictures of how their ideal future would look. Through a mixture of probing and questioning, I was able to allow people to imagine future possibilities, whether they were emotional or professional goals involving training or further education. It was a success as often the participants had not given thought to actually achieving future goals and the process of drawing pictures allowed them to visualise and think about any blocks and bridges.

Did I make a difference? I recently met with the Team Leader who told me that everyone on Team 172 had gone onto employment or college, so I think that is clear evidence that the Princes Trust works. My expectation as an NLP coach is for a positive, long term improvement for the people who were on the scheme, and time will tell

whether the Princes Trust and my coaching efforts have had any real, positive long term impact.

From the point of view of my own personal development, I believe that I had become too directive, due primarily to the guidance aspect of my role in MoD. I found that my tolerance levels dropped significantly while working with the Trust, as my values were challenged constantly. I even lost my temper on many occasions and this was shocking for me, as I pride myself on self control. So not only have I learned to recognise my “be perfect” driver, I learned to be more impartial and alert to my internal judgements, all of which I hope will make me a more resourceful and effective coach in the future.

Contributing to the Trust’s work was an enormously valuable experience, personally and as a coach. I’d like to acknowledge the full support I received from my line manager and colleagues who obviously shouldered the workload while I was away on secondment.

Review: “: Lewis, T, Amini, F & Lannon R - “A General Theory of Love”

Ken Smith

The next time someone tells you they have three brains, they will not be boasting. They may have read this hugely engaging and wonderfully eloquent book.

The authors’ starting point is to reveal the threefold structure of the human brain, describing in turn: the basic survival drive of the ancient reptilian brain; the limbic brain which compels

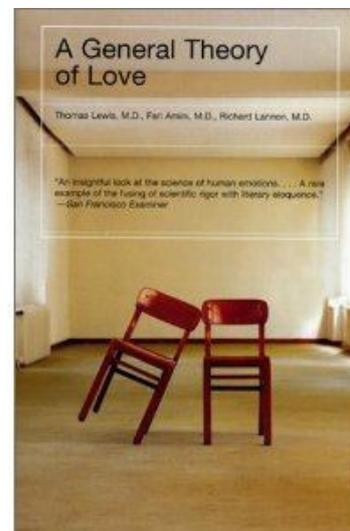
and requires us to attach ourselves to others; and the neocortical brain which fools us into believing that we are rational creatures living in a world we can control.

The cognitive capabilities of the neocortical brain set us apart from other mammals. They include our capacity for language and metaphor, analysis and abstract thought. It is the hidden processes of the limbic brain, however – resonance, regulation and revision – that give the lie to the overlordship of rationality and make us the affectionate mammals we are. These processes are relational, i.e. we are formed by our relationships with others, in the exquisite limbic exchanges we experience with them. If there were any doubt of this, the authors' accounts of the impact of prolonged isolation on individuals show how deeply we need social interaction to be well. While fully anchored to its title, this book could easily have been called "The Physiology of Relationships": "a relationship is a physiological process, as real and as potent as any pill or surgical procedure."

The authors throw light on many of the constructs used within the vocabulary of coaching, by illuminating their physiological basis. When we talk about rapport, for example, we are really talking about limbic resonance: "A symphony of mutual exchange and internal adaptation whereby two (people) become attuned to each other's inner states." It may be this, out of awareness synchrony of states that underlies our experience in coaching of intuition; those moments when something tells you to ask a question seemingly unprepared by or outside the territory of the earlier dialogue.

In our limbic-driven search to know the client, our awareness of their

incongruent signals (their voice says "I'm fine" while their eyes say "I'm lost") is the result of our scanning for resonance with them. That we have this awareness derives from the purpose of our limbic brain: to monitor the external world and the internal bodily environment, and to align them with optimal comfort and efficiency. The body-mind connection is a limbic connection; and as we work for our own congruence of outer world and inner state, we notice its presence or absence in others.



The patterns of congruence and incongruence that define how we are and how we behave, and about which we talk in coaching, are, for the authors here, the outcome of an associative neural network created from sensory input. Crucially: "Emotionality forms a principle dimension of that associative network." We map subsequent input against an existing network to make sense of it, as economically and with as much emotional ease as we can. One result of this is that: "The nature of what (the brain) *has* seen dictates what it *can* see" (authors' italics); something ever apparent in the

paradigm clashes between the financial and people disciplines in organisations. This tendency creates an “informational inertia” where we fit what we encounter into what we know; and what we know can easily become the gaoler of what is allowed to be possible.

The Theory of Love is not a cold reductionist account of how personality and relationships are formed, but a deeply compassionate and urgent call to attend to ourselves and to others, with a clearer knowledge of what makes us what and who we are. This is most apparent in the sections dealing with parenting and medicine and sexual love; and the expectations of and practices in these fostered by cultural forces within Western society, which the authors see as profoundly destructive to well-being. They also touch upon the fallacy of loyalty in the corporate world, where the reciprocation of limbic resonance and regulation played out in dyadic human relations and which builds such ties, can only be a mirage; as instead of a warm mutuality, corporations offer us a deal which they can and will quickly withdraw with a reptilian snapping of jaws.

It is because we each have a part in forming others, in the mutually

synchronizing exchange of limbic regulation, that the possibility of change exists. “In a relationship, one mind revises another” through the imperceptible interweaving of our information patterns within the dialogues we have. We are joined together in a continuous exchange of signals, where we call forth each others memories and emotional states. As NLP coaches will have been taught, we cannot not communicate. Though we strive hard to acquire and skilfully deploy our tools and techniques, the experience of coaching repeatedly confirms that *you* are the intervention. The agent of change is who you are.

This is not a new book (it was first published in 2000) but it is an important one. It is not about coaching but I would urge all coaches to read it. If, as we hear ever more often, the effectiveness of coaching is most dependent upon the client’s experience of the coaching relationship; and if our training tells us that a critical part of our coaching practice is developing our own signature presence; this book is essential reading for what it tells us about the emotional mind and about the unconscious and profound way we need and must connect with others.

Tips, Tales & Techniques #3 – A Glimpse at Gestalt

Hamid Tavassoly

I had been curious about the Gestalt workshop that Julie Allen and Alison Whybrow were delivering at i-coach Academy, as I had been to a another Gestalt seminar and wanted to see the differences and similarities of approach.

As it turned out, it was very different to my previous experience. I had come to coaching through an NLP route and it was at this workshop that I realised that a lot of the underpinning concepts in NLP come from Gestalt.

I found the structure and substance of the workshop very effective for my learning preference which is mixture of theory and practice. In particular I was drawn to the "Gestalt Cycle of Awareness" and also what can get in the way of this. The exercises on focusing attention on the relationship in the here and now, which stemmed from phenomenology, reinforced for

me the power of paying attention to my own physiology using all the senses and feelings during coaching sessions.

Another exercise that I found very interesting was to choose an object during lunch break and bring it back. We were then invited to describe the object as if we were the object using "I am ..." and paying attention to details. I had chosen my sunglasses and as I was describing the attributes of the sunglasses I suddenly realised I was describing myself! The lesson was that you see the world not as it is but as you are and this is a very quick way of getting to know somebody.

There are now 216 members of the Coaches in Government Network, from 51 organisations. Since the Network's inception 24 members have provided in excess of 670 hours of coaching in other members' organisations.

In addition to the invitation from Stuart Hadden on p.9 above, the Network has also been invited to participate in a potentially valuable piece of research, investigating whether there are key differences in how clients experience coaching with internal or external coaches. To get involved in this contact ciaran.wrynn@gmail.com

The Network's reputation continues to grow, with a connection made with the new EMCC public sector forum.

This month sees the departure of two of the Networks' longest standing members and champions. Justine Ballard and Alison Dale are embarking on new careers outside the Civil Service. They leave with all our thanks and best wishes for their future success.

And finally:

"Our passions stem from origins deeper than an accountant's calculus of benefits and costs." Boyd Tonkin