Peer Coaching: A Relational Process for Accelerating Career Learning

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We examine the nature of peer coaching and frame it as a type of developmental tool that can enhance personal and professional development. We begin with a discussion of the relational perspective on career learning, which provides a context for peer coaching as a tool that can accelerate career learning. We distinguish between peer coaching and the related concepts of mentoring and peer mentoring and discuss factors that facilitate the development of this type of helping relationship. We offer a discussion of the key characteristics of effective peer-coaching relationships, and we provide an empirical test of the impact of these characteristics with a survey of MBA students. We also offer a theoretical model of peer coaching, along with propositions for future research. We conclude that when peer coaching works best for a person, it happens through a 3-step process of (1) building the developmental relationship, (2) creating success in development, and (3) internalizing the learning tactic by applying the peer-coaching process in future relationships.

The contemporary business social and political/military environment has been influenced by global competition, organizational restructuring, mergers, delayering of organizations, and flattened structures. In the U.S. Army for example, the acronym "VUCA" is used by leaders to signal to employees that every day they have to be mindful that they operate in a world that is volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous. Such an environment has resulted in new employment patterns and also created high levels of stress around job and career issues (Ashkanasy & Holmes, 1995). Different sets of career skills are necessary to adapt to these changes and maintain employability. In particular there is an in-

creased focus on learning as a foundation of career growth as individuals assume responsibility for their own career development.

One of the challenges that managers now face is how to promote learning, growth and development for themselves and for others. Life-span issues of adulthood mean that career learning has moved from a one-time education credential to an ongoing lifelong process that underpins a range of career education issues including preparing for the world of work, transitioning in the job, losing work, and adjusting to changed circumstances (Guindon & Richmond, 2005). Learning and work, which have traditionally not been well coordinated (Burns, 1995), must now be integrated into a continuously supportive process so that people can "acquire all the knowledge, values, skills and understanding they will require throughout their lifetimes" (Stewart & Ball, 1995: 5). Oral and written communication skills, motivating and managing others, and leadership skills are considered by students to contrib-

ute to improving workplace situations (Zekeri, 2004).

Such skill development is inherent in career education today, and the foundation for acquiring these skills is frequently developed in degree programs. Increasing numbers of workers are returning to tertiary institutions at various stages of their lives to address these dramatic changes in work roles (Watson, Buchanan, Campbell, & Briggs, 2003). However, reviewers of management education have been critical of schools' lack of responsiveness to the needs and desires of employers (Boyatzis & Kolb, 2000). The emphasis on the process of learning rather than specific content is underscored by the current attention of accreditation bodies, which requires schools to demonstrate links between the learning process and outputs as measures of quality (e.g., AACSB International; EQUIS).

In the last decade both scholars and practitioners have acknowledged that mentoring and other developmental relationships are essential to helping individuals strengthen their ability to learn at a pace and breadth that is required in today's workplaces (Kram & Hall, 1989, 1996; Ragins & Kram, 2007). These relationships exist in a variety of forms, both within and external to the organization, and are well documented as keys to successful learning in careers (Higgins & Kram, 2001). The most well recognized is the traditional mentoring relationship in which a more experienced colleague supports a younger person through assignment allocation, feedback, and sponsorship (Kram, 1996). Positive career outcomes and psychosocial support emerge in the process.

While traditional mentoring continues to be an enduring learning process (Mavrinac, 2005), confusion has arisen from the plethora of terms used to describe developmental relationships and the lack of clarity associated with them (D'abate, Eddy, & Tannenbaum, 2003; Ensher, Thomas, & Murphy, 2001). Mentoring and coaching are the most widely recognized terms, and both forms have come to be used more frequently in organizations. These terms are sometimes used interchangeably, and although some argue that they are the same (Sperry, 1996), the meanings can be easily confused (Watt, 2004). However, there are many more forms of developmental constructs (D'abate, Eddy et al., 2003) identified by other names.

Despite the terminology, the reality is the resource constraints of contemporary organizations includes relational limitations, and therefore, fewer senior managers are available today to act in a mentoring role (Allen, Poteet, & Burroughs, 1997; Eby, 1997). And what is the upshot of all of these forces? An extremely high need for emotional and informational support for all workers as they strive for continuous learning to maintain their career adaptability and other key capabilities. This need is largely unmet. We introduce here a new resource to address these learning needs: peer coaching. It is a powerful tool, and it has the potential to possess some remarkable properties: It can be high-impact, just-in-time, self-renewing, low-cost, and easily learned.

We introduce the concept of peer coaching and position it as a relevant and new application of a developmental interaction specifically focused to accelerate career learning. We build on the fundamental premise of "a helping relationship that has the intent of promoting growth, development, maturity, improved functioning, improved coping with life of the other" (Rogers, 1973: 223). Whereas helping relationships have often been relegated to therapy, increasingly the lexicon of organizations and of careers has broadened to include a wider scope of "helping" possibilities. Furthermore, more complete and sound definitions of particular developmental constructs are required (D'abate, Eddy et al., 2003).

We begin with a discussion of the relational perspective of careers, which provides a context for peer coaching to accelerate career learning. We distinguish between peer coaching and the related concepts of mentoring and peer mentoring and discuss factors that facilitate the development of peer coaching. We then report on several classroom initiatives that we have done at our respective universities; these involved using peer coaching to foster personal learning and leadership development. In addition to structuring peer-coaching opportunities in the classroom, we have done preliminary research to understand the factors that shape the quality and outcomes of peer-coaching relationships. Finally, we end with propositions for future research that will address the theoretical and practical gaps we have identified.

A Relational Perspective on Careers

Relational Influences on Career Growth

A relational approach to careers is grounded in the assumption that interaction with others is a critical resource for learning (Hall & Associates, 1996). The relational view is informed by feminist literature, which emphasizes the centrality of relationships, acknowledgment of multiple viewpoints, and personal construction of meaning (Gallos, 1989; Gilligan, 1979; Marshall, 1989). The concept is rooted in the belief that by "forming mutual and meaningful

connections with others, individuals gain a greater sense of energy, purpose, vision and, ultimately, self-understanding" (Walsh, Bartunek, & Lacey, 1998).

A relational approach includes the way individuals learn and grow in work-related experiences with others (Kram, 1996). There is a holism to life activities, in which career growth begins with self-knowledge—an assuredness or certainty that strengthens identity and allows an individual to subsequently reach out to others, be sensitive to their needs, and interact effectively. At the same time, identity and competence are continuously reshaped and affirmed through interactions with others. In contrast to traditional approaches that emphasized autonomy and individual mastery, individuals move through a process of increasingly complex states of interdependence (Kram, 1996).

Traditional Mentoring and Peer Mentoring

The contribution of mentors who support individuals as they cope with a range of personal and professional issues is well documented (Higgins & Kram, 2001; Kram, 1985; Kram & Hall, 1989). Since Kram (1985) defined mentoring functions and the stages in the process, many researchers have explored the role of mentoring in different aspects: antecedents; outcomes (Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, & Lima, 2004); psychosocial support (feelings of competence; self-esteem; job acceptance); strengthening individuals' ability to become leaders in their profession; and adjustment to changes in the environment (Kram, 1985). Recently, mentoring has been incorporated into LMX (Schriesheim, Neider, & Scandura, 1998); OCB; socialization and knowledge (McManus & Russell, 1997); and creating and sharing (Bryant, 2005). Mentoring facilitates personal learning (Lankau & Scandura, 2002), and it can also mitigate mergers' negative effects on personnel (Siegel, 2000).

However, mentoring has also come under scrutiny. The traditional role of an older, wiser person guiding a younger one has been undermined in an age where experience of the past and accumulated knowledge no longer guarantee relevance in the future. Empathy emanating from "having been there" is undermined. In the old career paradigm, mentors were able to guide learners from a base of experience and knowledge. However in today's environment, old patterns are no longer templates for future action, and career actors are required to face new situations continuously. Drawing from previous experience could thus be a disadvantage rather than the advantage of providing support to develop responses to new situations.

This situation has prompted the interest in peer mentoring. Peers are more likely to identify with the ambiguity and lack of certainty in contemporary situations. Furthermore, mentoring today is not necessarily aligned with values-based transformational change aimed at developing a learning culture (Mavrinac, 2005). Not only can peers provide the same kinds of psychosocial and vocational support (Eby, 1997; Ensher, Thomas, & Murphy, 2001), but also they can contribute to creating and sharing knowledge with its concomitant potential to create competitive advantage (Bryant, 2005).

There is no doubt that one downside of traditional mentoring in organizations is that the selection of some precludes selection of other motivated employees for developmental relational support. The introduction of formal peer-learning relationships allows for greater participation among the workforce numerically and may offer some unique advantages over traditional mentoring relationships (Bryant, 2005). Formal peer learning is an intentional one-on-one relationship between employees at the same or a similar level in the firm that involves a more experienced worker teaching new knowledge and skills and providing encouragement to a less experienced worker (Eby, 1997).

The relational approach, with its affiliative emphasis, promotes learning through social activity and recognizes structures that facilitate ongoing development. Communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) highlight the socially situated nature of learning. Connection with others through participation in multiple career communities supports growth and development of different aspects of self that are integrated into a synchronous whole by the career actor (Parker, Arthur, & Inkson, 2004). Participation also illustrates the need to participate in multiple learning environments, as no single context will meet all learning needs. Peer coaching is one form of a specialized developmental relationship that facilitates mutual career learning.

Peer Coaching

Conceptual Origins

The power of peer influence has long been noted in psychological literature (Bennis, Berlew, Schein, & Steele, 1973), and the value of consulting with knowledgeable peers has been advocated both in coaching (DeMarco & McCullick, 1997) and in experiential learning (Schön, 1983). The sense of connection with others may be found in a range of relationships—including those with peers—that

provide formal and informal support (Clawson, 1996). An increasing focus on the role peers can play in developmental relationships has highlighted a vital horizontal communication link (Siegel, 2000). From a learning perspective, access to peers is critical to developing a community of practice (Wenger, 1998).

Working with peer partners is widely reported within education, often to improve specific classroom skills. For example, in collaborative classrooms, peer coaching maximizes the natural learning environment for staff and pupils (Buzbee Little, 2005). Peer planning is a specific type of peer coaching that occurs in the planning stage of a program and is then combined with team teaching (Finley, Skarl, Cox, & VanderPol, 2005). Peer-assisted leadership emerged from a program designed to reduce educational managers' professional isolation by increasing informal networks (Dussault & Barnett, 1996).

However in some fields the uptake has been slower, such as in sports coaching, where the role of peers for help other than strategy formation was first posited by Gilbert and Trudel (2005). In the careers field it is now recognized that peers can provide emotional and psychological support that facilitates individual learning and career success. In fact many of the benefits of traditional mentors can be provided by peers (Eby, 1997; Ensher, Thomas et al., 2001; Higgins & Kram, 2001), although a range of developers may be required to meet a variety of individual needs (Higgins & Kram, 2001).

Different themes emerge in peer relationships at different career stages—for example, in early career more self-confidence is needed and competence to adjust to rapid changes in organizational life is required. A quick reflection on a pair-and-share activity in educational settings may contribute to self-assessment and awareness of different perceptions of others on a particular issue. At later stages, deeper levels of analysis may be required to elicit more transformational learning to effect career development. Peers can assist each other in learning how to learn and in drawing insights into personal style.

Peer coaching is more focused than general peer learning. *Peer coaching* has been described as a "developmental relationship with the clear purpose of supporting individuals within it to achieve their job objectives" (Holbeche, 1996: 26). As with other developmental activities, the interaction is between two or more people with the goal of personal or professional development (D'abate, Eddy et al., 2003). The emphasis is on the voluntary, nonevaluative, and mutually beneficial partner-ship between two practitioners of similar experience (Waddell & Dunn, 2005).

Peer coaching is one type of helping relationship, which, as Carl Rogers (1973) emphasized, is based on qualities such as unconditional positive regard, authenticity, and mutual trust, if it is to be effective. There are other examples of developmental relationships that support individual learning and facilitate career success. However the unique contribution of peer coaching is the inherent mutuality and reciprocity of the process. Both individuals are learners, in contrast to more traditional models of mentoring and other hierarchical learning relationships. The explicit and primary purpose of the relationship is to service both parties' learning. While more recent writing on mentoring acknowledges that mentors learn as well, the primary purpose is still defined as "in the service of the protege's learning" (Ragins & Kram, 2007).

One of the earliest mentions of peer coaching we found was Joyce and Showers' (1980) discussion of peer coaching as a dimension of staff development for teachers to create better learning environments. The coaching was a component within a broader context of general professional improvement. Since its inception, the concept has been applied in several and varied fields including nursing (Holbeche, 1996) and medical education (Gattellari, Donnelly, Taylor, Meerkin, & Ward, 2005; Sekerka & Chao, 2003); patient education (MacPherson, Joseph, & Sullivan, 2004); education (Arneau, Kahrs, & Kruskamp, 2004; March, Peters, & Adler, 1994); staff development (Dixon, Willis, Benedict, & Gossman, 2001); and counseling effectiveness.

Critical Qualities

Characteristic elements of peer coaching include (1) equal status of partners (Siegel, 2000); (2) focus on personal and professional development of both peers (Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001); (3) integration of reflection on practice to identify critical incidents for focus (Daudelin, 1996; Raelin, 2000; Van Manen, 1977); (4) emphasis on process as well as content that facilitates leadership skill development (e.g., as in learning to attend to the whole person, taking account of the emotional component, acting as a critical friend (Arthur & Kallick, 1993; Heron, 1992; Kidd, 2004); differentiating between dialogue and conversation (Baker, Jensen, & Kolb, 2005; Issacs, 1999); coaching, (Barnett, 1995); (5) and accelerating career learning (McCauley, 2006). Each quality of peer coaching is discussed below.

1. *Equal status of peers.* First, the equal status of peers removes the important power dimension evident in other relationships. Individuals who are at the same level can provide both critical horizontal communications and traditional mentoring (Siegel, 2000). Peers can plan and initiate their learning opportunities and work toward a shared goal of support of mutual learning, considering sensitive and personal or professional issues. A peer coach offers another lens to examine a specific task, problem, or decision. Peer coaching thus provides one specific way in which social networks can contribute to the planning and management of careers (Siebert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001).

2. *Personal and professional development of both peers.* Within the process, peers strive to gain an in-depth understanding of subjective experiences, including the worldview of the other. In this sense, the peers engage in shared sense-making of each other's worldview. The learning is self-directed and requires peers to examine their own mental models, assumptions, and beliefs that underpin attitudes and behaviors. Each participant selects issues of personal interest for expression and exploration within the dyad. Peers listen for consistency, congruence of the helper's words, and feelings, and must ideally hold the other in unconditional positive regard according to Rogers' (1973) characteristics of helping relationships that enhance growth.

3. *Integration of reflection and practice.* In effective peer coaching attention is on the whole person. This requires personal reflection on one's actions or practice. The reflection process builds awareness of cognitive, affective, and spiritual aspects of professional and personal dimensions that extend beyond the traditional emphasis on applied intellect to encompass body awareness, feelings, social and political processes, and spiritual awareness (Heron, 1992). Therefore, the learning process that builds such self-awareness is one that demands purposeful attention to self.

Reflection is a familiar process to most people and one that promotes learning when encouraged by allocating time and structure for it to occur (Daudelin, 1996; Seibert & Daudelin, 1999). Peer coaching is an ideal structure for reflection. However as with any form of cognitive coaching, behavior will not be affected until the inner thought processes are altered and rearranged (Barnett, 1995).

4. *Importance of attention to process.* Peer coaching provides a medium through which peers learn a process for how better to *attend* to other people. Grounded in process rather than content, peer coaching can be transforming for individuals. The focus is on understanding self, other people, events and patterns over time rather than "truth" as measured by an external judge. In this sense, the process is constructivist in that it involves generating data from peers who assume multiple realities rather than a fixed truth, with participants as active agents in their ongoing development (Peavy, 1994). This proactive stance is congruent with calls for people to be more active in pursuing their personal career agendas in the emerging knowledge economy and to maintain employability in changing times.

5. *Accelerating career learning.* The need to learn rapidly and continuously has assumed greater importance in the era of the VUCA world of the 21st century. Attention to ongoing career development is an imperative that cannot be ignored as tensions (such as the need to perform in the current role and also seek ways to develop) and opportunities coexist. Since fewer external guidelines are available to employees, new forms of self-organizing assume greater importance (Weick & Berlinger, 1989).

Proactive career management requires that all employees be perpetual learners to promote career growth and success. High levels of learning support are required to develop not only microlevel skills that extend beyond those necessary for a particular job, but also macrolevel skills such as adaptability and learning how to learn (Hall, 2002). In addition, career actors today need to possess political and social skills to succeed (Siegel, 2000). A recognized way to learn these skills is within developmental relationships where the interactions are critical to both individual development and organizational success (D'abate, Eddy et al., 2003).

Career learning as a relational activity includes the ability to self-reflect and expand self-awareness, personally assess what is known and what needs to be known, and to adapt to the situation by altering behavior and attitudes. Careers are repositories of knowledge (Bird, 1996), and individuals must drive personal learning agendas in an ongoing process of growth and development as lifelong learners. Support and challenge from a trusted peer, through the peer-coaching process, can provide a powerful form of this accelerated career learning.

Commentators on global business support the learning concept to enhance life not only at the individual level, but also to promote a robust, adaptive, and prosperous society (Friedman, 2005; Handy, 2005). Career learning is necessary for adaptability and growth of the individual, not only to focus merely on short-term performance enhancement (Hall, 2002), but also as a basis for lifelong development with a focus on the process itself.

Peer Coaching in Practice

There are now a growing number of examples of peer coaching emerging in both industry and educational settings. While not much research has been completed yet, sponsors and participants are reporting positive experiences. Where these initiatives are not meeting expectations, there is the opportunity to identify what factors—in terms of structure and process—need to be addressed in order to achieve the potential of peer coaching as a relational tool.

Corporate Settings

Success has been reported at Vodaphone, where peer groups were formed at each level of the organization to accelerate culture change. Building a coaching ethos from the top down and linking it with elements such as personal development reviews, briefings, team building, and leadership courses contributed to a shift in priorities from day-to-day processes to people development (Eaton & Brown, 2002). At National Semiconductor in California's Silicon Valley, peer coaching was instituted to coach more than 400 people in one organization. Peer coaches made up performance partnerships for new behavior, increased organizational effectiveness, and enhanced personal productivity (Peters, 1996).

Several organizations are now experimenting with peer-coaching groups and mentoring circles.[1] In each case, peers are brought together on a regular basis (e.g., monthly) for a specified time (e.g., 1 year) for the purpose of supporting one another's learning and development. At one pharmaceutical firm, an HR facilitator trains managers to serve as facilitators of these peer-coaching groups. The specific learning goals are related to on-the-job challenges as well as emotional competencies that will enhance peer coaching and other learning relationships.

At a large consumer products firm based in the United States, mentoring circles have been established with junior executives for the purpose of supporting one another's career development. Each circle has a senior executive who is responsible for convening the group monthly and providing mentoring as well. As at the pharmaceutical firm, the senior executives are trained in the emotional competencies and group dynamics skills necessary for these groups to achieve their primary objectives. The initial pilot has already indi-

cated that participants found this experience to be very fruitful in terms of personal learning and career development. The learning was so significant for some that they decided to continue to meet after the formal commitment had come to an end. Senior executives who led these groups reported that they learned as much about themselves, their younger colleagues, mentoring, and peer coaching as did their junior colleagues.

Academic Settings

At Griffith University, Australia, a postgraduate class in leadership was introduced to the concept of peer coaching to promote learning of both content and processes associated with leadership and self-development. Thirty-four students of a broad age range and from 15 different countries participated and were structured formally into peer-coaching dyads. Prior to peer selection students experienced a range of scenarios that highlighted similarities and differences among the class and the implications for learning. A model of coaching based on assessment, challenge, and support (Van Velsor & McCauley, 2004) was introduced, followed by a wide range of specific skills to support each other's learning. Each dyad developed a working agreement (which they revisited throughout the semester) to build trust and establish boundaries for peer coaching.

Early process work used course content to provide a focus for engagement and specifically to develop a depth of understanding by practicing questioning techniques. The developing skills were then used to transfer to more personal applications of leadership content and the relevance in students' lives, such as personal visioning and leadership challenges. Some class time was allocated each week to peer coaching, and peers could choose how to use it. Reported outcomes from participants were extremely positive without being unanimous.

In the School of Management at Boston University, where team learning is a key element in the undergraduate and MBA curricula, peer coaching is used in a manner similar to that employed at Griffith. The skills of peer coaching are taught in the first-semester required course in organizational behavior, where a major component involves self-assessment. Students self-select their peer coaches, with assistance from exercises that facilitate discussions with people who the students see as different from themselves, as well as people that they see as similar. Peer-coaching activities are used throughout the course. There are two basic types. One we call "Share and Com-

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[1] The examples that follow are ones that at least one of the authors worked on either in a consultant or leadership role.

pare," in which students pair off after a class activity (e.g., case, experiential exercise, self-assessment activity) and share their reactions and learning arising from what they had just done. The second type of peer coaching is more intensive, with students helping each other process their self-assessments from various tests and exercises over the course of the semester. They also coach each other on the design and writing of their final papers that integrate their self-assessment data and present a career development plan based on that self-assessment.

A similar process of peer coaching is used in the school's leadership elective. Here, too, the course is based upon self-assessment work, with the assumption that much of leadership development is personal development. Peer coaching is used both for "Share and Compare" activities and longer term development work on a final self-assessment and leadership plan paper.

Finally, through the full-time MBA program, as part of the career-planning process, all students participate in what are called "professional portfolio communities" comprised of other students with similar career interests. Facilitated by a faculty portfolio advisor, students are encouraged to coach each other in dyads or teams to maximize learning from their internship experiences and the job search process.

In sum, there is evidence in the literature and from our personal experiences to suggest that a relational approach to careers—and peer coaching in particular—facilitates ongoing development. The power of peer influence is noted in a range of contexts and at different career stages. Peer coaching is a more focused form of peer influence that facilitates professional development and accelerates career learning. Its unique contributions are the inherent mutuality and reciprocity of the process, along with a focus on a specific issue or task. However, empirical evidence is required to support this claim and to promote the concept more broadly. This study reports our initial empirical investigation in university settings and leads to propositions for further testing.

THE STUDY

Method

To give us a better idea of the outcomes from the peer-coaching process, as well as a better understanding of what facilitates good peer-coaching experiences, we conducted a survey of our students ($N = 209$) in our MBA leadership and organizational behavior courses. The survey data were collected approximately 6 months after the students had completed the courses in which peer coaching was used. The students (50% male, 50% female) are full-time MBA students at Boston University and Griffith University. Forty-three percent were 27 years of age and younger, 30% were 28–30, and 27% were over 30.

The survey was conducted on-line, using Survey Monkey, a site that our students are quite familiar with and use for their own course research, such as marketing surveys. The survey items were created specifically for this research, designed to operationalize the major issues that we have been discussing. For example, we assessed the extent to which students had input in choosing their peer coach with the following question: "How much input did you have in choosing your peer?" The response options were None/Very Little/Some/A Lot/Full.

Satisfaction was measured from responses to "How satisfied were you with your peer coaching experience?" The responses ranged from Dissatisfied to Extremely Satisfied. Other variables were measured in a similarly straightforward manner. The four outcomes measured were satisfaction, percent of course learning resulting from peer coaching, contributions to professional development, and later independent use of peer coaching.

Qualitative data were gathered with two open-ended questions: "How did the peer learning process compare with other forms of learning you have experienced?" and "How were your skill level and development affected by the peer coaching process?" Comments were examined by sorting the sample into groups with high and low levels of the outcomes that were measured. These comments were used to enrich our understanding of the phenomena identified in the analysis of the quantitative data.

Results and Discussion

First we examined what our students reported as the outcomes resulting from their experiences with peer coaching. Some of their comments give a flavor of how they were affected by the peer-coaching process. Qualitative data in the survey indicated that the impacts were in the following areas:

- Success in dealing with change
- Support for personal and professional goals
- Increased confidence
- Improved accuracy on self-image
- Development of "soft" skills
- Fostering empowerment
- Improved delivery of feedback

Comments included the following:

TABLE 1
Zero-Order Correlations Among Peer-Coaching Relational Qualities, Peer-Coaching Learning Outcomes, and Future Independent Use of Peer Coaching ($N = 209$)

	Gender	Age	Input	Satisfaction	Accommodation	Emotional	Future use	Development	Respect
Age	.078								
Input	−.028	−.151							
Satisfaction	−.059	−.119	.350**						
Accommodation	−.081	−.158	.319**	.372**					
Emotional	.147	.045	.224**	.541**	.360**				
Future use	−.035	−.058	.143*	.223**	.049	.142*			
Development	−.021	−.113	.360**	.729**	.393**	.508**	.320**		
Respect	.020	−.004	.358**	.531**	.266**	.463**	.213**	.441**	
% Learning	.017	−.118	.227**	.540**	.285**	.284**	.175*	.624**	.230**

* $p < 0.05$ level (2-tailed). ** $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed).

X made me realise that the experiences I had were valuable and could be applicable in HR.

I learned to broaden my horizons.

. . . reflected on observations as well as thoughts.

It was almost like I turned on the self-awareness tap and it was hard to stop—I was constantly evaluating myself.

X used her expertise and questioning skills to push my thoughts and she really made me think about how to deal with my relationship with a Director of the company I work for.

It was more personalized [than other learning methods], and, because I had a very good peer coach, I received a lot of detailed feedback. It was obvious my peer coach spent a lot of time really trying to understand my issues and subsequently work through them with me.

In terms of student satisfaction, we had a wide range of responses. Forty-nine percent reported that they were either satisfied, very satisfied, or extremely satisfied with their peer-coaching experience. Twenty-six percent were partially satisfied, and another twenty-five percent were dissatisfied. In looking at the qualitative responses, it appears that the degree of satisfaction and learning are a function of how much time and effort both parties put into the peer-coaching process, as we see in the following comments:

I would say it was not very effective for me because my peer and I did not put in too much time to do real "coaching."

[It was] very helpful to have someone really spend time 1:1 with results vs. doing it in a team setting. Would have liked more time—we continually were late joining class [after peer coaching activities] as we got into some very deep discussions.

Beyond satisfaction, we were also interested in how peer coaching contributed to the students' adaptability—their ability to use new methods of learning *on their own* after the course was finished. To get at this, we asked them how they thought their relationship with their peer coach contributed to their professional development. Sixty-six percent reported some contribution to their professional growth. An important way that their ability to learn in the future could be enhanced would be through using peer coaching on their own in other courses, when it is not required. Three quarters of the respondents reported that they made some use of peer coaching on their own, with about one quarter using it to a considerable extent or to a great extent.

Correlates of Course Learning Outcomes and Later Use of Peer Coaching

The good news, then, is that roughly three quarters of the students experienced some level of satisfaction with the peer-coaching process, and for many it has become a new skill and learning tool that they use independently. But, about one fourth of the students did not experience these positive outcomes. What accounts for the differences between

TABLE 2
Regression Results: Standardized Regression Coefficients (betas) Between Predictors and Peer-Coaching Outcomes ($N = 209$)

Predictors (over "gender, etc.)		Outcomes		
	Satisfaction	Percent of course learning resulting from peer coaching	Contributions to professional development	Engaging in peer coaching later on one's own
Gender	−.08	.01	−.04	−.04
Age	−.08	−.07	−.06	−.04
Input into choice of peer coach	.12*	.10	.16*	.08
Accommodation of learning styles	.12*	.16*	.16*	−.05
Emotional component in peer coaching	.35***	.17*	.34***	.07
Relationship was mutually respectful and professional	.30***	.07	.18**	.17*
R^2	.44***	.14***	.38***	.06

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$ (all two-tailed).

those who benefited and those who didn't? To answer this question, we used multiple regression analysis to look at relationships between these outcomes and some possible predictors. These results are reported in Tables 1, 2, and 3. Table 1 shows the zero-order correlation coefficients, and Tables 2 and 3 show the regression results.

For predictors, we were interested in seeing whether age (perhaps a surrogate for maturity?) and gender were related to the course learning outcomes related to peer coaching. As Tables 1 and 2 show, a student's age and gender had nothing to do with peer-coaching outcomes.

The other possible predictors were related to the

TABLE 3
Predictors and Course Learning vs. Later Independent Use of Peer Coaching

	Engaging in peer coaching later on one's own
Relational Predictors	
Gender	−.03
Age	−.03
Input into choosing peer coach	.03
Accommodation of learning styles	.10
Emotional component in peer coaching	−.03
Relationship was mutually respectful and professional	.12
Course learning outcomes	
Satisfaction	−.01
Percent of course learning resulting from peer coaching	−.04
Contributions to professional development	.35**
R^2	.12***

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$ (all two tailed).

nature of the *relationship* between the two parties. First, we thought that the more choice or input that a student had in the selection of the peer-coaching partner, to help one find a partner from whom one can learn a lot, the more successful the outcomes might be. As one student said, "Peer coaching with an individual with the same or less experience as yourself is not helpful." And, as we can see in Table 2, input into choice of the partner was, in fact, related to later satisfaction with peer coaching and the extent to which the peer coaching contributed to one's professional development. However, the relationship between choice of partner and the percent of course learning resulting from peer coaching was not significant. Also, having input into selecting the peer coach was not related to the later use of peer coaching on one's own.

Next we looked at the nature or quality of the relationship between the two peer coaches. Did the relationship accommodate their two learning styles, was there an emotional component in their work together, and was the relationship mutually respectful and professional? We predicted that all of these qualities would make for a better, more trusting peer coaching relationship and thus more positive outcomes. And in fact, all three relational qualities were strongly correlated with some peer-coaching outcomes in the course, particularly the contributions of peer coaching to one's professional development. Also, a person's satisfaction with peer coaching was positively related to the emotional component in the relationship with the peer coach, as well as to the extent to which the relationship was mutually respectful and professional.

Overall, all predictors (input, accommodation,

emotional components, and respectful relationship) yielded significant predictions of three of the outcomes: satisfaction, percent of course learning resulting from peer coaching, and contribution to professional development. All of the multiple R^2 values were significant at the .001 level.

As we said earlier, our "ultimate" outcome of interest was the likelihood that the person would engage in peer coaching on his or her own in the future. What factors predicted the adoption of this new style of learning? First, we see from Table 2 that our significant predictors of the other three outcomes failed to yield a significant R^2 as a predictor of future independent use of peer coaching.

To examine this issue further, we regressed all of our relational predictors and the other course learning outcomes against future use of peer coaching on one's own, as reported in Table 3. In this combined model, no relational predictor was significantly related to future independent use of peer coaching. Of all the variables we studied, the only aspect of the peer coaching experience that was significantly related to future independent use of peer coaching was one of the learning outcomes: the extent to which the relationship was mutually respectful and professional ($\beta = .35$, $p < .01$).

Therefore, although it does appear that the process of choosing the peer coach and the quality of the relationship between the two parties have a lot to do with their satisfaction and the success of their peer-coaching work in a course, these qualities do not appear to extend to the later independent use of peer coaching in other courses. These qualities affect the later independent use of peer coaching indirectly, through their positive impact on the person's professional development.

Thus, to recap our results, as expected, when students experienced the positive learning outcomes of seeing an impact on their professional development from peer coaching, they were more likely to use it later on their own. In the correlational results, we saw that all three course learning outcomes were significantly related to the later, independent use of peer coaching: satisfaction, percent of course learning resulting from peer coaching, and contributions of peer coaching to professional development. However, when we did the regression analysis, which removed the effects of the other variables, only one course learning outcome was significantly related to the later use of peer coaching: the contribution of peer coaching to one's professional development. That is, only when students saw that peer coaching contributed to their professional development, were they more motivated to engage in peer coaching in later courses.

Thus, on the basis of these regression results in Tables 2 and 3, even though ours is not a longitudinal study, the regression data are consistent with the idea that there may be a 3-step process in the acquisition of peer coaching skills and motivation as a life-long personal capability. Step 1 involves building the developmental peer relationship, through selection of a "good fit" partner, accommodating to each other's learning styles, building emotional rapport, and creating a mutually respectful and professional relationship. Step 2 is building success—learning the actual skills of doing the peer coaching effectively and having peer coaching success that fosters one's professional development. These steps are shown in the relationships in Table 2.

Then, if this second step is successful, if each person can see from personal experience that peer coaching contributes to his or her professional development, we move to Step 3. The person is thus positively reinforced and is then motivated to continue using peer coaching as a learning tactic in the future (based on data in Table 3). This 3-step process in the development of peer coaching is illustrated in Figure 1.

Pulling It all Together: Some Propositions

Our review of the literature related to relational helping as well as our experiences in our classrooms and our survey of our students, has led us to several conclusions. First, it is quite clear that the nature of the relationship between two peers is critical to the success of the venture. Our observations in the classroom, combined with qualitative data from our students leads to several important qualities in the peer relationship that we would argue contribute to the positive outcomes of peer coaching.

A Climate of Trust and Support

These qualities emerge over time and allow one peer to understand fully the context of the other, moving beyond more superficial networking. Peers need to develop empathy with each other and although they need not be friends, it may happen. What is important is to establish trust and safety at the outset of the peer relationship so that roles, such as that of "critical friend," may be adopted successfully. Critical friends support mutual development by asking provocative questions, offering helpful critiques, and providing valuable feedback necessary for learning (Arthur & Kallick, 1993). In spite of this, a tension exists, and boundary setting is important to
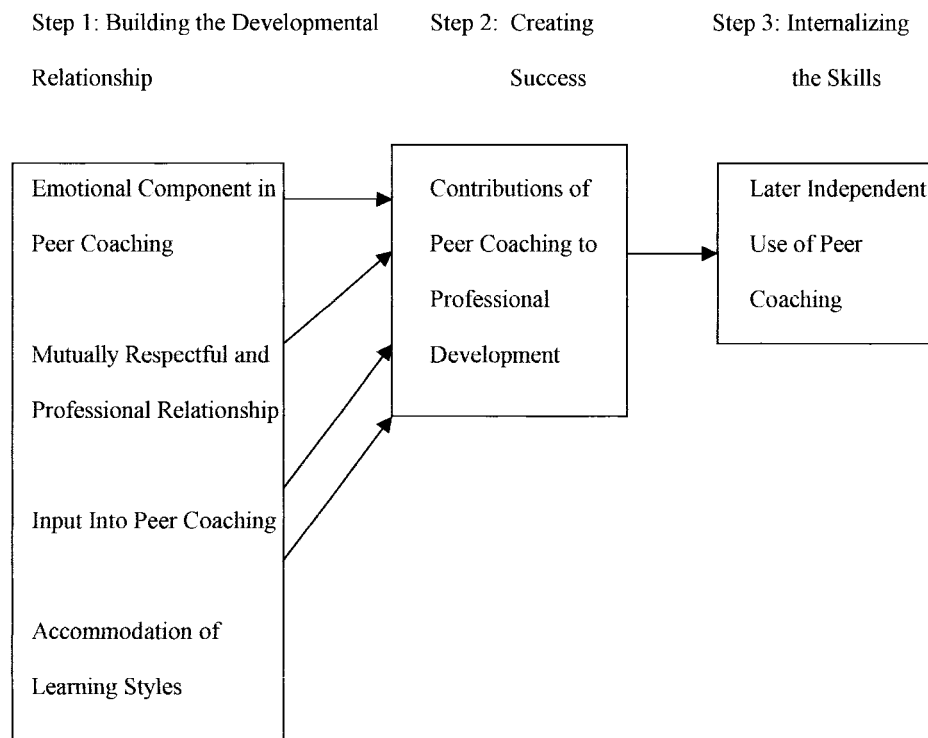
Step 1: Building the Developmental   Step 2: Creating   Step 3: Internalizing
Relationship   Success   the Skills

FIGURE 1
3-Step Process in Acquiring the Life-Long Use of Peer Coaching as a Learning Tactic

avoid slippage into being overly friendly in a way that compromises the distance required for an effective coaching role.

It is unlikely that trust and empathy will evolve in a dyadic relationship without the support of the larger environment in which the relationship evolves. We know, for example, that the quality of mentoring relationships is influenced by the organizational culture in which these are embedded (Kram, 1985; Ragins & Kram, 2007). When individuals are recognized for taking the time to develop others in their organizations, they are more likely to prioritize this important work. In addition, individuals are more likely to develop the emotional competence necessary to actively listen, provide constructive feedback, and participate in a mutual learning relationship if the organization provides opportunities to learn and practice these critical skills (Cherniss, 2007; Kram & Cherniss, 2001).

Authenticity

Establishing trust requires both partners to be honest and open both with the peer and with themselves to raise and express concerns and issues. The dyad must provide a safe environment in which concerns can be put out for examination and analysis. Social processing is not purely logical

and rational and may contain emotional elements associated with the event under examination. Deep feelings may emerge from reflecting on critical events or the issue that either peer brings to the table. Furthermore, emotions arise from the process and are given expression within the dyad. The appropriate handling of emotion is critical to the reformation of self that occurs continually through social relationships (Herriott, 2001).

There is a tension that arises to enter fully into the feelings and personal meanings of the peer's world, respecting the feelings while at the same time remaining separate and holding on to one's own feelings (Rogers, 1973). The tension may be managed through appropriate expression of empathy, warmth, and genuineness. In addition, establishing rapport through such expression provides a backdrop for expressing authenticity. Authenticity reflects congruence with personal values and convictions (Shamir & Eilam, 2005). Ultimately, the capacity to manage this tension effectively depends on the individuals' developmental position (Kegan, 1982) and their emotional competence (Goleman, 1995).

Dialogue vs. Conversation

A key aspect of peer coaching to accelerating career learning is that of promoting learning and

meaning-making between peers. Greater attention has been placed on these fields and the use of dialogue is a prime example. Issacs (1999: 9) defines *dialogue* as a "shared inquiry, a way of thinking and reflecting together." It is a learning process that surfaces, in the safe presence of trusting peers, "social, political and even emotional reactions that might be blocking effectiveness" (Raelin, 2000: 2). There are many similarities between dialogue and conversation and many researchers use the terms interchangeably (Baker, Jensen, & Kolb, 2005). However, we promote the concept of dialogue as posited by Issacs (1999) as it "raises the level of shared thinking, it impacts how people act, and in particular, how they all act together" (p. 22).

The process produces a learning space that is held between the peers and enables issues to be presented. While that space may assume different forms such as temporal or emotional, attention is drawn to its bounded nature to mark the area between peers (Baker, Jensen, & Kolb, 2005). In this way it becomes like a neutral territory into which issues can be placed and processed. The process then allows for one peer to develop a personal narrative around the issue he or she forwards and within that to identify as many tensions, paradoxes, and feelings of ambivalence or resonance as possible. The role of the peer is to listen, question to promote clarification (for the narrator), and to hold the emotional and cognitive space open. Developing a narrative of particular events is a process grounded in the constructivist methodology mentioned above (Savickas, 2001).

Reflection and Feedback

The purpose of building reflection and feedback into peer coaching is to develop awareness of personal behavior and to uncover underlying needs, mental models, and belief structures that affect performance. Work experiences are insufficient on their own for learning to occur, and often the assistance of a partner is necessary (Raelin, 2000). Reflection is a familiar process of learning to most people, and encouraging it, by allocating time and structure for it to occur, promotes learning (Daudelin, 1996). Peer coaching is an ideal structure for reflection. However, as with any form of cognitive coaching behavior, it will not be affected until the inner thought processes are altered and rearranged (Barnett, 1995).

Recalling critical incidents for review can often be done largely uncritically and unreflectively, particularly at the beginning. The role of the peer coach is to facilitate improvement in the partner's ability to become reflexive, and thereby, to con-

sider and understand his or her individual assumptions and mental models that underpin performance. Peers support each other in the development of deeper levels of analysis for the explicit purpose of deepening reflection to uncover their hidden assumptions. Through the peer-coaching process peers become the catalyst to deepen the level of consciousness in the other and identify values, beliefs, and behavior stemming from these assumptions.

Deep reflection, rather than surface recall, is essential for double-loop learning (Senge, 1997). A key way to facilitate increased depth is through powerful questions. Some suggest that the most essential talent a peer coach can possess is their questioning skill (Barnett, 1995). Skillful questioning by a peer may challenge an individual's orientation and encourage alternatives to the specific way he or she looks at the world. A practical outcome of a peer relationship is the opportunity to understand the orientation of the other, thereby facilitating a reflective knowledge of their world, a concept of "co-orientational grasping" (Van Manen, 1977). The advantage of such reflexivity is the broadening of understanding underlying assumptions and how to uncover them. There is a flexibility to examine situations from a different perspective, which gives rise to an increased range of possible responses to any particular situation.

The scope of peer coaching embraces the whole person, as mentioned previously. Feelings and knowledge "go hand in hand in the learning process" (Van Manen, 1977). The skill of one peer to facilitate deeper reflection in the other requires an active engagement (Amundson, 2003), to establish a mattering climate, and then to listen actively and mirror back aspects of cognitive (usually the content) and also aspects of the affective (feeling) dimensions of the person.

In the end, peer coaching differs from counselling in that the boundary around appropriate areas is career related and not intended to be therapeutic. Coachees must identify personal developmental edges and then construct their own knowledge by generating it from their experience. New acquisitions can then be shared and defended in consultation with the peer. Peer coaching has an integral emphasis on process, and therefore, those through which exchange of information occurs are critical to its success. These include reflection on practice, building dialogue (rather than conversation), attending and listening skills.

Although these several qualities—trust and support, authenticity, dialogue, reflection and feedback—appear to play major roles in the devel-

opment of effective peer coaching, it is important to note that these conclusions are based on data collected in university settings in the United States and Australia. While these data are encouraging in terms of the potential of peer coaching as a basis for ongoing learning, and supported by literature describing similar processes in the workplace, we are cautious about generalizing to workplace settings without further empirical data. We are currently gathering data from several work settings.

Finally, putting together all of the theory and literature, plus our own survey research, we would summarize our discussion with the following propositions:

Proposition 1: Peer coaching is more effective to the extent that the peers have participated in the matching process.

Proposition 2: The peer-coaching process is more likely to be effective to the extent that it contains an emotional component.

Proposition 3: Peer-coaching outcomes are more likely to be positive when the relationship has the following qualities: trust, mutual respect, professionalism, and mutual accommodation.

Proposition 4: Positive outcomes are more likely to be reached when both peers are motivated to learn and when both contribute actively and equally to the process.

Proposition 5: People are more motivated to engage in peer coaching independently when they have previously experienced positive learning outcomes from peer coaching, such as professional development.

CONCLUSION

Summary of Findings

Our aim here has been to introduce a previously largely overlooked method of learning: peer coaching. Currently our data are drawn from university settings, which may have limited generalizability to the workplace. However our students are adult learners, and many are executives studying part time to increase career qualifications. Therefore, we suggest that these learners are capable of adopting learning processes that are representative of workplace demands. Furthermore, such students are those likely to be leading and modeling learning processes in their own workplaces.

We posit peer coaching as a type of helping relationship in which two people of equal status actively participate in a process of helping each other on specific tasks or problems with a mutual desire to be helpful. It works best when there is an emotional component in the process, when the participants have an input into choosing the peer coach, and when it is a professional (but unpaid) relationship characterized by mutual respect and accommodation. The effective peer coach adopts the role of "critical friend," providing a balance of support and challenge.

Peer coaching is related to, but different from, other forms of relational helping, such as mentoring, dialogue, or professional coaching. It involves skills that can be learned in classroom settings. Thus, it presents an attractive learning resource— with a ubiquitous, low-cost source of supply and with powerful positive outcomes. And, best of all, not only are the outcomes positive, but also the process itself is intrinsically rewarding, with two peers, who can become close friends, coming together to help each other on activities of shared professional interest.

Toward Future Research

Based on our research, we have concluded here with a set of propositions related to the way that people acquire the skill of peer coaching as a life-long learning tactic. It appears that internalizing peer coaching as part of a person's approach to learning happens in a 2-step process. As shown in Figure 1, the first step is to have a positive experience with peer coaching in a learning situation. This positive experience is created through learning how to accommodate each other's learning styles, through having an input to the matching process that creates peer-coaching dyads, through bringing one's emotional self to the peer-coaching work, and through working to create a mutually respectful and professional relationship. These activities lead to learning experiences that generate professional development. Since these learning experiences are intrinsically rewarding, they increase the likelihood that the parties will utilize peer coaching on their own in the future. Thus, they will have internalized peer coaching into their own personal portfolio of personal and professional competencies. In this way they become "metalearners," as they perfect the art of leadership.

How might this model be tested? Our model in Figure 1 would be especially amenable to an experimental design, similar to Daudelin's (1996), but conducted in the classroom rather than a labora-

tory. Interventions aimed at Building the Developmental Relationship (Step 1) could be employed as experimental treatments. For example, one intervention could be devoting class time for students (or participants in a workplace seminar) to get to know one another's skills, experience, and learning styles, to create more input into choice of the peer coach and to help provide accommodation of learning. Another could be providing specific training to participants about how to recognize and express emotions in peer-coaching discussions, or Rogerian-style training in how to develop mutually respectful and professional helping relationships. And, further, different interventions could be studied as separate experimental treatments, as Daudelin did, to help determine which would provide the greatest payoff. The control group would not receive these interventions and would instead receive basic instructions to work with a peer coach and to provide help to each other. There could be a check for treatment effects, to see if the four elements in Step 1 were in fact more present for the experimental group. And then, of course, we would expect to see higher scores for the experimental group for Step 2 (creating success) and Step 3 (future independent use of peer coaching).

Another approach would be longitudinal survey research, with a large sample, employing structural equation modeling, to get at causal relationships suggested by the model. In particular, linear growth modeling could be especially relevant for a developmental process such as that in Figure 1.

The Practice of Peer Coaching

We must add a caution, however. Peer coaching does not always work. It has to be done well to have a developmental impact. Accelerating career learning through peer coaching requires commitment by each career actor to the other. The process may be transformational and allow peers to develop holistically. However, herein lies the caveat—without such commitment and training or education to engage fully in the process, disappointment and frustration may result. Peer coaching is a reflexive process that requires engagement, and also takes time, practice, ongoing dialogue and debriefing continuously to hone the prerequisite skills.

The benefits, however, are many, and the potential for a long-term impact of such a skill cannot be overestimated. Indeed, this is why we included the Step 3 variable, future independent use of peer coaching, in our research. We are interested in the way that peer coaching can promote individuals'

longer term adaptability. Peer coaching provides a low-cost effective learning process that may address the adaptive challenges posed by the VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous) environment that we described at the beginning of this article. The requirement for the workers of today and in the future to be self-directed, confident, capable learners indicates the need to provide the tools for learning that extend well beyond graduation. And these need to be simple, accessible tools that can be used in one's everyday work.

Many who write about contemporary learning organizations strongly indicate that the pace of learning must increase. They are alluding to both technical learning as well as leadership learning. In both kinds of learning we can imagine that peer coaching offers an important tool. Peers working on product development teams, for example, can coach one another on the latest analytic techniques, relevant innovations, and approaches that are so new they may only reside in one or two individuals with unique backgrounds. By tapping in to one another's unique resources, all parties will learn, and the productivity of the team will increase. Similarly, in terms of leadership learning, if peers can provide direct and honest feedback to one another, and hold each other accountable for personal development goals and actions, they are likely to keep leadership development as a priority, equal in importance to technical knowledge acquisition.

Not only do we have to have a longer term career focus on helping individuals build life-long learning skills such as peer coaching, but we have to conduct more research on the future impact of our developmental and educational efforts upon our students' careers. When participants learn a tactic such as peer coaching, do they actually use it 5 or 10 years later, and what factors influence whether it is used or how well it is used? We need more long-term development work and more long-term research on developmental outcomes.

In summary, we believe that peer coaching in our management classrooms, in corporate settings, as well in everyday work settings, has great potential to accelerate career learning. Our hope is that this examination of the nature and potential of peer coaching will guide future efforts to equip executives with a relational learning tool that promises to greatly facilitate self-directed development throughout their careers.

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