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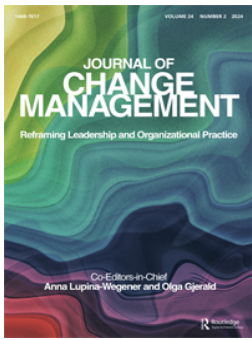
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Guiding Through Turbulent Times: Coaching During Merger and Acquisition

Judith Schmitt^a, Cristian Vasquez^b and Daniela Pauknerova^a

^aDepartment of Managerial Psychology and Sociology, Prague University of Economics and Business, Prague, Czech Republic; ^bSheffield University Management School, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, UK

ABSTRACT

Mergers and acquisitions put organizations through significant disruptions, often taking a toll on employee well-being. This qualitative study aims to analyze how coaching supports employees in coping with the impact of mergers. Eleven semi-structured interviews were conducted with employees and managers. Using realist evaluation, four context-mechanism-outcome configurations (CMOCs) were developed, providing evidence for the following working mechanisms: (1) Increased self-awareness and assertiveness led to greater self-efficacy, empowering participants to advocate for themselves. (2) Breaking down big things into manageable steps helped participants cope with overwhelming issues. (3) Leaders' support and guidance played a crucial role in helping employees navigate change. And (4) managing a high workload led to increased self-efficacy and well-being at work. These CMOCs demonstrate the diverse working mechanisms of coaching interventions implemented in a disruptive context. The study's insights into these mechanisms offer valuable guidance for designing future interventions to support employees during organizational changes, such as mergers and acquisitions. By tailoring interventions to address employees' individual challenges and needs, organizations can enhance the effectiveness of these initiatives and promote employee well-being during times of transition.

KEYWORDS

Coaching; merger and acquisition; mental health; realist evaluation; organizational interventions

MAD statement

This study aims to Make A Difference (MAD) by revealing how coaching works in the context of mergers and acquisitions; more specifically, it identifies the working mechanisms contributing to the intervention's success. By its detailed identification of the interplay of context, mechanism and outcome, it highlights the multifaceted impacts of coaching, ranging from enhanced self-efficacy to coping strategies. It adds to the theoretical discussion on the effectiveness of workplace interventions by not only analyzing what works but also how they work under specific circumstances. As such, it can inform employers on how to support employees during times of organizational change.

CONTACT Judith Schmitt  Judith.schmitt@vse.cz

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Introduction

Mergers and acquisitions (M&A) are often seen as a way for businesses to increase their market share, boost profits, and gain a competitive advantage. However, these processes can have a significant negative impact on employees and their well-being. The announcement of M&A may initiate stress and uncertainty in employees concerning their job-life (Seo & Hill, 2005; van Dick et al., 2006). The M&A procedure itself may create difficulties for employees, such as layoffs, job insecurity, reorganization, or change of business culture (Seo & Hill, 2005; van Dick et al., 2006; Wang et al., 2012). In terms of employee experiences, prior research has shown that M&A are associated with employee anxiety, feelings of ambiguity, lower productivity, lower self-esteem, and mental and physical illness (Rosa et al., 2017; Seo & Hill, 2005; Smollan, 2015; van Dick et al., 2006; Wang et al., 2012). Considering those adverse effects on employees and their association with the failure of M&A (Degbey et al., 2021), there is a need for measures to mitigate them, such as workplace interventions. While the literature provides some examples of successful interventions during M&A, such as coaching, little is known about how these interventions work under the given circumstances.

The main goal of this research is to explore how coaching aids employees in coping with challenges brought about by M&A. Through qualitative interviews with coaching participants from an acquired organization, we delve into the intervention's mechanisms and outcomes within the context of organizational change. This approach offers detailed insights into participants' experiences with M&A challenges and analyses how coaching operates within its specific context, leading to certain outcomes. Our analysis is structured around the realist evaluation framework (Pawson & Tilley, 2004), which examines the elements that make interventions effective, the contextual conditions that facilitate their success, and the resulting positive changes in employees' well-being, known as context-mechanism-outcome configurations (CMOCs) (Nielsen & Miraglia, 2017; Pawson & Tilley, 2004). This framework allows for the formulation and testing of CMOCs to refine our understanding of coaching effectiveness in M&A scenarios.

This study presents two contributions. First, it contributes to the coaching literature by identifying the specific mechanisms and their connection with contextual factors that drive the success of coaching interventions during M&A. More specifically, it provides a clear insight into how coaching works in the context of M&A. With our detailed explorative approach in forming CMOCs, we join the theoretical discussion in evaluating interventions and address the call to identify how outcomes of interventions are created (Fox et al., 2022). Second, our study adds to the literature on M&A by illustrating how coaching tailored to these contexts can lessen the negative impacts on employee well-being and organizational identity. Our structured analysis provides actionable guidance for employers and practitioners and highlights the importance of fostering a sense of belonging and promoting communication, which are crucial for maintaining organizational identity and commitment during M&As.

Literature Background

Mergers and Acquisitions

M&A have become a popular strategy for organizations to adapt to dynamic business environments or gain competitive advantages (Cooke et al., 2021; Umashankar et al.,

2022). M&A inherently involve organizational change where processes and functions are integrated. The degree of change and how it affects the people within the organization can vary significantly (Seo & Hill, 2005). Research consistently shows that M&A are common forms of organizational change (Grant, 2014; Kiefer, 2005), and have a predominantly negative effect on employee well-being (Cooke et al., 2021; de Jong et al., 2016; Zagelmeyer et al., 2018).

The announcement of M&A and the merging procedure itself often lead to high levels of perceived uncertainty among employees (Joshi et al., 2020; Rosa et al., 2017; Seo & Hill, 2005). This uncertainty is mainly triggered by the anticipation of change and concerns about the future rather than the actual change itself. In an attempt to cope with uncertainty, employees often predict the potential impact of M&A on their future careers, frequently creating worst-case scenarios (Seo & Hill, 2005). Those coping strategies may lead to anxiety and distress, particularly if the imagined scenario is the loss of employment (Seo & Hill, 2005; Sinkovics et al., 2011).

Another critical impact of M&A on employees is the potential loss of organizational identity, as M&A-related changes involve the development of a new organization. Organizational identity comprises the shared perceptions among the organization's members about who they are as an organization but also about how they differ from other organizations (Albert & Whetten, 1985). Unlike corporate identity, organizational identity focuses on the individual employee within the organization (Balmer, 2008). M&A can threaten individual employees' sense of organizational identity by causing uncertainty and changes in the organization's structure, culture, and values. This can lead employees to question their place in the new organization and their role within it. Joshi et al. (2020) highlight the importance of similar organizational identities when two companies merge, as dissimilarities in identity often hinder the expected synergies of the merger.

When investigating organizational identity in the context of M&A, it is relevant to consider the differences in organizational dominance (Joseph, 2014). In acquisitions, dominance is often determined by who acquires whom, whereas in mergers, the status of the organization is prevalent, e.g. the smaller, less powerful or less profitable firm can be classified as the low-status partner (Rosa et al., 2017). The acquiring organization or the high-status merger partner are likely to be more dominant (Wei & Clegg, 2018; Zagelmeyer et al., 2018) and thus more influential in determining the shape of the new organization (Knippenberg et al., 2002; Wei & Clegg, 2018).

The dominance of one organization may threaten the identity of members of the dominated organization (Knippenberg et al., 2002; Lupina-Wegener et al., 2014), which can negatively impact their job and life satisfaction (Mühlemann et al., 2022). Employees with a strong emotional attachment to the previous organization may more likely be resistant to change, especially change regarding their organizational identity (Zagelmeyer et al., 2018).

Besides the aspect of organizational identity, negative reactions to M&A are more prominent among members of the low-status partner: They may suffer more intensely from fearing a loss of autonomy and status and perceive the take-over as a more significant threat than employees of the high-status partner. Consequences of the negative impact of M&A on employees include low commitment to change and the risk of M&A failure (Cooke et al., 2021; Ullrich et al., 2005; Zagelmeyer et al., 2018), as well as higher absenteeism and turnover (Degbey et al., 2021; Rosa et al., 2017; Zagelmeyer et al., 2018).

Supporting Employees During Times of Disruption

Employers can support employees through the process of M&A by providing them with the means to cope with the immediate challenges and buffering the harmful impact. Supporting employees comprises actions to build up resilience (Cooke et al., 2021), self-efficacy, optimism (Nwanzu & Babalola, 2019), and trust (Kiefer, 2005). Additionally, employees need support in integrating the expected changes into the work context (Rosa et al., 2017) and receiving appreciation for their efforts (Kiefer, 2005). Several researchers stress the importance of leaders in this context (Nöthel et al., 2023; Schmitt, 2024). Leaders must anticipate the challenges of change (Smollan, 2015) and recognize that fostering change requires people to change and develop by justifying their personal reasons to move on (Kavanagh & Ashkanasy, 2006).

Threats to employees' organizational identity can be mitigated by fostering a projected continuity (Lupina-Wegener et al., 2014; Mühlemann et al., 2022). Projected continuity refers to a clear direction based on the question, 'Where are we going and what can we do to make it happen?' (Ullrich et al., 2005, p. 1562). As change agents, leaders should aim to foster a post-merger identity to retain or create the employees' feeling of belongingness (van Dick et al., 2006) and enhance their followers' vision of the future organization. Members of the low-status merger partner who strongly identified with the pre-merger organization may struggle with developing a sense of projected continuity (Lupina-Wegener et al., 2014).

To address these challenges, leaders need to be equipped with the means to handle the additional demands of change management, change leadership and self-management (Bickerich et al., 2018; Kilkelly, 2014). At the organizational level, researchers call for building collaborative environments that support organizational learning and renewal (Percy & Dow, 2021) as well as constructive, participatory organizational cultures (Smollan, 2015).

Researchers have examined various approaches to address these needs, with the majority targeting leaders and their relationships with employees. For example, Cooke et al. (2021) focus on measures to foster empowerment and improve employee resilience. Possible actions presented are relationship building between manager and employee and developing employee competencies. They emphasise the benefits of applying positive psychology approaches in this context. Building on this, Kavanagh and Ashkanasy (2006) urge leaders to create an atmosphere of psychological safety where employees can 'test the waters of the new culture' (p. 86). In order to provide a feeling of belongingness for employees (van Dick et al., 2006) and engage them in identifying with the post-merger organization, Ullrich et al. (2005) stress the importance of closeness between leaders and their teams. When team members perceive leaders as 'one of us', leaders can better sustain the organizational identity through the change process (Ullrich et al., 2005).

Mühlemann et al. (2022) specifically highlight the critical role of low and middle management in providing this sense of togetherness during change. Zagelmeyer et al. (2018) focus on the importance of effective managerial communication during change and the employees' perception of such communication. Other researchers have stressed the importance of managerial support and managers' actions to foster a positive climate (Guidetti et al., 2018; Nielsen et al., 2010) or specific leadership styles (Cooke et al.,

2021; Kavanagh & Ashkanasy, 2006). Approaches to developing leaders have been proposed by Smollan (2015), who advocates for training courses in organizational change and stress management. Similarly, Mühlemann et al. (2022) highlight the importance of developing leaders' identity leadership capacity.

Coaching to Guide Change

Coaching is a widely used and preferred intervention to support employees undergoing organizational change (Bennett & Bush, 2013). For instance, de Haan's (2019) systematic review of coaching shows that this kind of intervention supports organizations going through radical changes. Typically, coaching interventions focus on firms' executives, enabling managers to better manage change and enhance managerial self-efficacy and resilience (Grant, 2014). It also provides a reflective space for managers to realize their options and maintain a healthy degree of psychological detachment (Schnell, 2005).

Grant (2014) summarizes key mechanisms involved in coaching: (1) a supportive and confidential relationship, the so-called 'sounding board', which allows coaches to reflect, relieve stress, and consider issues from different perspectives; (2) goal setting and the development of actionable steps; and (3) systematic support in dealing with setbacks, which fosters resilience and enhances self-regulation. These mechanisms can improve change readiness and self-efficacy and equip coachees to better cope with change and workplace stressors. For instance, in a study with 38 executives undergoing organizational change, Grant (2014) provided evidence of coaching's positive impact on leader resilience, self-efficacy, ability to deal with change, and solution-focused thinking. While at the same time, the leaders' levels of depression, anxiety and stress decreased. However, the study is limited to outcome-oriented measures and fails to explore the working mechanisms of coaching.

Bickerich et al. (2018) developed a conceptual model of change-coaching and underlined the benefits of executive coaching in supporting managers by clarifying their stress factors, reflecting on attitudes and changing their appraisals, cognitions and emotions. Further, they provided evidence for improvement in leadership behavior through coaching, as it helped executives handle employees' resistance to change, foster employee involvement, and adapt their leadership behavior to the situation and type of change. Despite these insights, less attention has been paid to analyzing the underlying mechanisms that facilitate these observed benefits, suggesting a need for further exploration into how coaching specifically influences these changes at a deeper, process-oriented level.

Understanding the Working Mechanisms of Coaching in a Specific Context

Highlighting a significant gap in the literature, Grant (2014) emphasises the necessity for further empirical investigations into the effectiveness of coaching during organizational transitions. The individual formats of coaching can be very unique (Schnell, 2005) and largely depend on the context in which they are implemented and the individuals they target (Bennett & Bush, 2013). Coaching in an organizational context is to be understood as a complex intervention (Nielsen & Miraglia, 2017) with active participants embedded in a multi-layered social reality (Marchal et al., 2012). This is why investigating if a certain intervention worked leaves open questions as to how the intervention worked and in which contextual settings it can be replicated effectively.

Because of the heterogeneity of organizational change (Cooke et al., 2021) and the complexity and diversity of coaching (Grant, 2014; Roodbari, Axtell, et al., 2022), we see a paucity of research, as the existing literature consists primarily of stand-alone results providing evidence for what worked in a given context. Research has yet to provide insights into how these outcomes are created (see Grant, 2014; Schnell, 2005). Bickerich et al. (2018) partly address this by describing ‘change-coaching methods’, but while the coach’s perspective is very insightful, the participants in their study scarcely mention the working mechanisms, nor are they linked to specific outcomes (Bickerich et al., 2018, p. 2).

This makes coaching interventions an attractive subject of a realist evaluation aiming to capture its distinctive nature (Pawson & Tilley, 2004). Specifically, realist evaluation seeks to answer the question of ‘what works for whom in which circumstances’ through the development of context-mechanism-outcome configurations (CMOCs) (Pawson & Tilley, 1997). *Context* refers to the general and specific conditions in which mechanisms are triggered, such as how an M&A context may influence the effects of coaching sessions on employee well-being. *Mechanisms* are the elements that make an intervention work, for example, the particular elements of coaching sessions that explain changes in mental health and well-being. *Outcomes* refer to the changes generated by the mechanisms in a particular context, such as positive changes in employee physical and mental health (De Weger et al., 2020; Pawson & Tilley, 2004).

When investigating how coaching interventions work, the context has to be integrated into the evaluation, which then allows for uncovering the circumstances in which it works and identifying why it does (Blamey & Mackenzie, 2007). Drawing on this approach, the main research question we aim to answer is as follows:

Main RQ (1): How does coaching support employees in coping with the challenges of a merger?

To further elaborate on the particular mechanisms that made the coaching effective under those circumstances, we have developed three sub-questions drawing on the realist evaluation framework that guides our analysis:

RQ (1.1): How do the participants perceive the M&A, and how does this context affect coaching?

RQ (1.2): What are the main mechanisms that explain the effect of coaching?

RQ (1.3): What are the key outcomes of a coaching intervention in terms of helping employees cope with the challenges of a merger?

We believe that by identifying the mechanisms of coaching during M&A and linking them to the outcomes of the intervention, we can shed light on the most beneficial ways to implement interventions in regard to employee well-being during change (de Jong et al., 2016). Further, it allows us to fully understand the needs and challenges people experience when going through M&A (Smollan, 2015).

Methodology

We conducted a qualitative study to answer our research question, as this approach enables a thorough exploration of the intervention’s mechanisms and the surrounding context (de Haan, 2019). Qualitative research also allows us to capture the perceptions

held by the people involved, which is crucial to understanding the effects of a merger (Buono et al., 1985). Our analysis employs Pawson and Tilley's (2004) realist evaluation framework, adopting a realist epistemological stance that navigates the complexities of social phenomena via Context, Mechanism, and Outcome configurations. This approach enables us to systematically yet exploratively uncover the mechanisms activated by the coaching intervention's context and the resultant changes in participants' thoughts and behaviors. We embrace a subtle realism that recognizes the existence of an objective reality that can be understood through systematic and rigorous research while also acknowledging our interpretive role and the subjective influences inherent in the construction of knowledge (Madill et al., 2000). This perspective is premised on the understanding that, as researchers, our interpretations and insights are inherently shaped by our positions within the social fabric.

Research Context

The coaching intervention took place in a globally operating marketing company based in the Czech Republic with about 300 employees. Prior to the implementation of the intervention, the organization was acquired by a larger UK-based company with a similar but broader product spectrum. The number of employees of the post-merger organization was 4500. The acquisition led to a major organizational reorganization between March and October 2021. Unintentionally, the acquisition coincided with restrictions introduced due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The turnover rate in 2021 was 25 percent. This is significantly high compared to an industry average in the Czech Republic of around seven percent (CEDEFOP, 2023) and also a considerably higher rate than in previous years, which HR attributed to the acquisition and the pandemic. There were no layoffs in 2021 due to operational reasons.

Coaching was offered to all employees either holding a managerial position or with management potential across all departments, such as HR, sales and supply chain management. The intervention was only offered to leaders and employees with leadership potential and only to members of the acquired organization and not extended to members of the acquiring intervention. Participation was voluntary. The intervention consisted of six one-hour-long individual one-on-one sessions between the coach and coachee in a one-month interval. In total, 43 people participated in the intervention, of which 24 held managerial positions.

The sessions took place between April 2021 and January 2022. Depending on social distancing measures in force at that time and the individual preferences of coachees, the sessions took place in-person or online. Most participants experienced both formats. The opinions about online coaching were rather diverse; while some participants did not mind the online format and appreciated saving time commuting, others reported that they needed the in-person relationship for the coaching to be effective.

The aim of this intervention was to facilitate well-being and empowerment, support managers to lead by example, and enhance personal and professional development. The coaching concepts drawn on were those of positive psychology (Malinga et al., 2019) and Whitmore's GROW model. The GROW model is a framework used to guide goal-directed coaching processes, integrating the elements goal, reality, options, and will (Whitmore, 2017). The sessions were applied as individual case coaching (Grant,

2014), which means participants were asked to choose issues or individual cases they would like to discuss for each session. Therefore, the content ranged from dealing with uncertainty and change, handling a high workload, setting and achieving personal goals, gaining confidence, approaching conflicts with colleagues, and solving specific work-related problems. Three participants specifically mentioned that they were considering leaving the organization and made this deliberation process content of their sessions. Depending on the cases presented by the participant, the coach selected an appropriate approach to address them.

Study Design and Sample

We conducted 11 semi-structured interviews with participants of the intervention. Thus, our sample captured the experience of 25% of coaching participants. As only members of the acquired intervention participated in coaching, our interview sample was exclusively comprised of individuals from this group (Table 1).

The data analysis was carried out by two authors independently, the results were then discussed and merged. The analytical methodology used was what Berg (2007) characterizes as qualitative template analysis, with the objective being to identify patterns in the data. Template analysis was selected because it allows researchers to start their analysis with a template of a priori possible codes and themes drawn from theory (King & Brooks, 2017). This methodology has been described as a more flexible alternative to analyzing the data, permitting researchers to tailor it to match their requirements and potential themes emerging from the data (Brooks et al., 2015).

We employed the realist framework of ‘Context’, ‘Mechanism’, and ‘Outcome’ (Pawson & Tilley, 2004) as a template to identify and code both how the intervention functioned within its specific circumstances and the resulting outcomes. When analyzing the context, we considered the omnibus and discrete context in which the interventions were implemented (Johns, 2006). When investigating the omnibus context, we aimed to find the pre-intervention working conditions, e.g. the level of employee well-being and how the intervention fit into the organizational culture (Roodbari, Nielsen, et al., 2023). The discrete context was more dominant in this research, exploring the specific events that

Table 1. Interview participants.

| | Managerial Position | Gender (male/female) | Age (years) | Tenure (years) | Level of Education |
|----------------|---------------------|----------------------|-------------|----------------|------------------------------|
| Participant 01 | yes | m | 45–54 | 1–2 | Upper secondary education |
| Participant 02 | no | f | 25–34 | 3–4 | Master or equivalent |
| Participant 03 | yes | m | 25–34 | 5–10 | Master or equivalent |
| Participant 04 | yes | m | 35–44 | 5–10 | Post-secondary, non-tertiary |
| Participant 05 | yes | m | 35–44 | 3–4 | Post-secondary, non-tertiary |
| Participant 06 | yes | m | 25–34 | 5–10 | Bachelor or equivalent |
| Participant 07 | no | f | 25–34 | 3–4 | Post-secondary, non-tertiary |
| Participant 08 | no | f | <25 | 3–4 | Bachelor or equivalent |
| Participant 09 | yes | f | 25–34 | 5–10 | Master or equivalent |
| Participant 10 | no | f | 35–44 | 3–4 | Bachelor or equivalent |
| Participant 11 | yes | f | 25–34 | 5–10 | Master or equivalent |

influenced the intervention: The disruption caused by the acquisition and the COVID-19 pandemic. Questions we investigated were how the acquisition affected the participants, which demands and challenges it initiated, and how the participants coped with it. In exploring Mechanisms (M), we aimed to identify specific elements that make an intervention work, for example, the particular elements of coaching sessions that explain changes in mental health and well-being. Those can be triggered either by the implementation context or the intervention itself (De Weger et al., 2020). The outcomes (O) explored focus on the effects on the employees' mental health, more specifically, how the interventions changed how people work, think and behave to better cope with the challenges they are facing (Marchal et al., 2012). Applying this framework, the content was coded inductively with subsequent rounds of analysis. While the overarching categories were defined by the framework applied, the codes representing subcategories emerged from the data. Overall, we developed 42 codes. The coding template is provided in the appendix. Given that our data comprised subjective descriptions of experiences, we screened for coherence of experiences, synthesized complementary descriptions and compared diverse experiences. We then constructed four CMOCs that contribute to answering our research questions. These analyses were conducted using NVivo 12.

Findings

This section presents the findings of the analysis, starting with the organizational context during the implementation period. In particular, this entails the experience of the acquisition by participants, including the restructuring and change in organizational identity they were part of, the challenges they faced, and the impact it had on their well-being. Further, we present the CMOCs constructed based on how the intervention worked within the context and which outcomes it resulted in.

Context: Experience of the Acquisition Process

This details participants' experiences of the acquisition process, including organizational reorganization, the change in organizational culture, and the uncertainty that arose from this. Additionally, it covers participants' adaptation to the changes, excluding support received through coaching.

Acquisition Procedure and Reorganization (C)

While the description of the timeline of the acquisition was rather diffuse and partly contradictory to the process described by HR, all but one participant described it as a negative experience. All participants were affected by disruptions they have experienced due to the reorganization, such as changes in management, team composition, and job roles. Participants reported that the management of the former company left. Also, many participants stated change in their direct manager. The turnover rate was very high at that point, another factor leading to significant team reorganization:

I am on my seventh manager in three years. (Participant 11)

It was a particularly difficult time; new acquisition, leadership, the project I was working on was scrapped, essentially. (Participant 06)

It was not just the merger, there was a post-merger complete overhaul of the organisational structure. (Participant 03)

Rising Uncertainty (C)

The participants experienced the acquisition process as a tough, irritating, and scary time. They reported uncertainty about the future, their new job roles and responsibilities, and the expectations from the new management. Many described decreased well-being as the disruptions added stress and pressure. In addition to their personal challenges, participants noted a negative shift in the organizational climate, further impacting their well-being. Participant 11 emphasised 'a lot of other colleagues didn't take it well. They were all having breakdowns'.

As for the specific parts or events they perceived as challenging during that time, they named the high fluctuations, process instability, multiple changes in leadership, new responsibility and the high number of changes happening simultaneously. Also, many participants found it challenging that the acquisition happened amid the COVID-19 crisis as this was already a time of disruptions and uncertainty, but also because relationship building with colleagues from the acquiring organization could only take place virtually due to social distancing measures and travel restrictions.

The mergers and integrations are increasing the uncertainty, are increasing the pressure, and it was still happening in the middle of lockdowns and so I think it was a demanding period for everyone. (Participant 01)

Adaptation to Change (C)

The participants adapted to the changes they experienced somewhat diversely. Most reported having reached a level of acceptance. Yet, some participants mentioned they would like to make it undone or are still considering leaving the organization because of the changes triggered by the acquisition. Finding positive aspects in their new job role, mutual support from colleagues, focusing on their personal goals in the new organization and learning to communicate with partners from the acquiring organization were mentioned as ways that helped them adapt.

There is the option – just go to a different company – but I like the company, I like that I can become a manager during my expertise here, so this was a milestone that I wanted to reach (...) So, that helped me to go through all the weird corporate stuff. (Participant 09)

Lower-Status Merger Partner (C)

The participants perceived their organization as the lower-status partner of the acquisition process, attributing it mainly to the smaller company size and the perceived dominance during the takeover of the acquiring organization. Employees described being confronted with new rules and a new way of working, which caused 'a lot of friction' and 'tough discussions' (Participant 06). The perceived implications of being the lower-status merger partner are mostly related to the change in organizational identity, which will be described in the next paragraph. Besides that, a feeling of lack of control regarding the change process becomes apparent. Participant 09 described, 'It's not up

to us to decide if the merge will happen or not', 'nobody wanted to' 'the only word I got (was) get used to it'.

Change in Corporate Culture Resulting in Loss of Organizational Identity (C)

One of the strongest implications of the acquisition process was the experienced change in corporate culture; the majority of participants described it as a major, challenging change. Several participants described the change in culture as 'corporate vs the small company' (Participant 11), the latter referring to the former culture. Others also use the term 'start-up spirit' for it. Specific aspects that were pointed out were a decrease in autonomy, a longer, centralized decision-making process, and the deprioritisation of people's development. Participant 04 underlined, 'it seems to me those types of activities and those type of 'work on their people development' is so far away of the company that acquired us'.

As a result, this was perceived as a change for the worse as participants lost their corporate identity. They described it as losing the feeling of 'belongingness to the organisation' (Participant 05) or 'it's just not us anymore' (Participant 09). Also, over a year after the acquisition took place, they clearly differentiated between the former culture and the new culture, comparing what was lost.

In this section, we thoroughly captured the organizational context, focusing on the M&A and the challenges the participants experienced. Next, we present how specific contextual factors affected the coaching mechanisms and which outcomes this interplay created.

The Working Mechanisms of Coaching

This section will present four CMOCs to show the working mechanisms of coaching under the circumstances in which it was implemented and to which outcomes it led. For each CMOC, we first describe the connection between specific contexts-mechanisms-outcomes, and then, we provide more details about participants' experiences in each of these areas separately.

CMOC 1: Becoming More Self-aware and Assertive

This CMOC (see [Figure 1](#)) represents how specific mechanisms activated in the coaching sessions (e.g. coaching techniques related to a shift in perspective, self-reflection on personal needs, etc.) help employees to cope with some particular aspects of the acquisition (e.g. context of change, uncertainty, turnover intentions and lost in the sense of belongingness) to produce some proximal (e.g. increased self-awareness and efficacy) and distal outcomes (e.g. decrease turnover intentions and increased well-being) on employees. Specifically:

Intervention Context: Mainly triggered by the acquisition and the COVID-19 pandemic, most participants described how the general contextual factors described in the previous section, such as constant changes in the organization and restructuring, the change in organizational culture and the high turnover of their colleagues, led them to question their future in the organization. They experienced high uncertainty and partly lost their sense of belongingness. Several participants addressed these issues in their coaching sessions.

There was a lot of people leaving the company; a lot of changes in the individual teams; a lot of changes in the structure. (Participant 04)

Mechanisms: Participants described how certain coaching techniques enabled them to take on a different perspective towards a specific problem, their goals, or their own expectations. Some reported using techniques to reflect on their personal needs and strengths. These coaching techniques help them deal with feelings of uncertainty and a sense of belongingness.

Coaching created for me the space to (...) think with the higher perspective on what I am experiencing and indeed through that kind of principle of a sounding board to get myself to acknowledge some of the things that happening and that moved immediately into – that realisation moves into changing the actions or taking the actions. (Participant 01)

Further, these techniques supported them in finding out what they wanted and needed from their organization to stay in the organization and advocate for it. Even though the ongoing disruptions made the participants question their future in the organization, through these coaching techniques, they were able to see the bigger picture. Most participants reported that coaching helped them find their role and place within the new organization and newly formed teams.

Is this the right environment for me going forward? Is it worth it? Do I wanna be part of it – and, if yes, then what is in it for me, specifically? (Participant 06)

They can have really quality discussion about pros and cons and I can even believe if they can talk through it and see where is the problem, they can maybe find out okay, but you don't have to leave if you still like the job, but there is some problems but it can be dealt with – you can deal with them. So, yeah, for sure I would definitely find the coach for it. (Participant 09)

Outcomes: The shift of perspective entailed a positive approach and created self-awareness of the participants' personal needs, values, and capabilities. Several participants emphasised the assertiveness they gained through the coaching. They described progress in feeling self-efficacious and being able to advocate for themselves, discuss their needs with their supervisor, and clearly communicate personal boundaries. Also, some

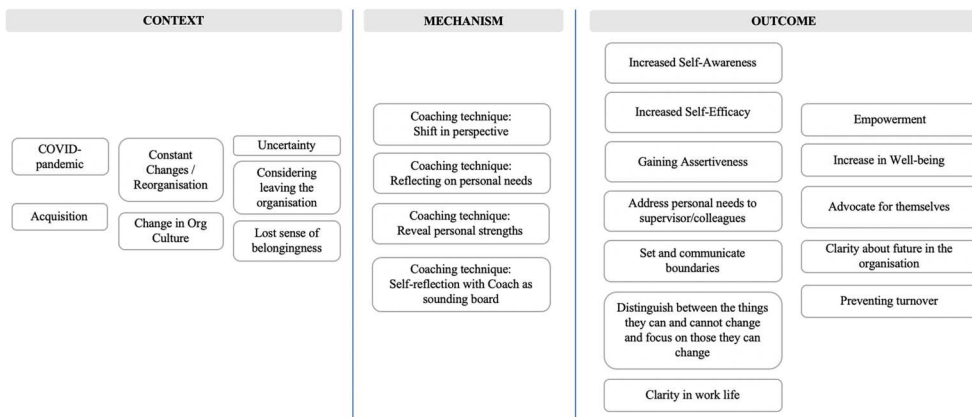


Figure 1. CMOC 1: Self-awareness and empowerment.

described finding a clear distinction between things they can and those they cannot change and that they approach the things they have the power to influence.

Another outcome is an improvement in well-being at work. Two participants described how by prioritizing themselves over others and advocating their needs during those demanding times, they realized where their limits were and were able to set and communicate healthy boundaries. This is reflected in the answer of Participant 02 to the question if coaching helped them manage their well-being or mental health during the acquisition process:

I think so, because, like I said, I started to focus more on myself and then I wasn't that scared of everything (...) what is good for me and when I am satisfied. So, I was able to speak to my manager and discuss my needs better.

CMOC 2: Tackling Big Things with Small Steps

This CMOC (see Figure 2) shows how specific mechanisms activated in the coaching sessions (e.g. coaching techniques to visualize progress, and analyze problems step-by-step, etc.) help employees to deal with other particular aspects of the acquisition (e.g. feeling overwhelmed by changes, lost sense of meaning and organizational identity, etc.) to produce some proximal (e.g. increased self-efficacy and control over accomplishments) and distal outcomes (e.g. decrease in feeling overwhelmed and increased well-being) on employees. Specifically:

Intervention Context: Many participants reported feeling overwhelmed and a lost sense of meaning and organizational identity. These feelings were caused mainly by the demands of coping with constant change, a high level of disruptions simultaneously, and a feeling of uncertainty. These changes were triggered majorly by the acquisition, such as restructuring, new work processes, or new responsibilities, but also by the measures of the COVID-19 pandemic, such as the switch to remote work. For example, Participant 09 mentioned:

I was overwhelmed from all (...) we see that I'm stuck, and I can't move, like, to forwards or to backwards. I couldn't do any kind of step. (...) it took me a while to get used to it [the merger], that I am not longer the [original company] employee, but now I am the [new company] employee (...) Sometimes it's still hard (...) we still would like to go back, everybody would like to go back, because not all these setup here after the merge is perfect.

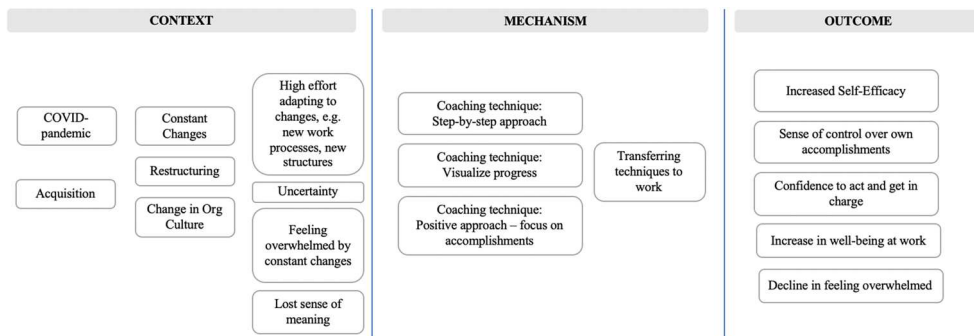


Figure 2. CMOC 2: Tackling big things with small steps.

Mechanism: Participants addressing these topics in the coaching sessions were advised to break the perceived overload down into manageable parts and approach things step-by-step. This helped participants with a sense of control over their behavior and helped them find the root cause of their frustrations. The coaching sessions also included visualization techniques to enable employees to monitor progress along these steps. Participants were encouraged to focus on their achievements rather than on the negative aspects of their work.

So, [the coach] helped me to detail- to write it down really like step-by-step and see. And I remember [the coach] said, "see, it's not that difficult if you write it down". (Participant 09)

I think that, like, simply knowing that I can get wherever I want to if I take some, like, continuous steps, was what I learnt from the coaching and I think that's something I think that will help me to slowly, but surely, progress in my career and get to where I want to. (Participant 08)

As this participant emphasised, learning how to break tasks down gave them the confidence to act and helped them see their job career with more clarity.

Outcome: Instead of feeling overwhelmed, participants described perceiving tasks as manageable, which provided them with the confidence to act and to gain a sense of control over their own accomplishments. This ultimately resulted in an increase in well-being at work. Few participants reported that breaking down the overload into small, manageable steps had a calming effect and an increase in self-confidence and self-efficacy that let them perceive the excessive demands as manageable. The specific connection between mechanisms and outcomes can be seen in the following quotes:

[Coaching techniques] calming me a lot and some of my, you know, thoughts around, you know, go into the next steps and next steps and next steps- which give me kind of calm in my behaviour. (Participant 04)

Well, it actually helped me to calm down and to gain some, let's say, self-confidence because in the end, we found out that I was too much striving for perfection even though I am simply just like at the beginning of my career. (Participant 08)

CMOC 3: Leading People Through Turbulent Times

Unlike the previous two configurations, this CMOC (see [Figure 3](#)) shows how specific mechanisms activated in the coaching sessions related to their leaders' role (e.g. awareness of employee feelings and mental health, and learning to address mental health topics, etc.) help participants to deal with other particular aspects of the acquisition (e.g. challenges for leaders in how to support employees, etc.) to produce some proximal (e.g. recognize when employees are struggling) and distal outcomes (e.g. improve communication and increased subordinates' well-being) on participants. Specifically:

Intervention Context: A related working mechanism to CMOC 2 was revealed from the leader perspective of some participants. The context described in CMOC 2 also caused a challenge for leaders to support their subordinates going through this period of disruption and uncertainty. As those managers gained awareness of the impact of those changes on employees' mental health, they addressed these issues in their coaching sessions.

[Before the intervention] Mental health was a non-topic, yeah, for better or worse, but it was really not considered as a company’s job or manager’s job to take that into consideration on a daily basis. (Participant 03)

Mechanisms: Participants report how the context triggered them to reconsider their role as leaders in regard to employee well-being. They described working on developing a better sense of how their employees are feeling and recognizing people’s emotions. Further, they explained working on improving their ability to address employees’ mental health issues in one-on-ones. Techniques used are role play and a guided reflection of leadership scenarios.

This is moving me forward in terms of how to understand and see from these minor signals on these people about their feelings and so on. And this absolutely critical on the leadership because otherwise, you have a non-functional individual which is- if something is going on. (Participant 04)

Outcomes: As an outcome, participants reported being able to recognize better when someone in their team is struggling and having improved their communication towards their team regarding mental health issues. Also, feeling more connected with subordinates. Participants perceived that this contributes to improving employee well-being and helps the subordinates cope with the disruptions they face.

It helped me as a manager to be more conscious about knowing that this is still possible and kind of be again more connected to the team and make sure that, you know, if they have a problem, I should- or to recognise if they have a problem. (Participant 05)

Um, yes! I think that there was like a clear feedback in terms of the connected and the- yeah, around the connected in the team and where I was in terms of like staying close to members of the team. (Participant 03)

In these two examples, we can see how the coaching sessions helped leaders develop their ability to recognize employee’s feelings and the positive impact of the sessions on

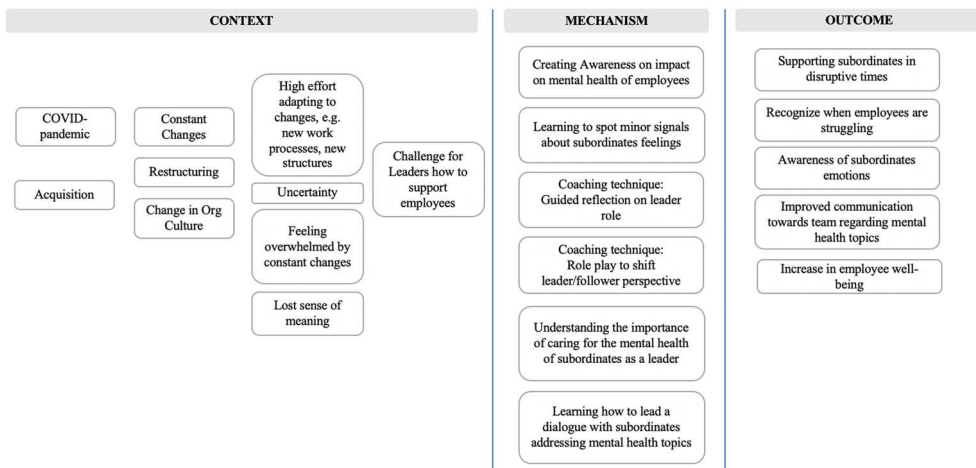


Figure 3. CMOC 3: Leading people through turbulent times.

interpersonal relationships within teams. As mentioned, coaching not only helped managers contribute to employee well-being but also improved their own well-being.

I think it's on behalf coaching, of that positive leadership coaching, which I was also part, and yeah, I think that I'm less in stress and ... let's say, with my mental health or my mental – I don't know how to say – activity or, you know. I'm not getting into stress so often because of my work. (Participant 02)

CMOC 4: Coping with High Workload

This CMOC (see Figure 4) differs from the previous ones as it is not directly related to the acquisition context but indirectly because the restructuring process was one factor increasing the level of work overload employees experienced. In that regard, it represents how specific mechanisms activated in the coaching sessions (e.g. coaching techniques related to time management and work-life balance, etc.) help employees to cope with this increased sense of workload to produce some proximal (e.g. increased self-compassion and healthy emotional detachment) and distal outcomes (e.g. fewer overtime hours and increased well-being) on employees. Specifically:

Intervention Context: Another contextual factor addressed in coaching was high workload. Participants described struggling to cope with too much workload; for some, it also conflicted with private life demands. Participant 11 explained, 'I'm just sitting there for those 10, 12 h like I used to do in the evenings when I split it between the kids, work ... I don't know how'.

Mechanisms: The participants struggling with it described that they applied techniques to visualize the time they dedicated to different topics in a cake chart or their progress. Further, they explained that working with the coach helped becoming more aware of their personal needs and practice self-compassion. They described being able to transfer those techniques to their work life and still apply them several months after the end of the coaching sessions. Participant 11 illustrated the change in behavior as follows:

I don't work that much overtime. And it's not because the work isn't there. (...) thanks to that session with [name coach] I understood and internally arranged it that I don't have to do the overtime, (...) we don't operate on brains. I just want to help everybody, but that I need to

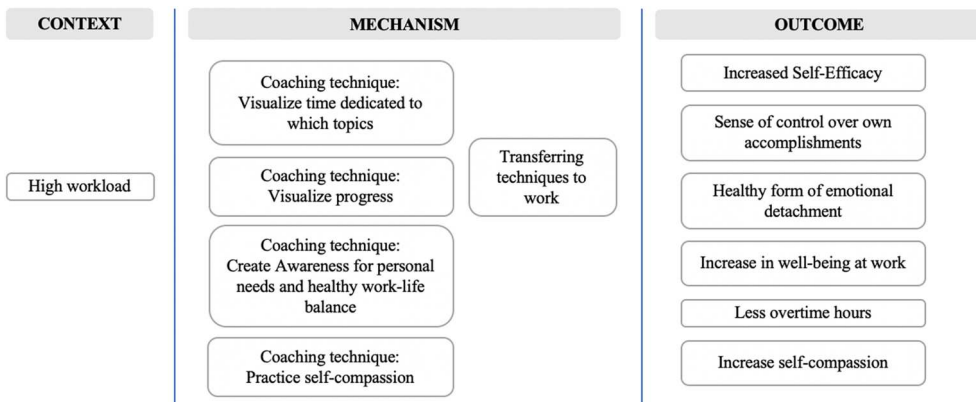


Figure 4. CMOC 4: Coping with high workload.

realise that I need to help myself first. (...) I was actually neglecting myself (...) Now I don't break down anymore when something comes up.

Outcomes: The described mechanisms created the participants' sense of control over their accomplishments and contributed to their self-efficacy. Some participants depicted not pushing themselves towards working more in an unhealthy way and described being more self-compassionate. The mechanisms described by Participant 11 result in a healthy form of detachment from work. We conclude that the intervention ultimately leads to an improvement in well-being. The following quotes support this:

It really gave me a lot, both in my working life and some things I brought into my personal life. (Participant 11)

But the meetings definitely helped me to – how to say? – to feel better. (Participant 07)

Summary of CMOCs

These four CMOCs display the different interplay of context and mechanisms of the same intervention. While some may interact, such as CMO 2 and 3, others may develop independently. Taken together, we believe the four presented CMOC complement each other well in answering the research questions.

Overarching Context-fit of Coaching

In addition to what was described in CMOCs, the data provide compelling support for the idea that coaching supports participants in coping with the challenges induced by the acquisition process. While participants experienced a range of challenges, the coaching sessions were able to regard this individually. Most participants described the coaching sessions as essential to help them through the acquisition process; nine people directly confirmed this. Participant 11 emphasised, 'I really had it at the right time'.

Only Participant 07 mentioned that although coaching helped them with the challenges induced by the acquisition, they 'would rather do it at a different time (...) because then I could have more time to also to work on and concentrate on the things that we talked about during the meetings'.

Discussion

The aim of this research was to find out how coaching helps employees cope with the challenges induced by M&A. We will first discuss the findings of the context and the challenges generated by the acquisition and then delve into how coaching worked under these circumstances by discussing the developed CMOCs.

The acquisition caused a high level of disruption in a time that was already marked by change due to the COVID-19 pandemic and previous internal restructuring. This triggered strong feelings of uncertainty and qualitative job insecurity. Participant 06 described being uncertain about 'the expectations from the UK leadership because we still see that we don't fit into the core business of the company which acquired us'. It also led people to question their future in the organization. In the acquisition, employees perceived themselves as the lower-status partner, which strongly impacted the organizational identity and caused a loss of belongingness. Participant 07 explained 'during

the time of the merger, there were people saying that, “well, now we are going to lose because of the merger all of the benefits we had as part of the [name of the former company] and it’s gonna be corporate, a big corporate company now that doesn’t care for the people working for it”. This supports previous findings of M&A (Lupina-Wegener et al., 2014; Ullrich et al., 2005). Considering the research by Ullrich et al. (2005), we believe that the intense reorganization of teams and changes in management damaged the leader-member relationships, challenging leaders’ ability to foster a sense of belongingness for their followers and successfully sustain their organizational identity.

However, six months after the integration was fully executed, people described that they ‘got used to’ the new culture, new process, and new structures, but at the same time, they described ‘in my heart, I can still feel [name of former company]’. From the perspective of organizational identity, this suggests that the continuity of participants’ identity has been disrupted by the acquisition and a post-merger identity is yet to improve. In line with previous findings (see Ullrich et al., 2005; van Dick et al., 2006), this underlines the challenges of fostering a strong post-merger identity.

To analyze how exactly coaching worked in the context it was implemented in, which mechanisms were triggered, and which outcomes it fostered, we developed four CMOCs, of which three directly contribute to answering the research questions:

CMOC 1: Coaching mechanisms enabled participants to reflect on their needs and strengths and adopt a positive perspective, addressing the uncertainty and the consideration of leaving the organization. The key mechanism described here relates to how coaching techniques facilitate emotion management (Richard, 2020). Coaches can help coachees employ several strategies to regulate negative emotions, such as uncertainty and stress (Wales, 2002). As a result, these mechanisms promote self-awareness, self-efficacy, and empowerment. Which then provided participants with clarity about their work life and their future in the organization. As participants described that this positive approach helped them see the benefits of their current job, which then convinced them to stay within the organization, we conclude that a possible downstream effect of coaching was mitigating turnover.

CMOC 2: The work environment challenges left employees feeling overwhelmed, which involves experiencing negative emotions. The coaching mechanism described here can be linked to the one outlined in CMOC 1 related to managing negative emotions (Richard, 2020). However, a distinctive factor in this CMO is the use of visualization techniques to help coachees break down their demands into manageable tasks (Wales, 2002). Coaches employ a step-by-step approach and visualize progress with a positive focus, which aligns with goal-setting theory (Whitmore et al., 2013). When transferred to the work context, these mechanisms create a sense of accomplishment and confidence to act, increasing well-being and self-efficacy while alleviating the feeling of being overwhelmed.

CMOC 3: In this configuration, we found a similar context to CMOC 2 but from a leadership perspective. The context enabled mechanisms in leadership behavior, such as being aware of subordinates’ mental health and the importance of addressing those issues in a dialogue with employees. This heightened awareness and subsequent action supported employees in coping with the challenges they faced, ultimately improving employee well-being. These findings align with the growing literature on leader behaviors that enhance employee well-being (Inceoglu et al., 2018). Leaders play a crucial role in promoting and

maintaining employee well-being by providing support, fostering a positive work environment, and engaging in open communication (Kuoppala et al., 2008).

These CMOCs demonstrate the different working mechanisms of an intervention implemented in a disruptive context. Based on the individual challenges participants were facing and their needs in this context, coaching provided tailored individual support in coping with and managing change. Moreover, the participants emphasised that the intervention was exactly what they needed 'at the right time'. To our knowledge, there is no study identifying the working mechanisms of coaching in a context of uncertainty and linking them to outcomes created. We believe this is an original contribution created by applying the CMOC framework.

The outcomes identified in our study are supported by other researchers reporting a positive effect of coaching during change on self-efficacy (Armstrong et al., 2007; Grant, 2014), well-being, resilience (Grant, 2014), self-awareness and communicating assertively (Armstrong et al., 2007). Consistent with the literature on executive or leadership coaching (Bickerich et al., 2018; Grant, 2014; Schnell, 2005), our findings show that leaders can benefit from coaching when going through organizational change to better manage not only the challenges they are facing but also to lead their subordinates through disruptive times better.

Linking back to organizational identity, our findings show that the post-merger identity has been challenged. The context described, specifically the factors that triggered CMOC 1, reveals that the participants' transition to the new organizational culture was incomplete pre-intervention. Although they managed the change with support from the intervention, none of the interviewees reported positive attitudes toward the change. From a perspective of agility of organizational identity (Liang et al., 2022), the participants did not strive for change. Instead, they described the merging process as being forced upon them.

As we did not work with a non-intervention group in this study, we are not able to compare to which extent coaching has mitigated this downward change. However, the mechanisms triggered that created empowerment and clarity of the future among participants may benefit the active participation of managers in shaping the future of the organization. Lupina-Wegener et al. (2014) argue that this is an important factor in achieving projected continuity, which then supports organizational identity in the post-merger organization. This also supports our claim that coaching could, to some degree, prevent turnover, considering that a weak identification with the post-merger organization correlates with high turnover intentions (van Dick et al., 2006). There is no support in the literature yet on coaching during organizational change with effects on turnover, but Baron and Morin (2010) found executive coaching to foster organizational commitment, which then mitigates turnover (Yao & Wang, 2006). However, previous studies rarely provide insight into how these outcomes are created (see Grant, 2014; Schnell, 2005).

CMOC 4: The high-workload context, only partly caused by the acquisition but a common stressor to be addressed in coaching, triggered some specific intervention's mechanisms. The coaching intervention proved effective as tools such as visualizing progress and increasing needs awareness were transferred into the work routine. This led to increased self-efficacy, a sense of control over accomplishments, and a healthy emotional detachment. These findings support the coaching literature in the regard that high workload is a common topic addressed in sessions (Rosen et al., 2010).

Contributions

First, our study contributes to the coaching literature by detailing how specific coaching mechanisms effectively address the psychological impacts of organizational change. For instance, reflective practices such as guided reflections enable employees to process their emotions and reframe their experiences during M&As, promoting resilience and adaptability. Moreover, emotion management techniques, including cognitive reappraisal, help employees regulate their stress responses and maintain a sense of control amidst uncertainty. Our adoption of explorative, qualitative methods to develop the CMOCs advances methodological approaches in evaluating workplace interventions. This contributes to the theoretical discourse by demonstrating how nuanced, context-specific evaluations can reveal the dynamics and efficacy of coaching mechanisms in real-world settings. Thus, it joins the theoretical discussion in evaluating interventions and addresses the call to clarify how outcomes of interventions are created (Fox et al., 2022). Further, it offers actionable results for employers and practitioners to utilize coaching as a tool to support employees in managing uncertainty.

Second, our findings contribute to the M&A literature by demonstrating how tailored coaching interventions can mitigate the adverse effects of M&A on employee well-being and organizational identity. Through the CMOCs, this study presents a structured analysis linking the contextual triggers and outcomes of coaching. For instance, our findings show that coaching interventions that focus on fostering a sense of belonging and promoting open communication between employees and managers are particularly effective in shaping organizational identity during M&As. Thus, it shows which coaching actions are effective in M&A scenarios. Linking those actions to broader organizational outcomes provides guidance on how to foster a supportive work environment and strengthen organizational commitment in turbulent times.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

We wish to point to the limitations of our research. (1) As this is a single case study conducted in a highly disruptive period, the findings are generalizable to a limited extent. Through the detailed presentation of the intervention context and then linking it to the mechanisms, this research gives a clear picture of how coaching works in this context. At the same time, we stress the importance of understanding the context when implementing organizational interventions, which would then allow a transfer of our findings when similar contextual factors are present. (2) Another limitation we ask to consider is that the sample consisted solely of individuals who participated in coaching and were still members of the organization after the merger procedure was completed. Therefore, there is a risk of survivor bias within the sample. Nevertheless, at the same time, we do know that none of the coaching participants left the organization during the intervention period. (3) Although we guide our analysis using the realist evaluation framework in an exploratory manner, we acknowledge that the traditional application of this methodology involves developing CMOCs based on theory and testing them with empirical data. Nevertheless, organizing our results in context, mechanisms, and outcomes has greatly enhanced our understanding of what works in coaching interventions.

(4) Finally, while we captured how coaching changed leadership behavior, we lacked data to assess the followers' perspectives on these changes. This would have provided a valuable addition to evaluate the effects on leaders' on-the-job behavior.

As M&A processes and their effect on the organization can highly vary from case to case, we believe that further research is needed to uncover the working mechanisms of coaching during M&A under different circumstances. Considering the complexity of coaching processes, a triangulation could provide deeper insights into how coaching works. We recommend studies combining qualitative and quantitative data, preferably collected throughout the coaching process. From a perspective of organizational identity, it would be interesting to explore the experience of individuals who did not receive coaching as support. One could investigate how their belongingness to the organization changed over time and if they were able to activate other support mechanisms. Additionally, it is crucial to emphasise the value of longitudinal studies. Such research, extending beyond the immediate aftermath of M&A activities, could track the effectiveness of coaching over prolonged periods. This focus would not only highlight the immediate impacts but also shed light on the long-term effects of coaching on organizational integration and identity.

Conclusion

In this study, we explored the impact of coaching on employee well-being during M&As, offering valuable insights for organizations navigating these complex transitions. Our findings demonstrate that coaching plays a crucial role in supporting employees by addressing the psychological impacts of organizational change. Through the development of context-mechanism-outcome configurations (CMOCs), we uncover the underlying processes that explain how coaching interventions promote employee resilience, self-awareness, and self-efficacy in the context of M&As. Specific coaching mechanisms, such as reflective practices and emotion management techniques, enable employees to reframe their experiences, develop coping strategies, and maintain a sense of control amidst uncertainty. By adopting explorative, qualitative methods, our study also contributes to the theoretical discourse on evaluating coaching interventions and offers actionable results for employers and practitioners to utilize coaching as a tool to support employees in managing uncertainty during M&As.

Moreover, our research extends the M&A literature by demonstrating how tailored coaching interventions can mitigate the adverse effects of M&As on employee well-being and organizational identity. The CMOCs present a structured analysis of the contextual triggers and outcomes of coaching, showcasing which coaching actions are effective in M&A scenarios. This employee-centric perspective complements existing M&A research, which has primarily focused on financial and strategic aspects, and highlights the critical role of tailored coaching interventions with managers in determining the success of these strategic initiatives.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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Research Ethics

This study gained ethical approval for the data collected within the project H-Work Multilevel Interventions to Promote Mental Health in SMEs and Public Workplaces by the ethics committee of the University of Bologna, listed under Prot. nr.185076 of 11/09/2020.

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Appendix

Table A1. Coding template.

| Context | Mechanism | Outcome |
|---------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|
| M&A | Coaching Techniques | Proximal |
| Restructuring | Shift of Perspective | Support Coping with M&A |
| Challenges | Needs Reflection | Self-Efficacy |
| Change in Culture | Awareness of Needs | Self-Awareness |
| Merger & Coaching | Step-by-step Approach | Assertiveness |
| Low-Status Partner | Emotion Regulation | Leader-Follower Relationship |
| Uncertainty | Time Management Tools | Healthy Form of Detachment |
| Social Support | Positive Approach (Focus on Accomplishments / Strengths) | Clarity about Future in Organization |
| Changes in Leadership | Transfer into Work | Self-Compassion |
| Adaptation to Change | Changes Leader-Employee Interaction | Manage High Workload |
| Intention to Turnover | Awareness for Leaders Impact on Mental Health | Distal |
| Lost Sense of Belonging | Discussing/Designing Leader-Employee | Participants Well-Being |
| Feeling Overwhelmed | 1:1s in Coaching Sessions | Follower's Well-being |
| COVID-19 Pandemic | Satisfaction with Intervention | WLB |
| Remote Work | Support Coping with M&A | Clarity on Career |
| Challenges | M&A related content of sessions | Wider Benefits of Learning |
| WLB | | |
| Pandemic & Merger | | |
| Leadership | | |
| Support for Employees | | |
| Support for Leaders | | |
| Changes in Leadership | | |
| Behavior | | |
| Wellbeing | | |
| Measures Pre-Intervention | | |
| Workload | | |
| WLB | | |

Codes in Black were defined a priori, and codes in grey evolved from the data analysis process.