

Academic Paper

Evaluating the impact of embodying the coaching mindset on leaders' paradigm of power

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Abstract

The benefits of coach training for organisations and leaders are well-documented. Embodying the coaching mindset, defined as the development and maintenance of an open, curious, flexible, and client-centred attitude, is considered a core competency in coaching practice. Today, several organisations expect their leaders to act as coaches and are investing in developing their coaching skills. However, the importance and impact of embodying a coaching mindset on leaders' paradigm of power and their leadership style has not received sufficient attention. To address this gap, this study employs a thematic approach to explore interview responses from 14 leaders from diverse professions from cities in India, South Africa, and the United States. This study shows that by embodying the coaching mindset, leaders experience a shift in their paradigm of power and leadership style (from a top-down approach, based on the power-over paradigm, towards greater power sharing, based on the power-with paradigm), perceived organisational role (from problem solving to facilitating), and their perception of their team members (from fragile and dependent to resourceful and whole). Furthermore, this study's findings suggest that offering coach training to leaders could help them develop various competencies and expand their toolkit to create a more collaborative work environment.

Keywords

Coach training, paradigm of power, leadership, shared power, collaboration

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Introduction

Over the last 40 years, the professional-coaching industry has exploded owing to the positive outcomes linked to working with a coach (Riordian & Waters, 2023). Coaching enhances performance, well-being, the ability to cope with change, work attitudes such as job satisfaction and engagement, skill development (Theeboom et al., 2014), clarity, and goal attainment (Grant et al., 2009). When used as a tool to integrate learning across the workforce (Brockbank & McGill, 2006), coaching can help build resilience (Vanhove et al., 2016), boost team performance (Grant, 2006; Kampa-Kokesch, 2001) and is considered an effective developmental tool (Fillery-Travis & Lane, 2006). The International Coaching Federation (ICF) assesses that globally, the number of leaders taking coaching increased by 46% between 2015 and 2019, and the number of leadership-coaching practitioners increased by 33% during the same period. Existing coaching literature largely attests to the benefits and effectiveness of coaching (Grant et al., 2010; Fillery-Travis & Lane, 2006). However, some scholars suggest that these benefits may have been overestimated, because given the complexity of human interactions and behaviours, it is difficult to obtain such uniform results (Fillery-Travis & Cavicchia, 2013; Cox, 2013). Therefore, to leverage the benefits of coaching more effectively, tracing how various elements of a coach training are tied to specific desired outcomes is crucial. To this end, this study examines how embodying a coaching mindset, a core competency in coaching practice, can transform leaders' paradigm of power and their leadership style to suit today's work environment.

Leaders with a coach-like approach

Today, leaders have been called to act as coaches and use effective coaching approaches in their interactions with others. They are expected to ask questions instead of providing

answers, support employees instead of judging them, and facilitate their development instead of dictating their actions (Ibarra & Scoular, 2019). A study by the Human Capital Institute and International Coaching Federation (Filipkowski et al., 2018) shows that as of 2018, a third of companies had invested in training their managers to incorporate coaching skills into their leadership style. Many organisations are investing in developing the coaching skills of their leaders or HR managers to incorporate coaching-based approaches in their day-to-day work (Riordian & Waters, 2023). In an article for the Institute of Coaching, researcher John Campbell (Institute of Coaching, 2017) notes that the coaching approach can be used in any situation to help people create a shift in themselves, others, or in situations.

Most recently, in their book, *The Coaching Shift*, Riordian and Waters (2023) have discussed how leaders can use a coaching approach in organisations, and use their coaching skills to motivate teams and groups. By practising their coaching skills, leaders can shape the team culture and create a psychologically safe environment, where people feel empowered to innovate, take risks, and work in agile ways (Riordian & Waters, 2023).

The Coaching-Mindset Competency

One of the foundational competencies in coaching, as laid down by the ICF and other coaching bodies such as the European Mentoring and Coaching Council, is the ability to embody a coaching mindset. The ICF (2021) defines the coaching mindset as the development and maintenance of an open, curious, flexible, and client-centred attitude. This competency emphasises self-awareness, reflection, curiosity, emotional regulation, and humility, and encourages people to learn continuously, and be open to and aware of how one's context and culture influences oneself and others (Riordian & Waters, 2022).

Embodying this coaching mindset enables leaders to avail the benefits of coaching even during unplanned situations, or the so-called 'coaching moments' (Lennard, 2010) or

‘coachable moments’ (Kaye, 1993; Hart, 2005; Mobley, 2001). These are the day-to-day management activities that present opportunities for employees to learn through support during chance interactions rather than while being instructed by their managers (Kaye, 1993; Hart, 2005; Mobley, 2001; Lennard, 2010; Schachter, 2008; Hart, 2005).

Impact of embodying the coaching mindset on leaders’ paradigm of power

Coaching is said to be effective when the parties involved share equal power, even if there may be differences in their roles, intersections of power, or personal power (Pedrick, 2020). When one person feels too burdened while directing conversations, fixing problems, and taking on responsibilities, it is a sign that power is not being shared equally. Therefore, power sharing is intrinsic to both the process of coaching and its transformative capacity (Pedrick, 2020). Coaching has the potential to bring about a shift in the sensitivity, courage, and generative power dynamics of individuals (Ibarra & Scoular, 2019). Here, the concept of ‘thinker power’, as defined by Pedrick (2020), or the idea of people accessing their personal power are also relevant. When we view the ‘other’ as someone needing help, we are inadvertently exerting power over them (Pedrick, 2020). This view of the other is at odds with the concept of embodying a coaching mindset.

This power-over mindset has also been mentioned in Brown’s (2018) work, who describes it as the belief that power is finite and can be hoarded while excluding others. Schramer (2013) suggests that the power-over mindset, which is our traditional definition of power, is flawed. This is demonstrated by the decreasing effectiveness of traditional hierarchies, and top-down leadership models in solving the complex challenges of a rapidly changing world. Instead, businesses, governments, and organisations require transformational leaders with diverse perspectives, creativity, and adaptability (Schramer, 2013).

Power and how it is held by individuals and leaders has been extensively discussed in Kahane's (2010) research. According to Kahane (2010), 'Power-over is the most common understanding of power. Not to see another person, or to see her or him as a nonperson, is the extreme manifestation of power-over'. Tillich (1963) defined power as the drive to achieve one's purpose, get one's job done, and grow. Conversely, he describes 'love' as the act of uniting what is separated or fragmented. Robert Johnson (1983, 1993) often saw love and power as opposites and their reconciliation as challenging (Kahane, 2010). Invoking these opposites, Martin Luther King Jr (1967), in his speech, 'Where Do We Go From Here?', said, 'power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anemic'. This understanding highlights the need to balance power and love, which also forms the core of Kahane's (2010) research. For instance, he distinguishes between the 'power-to' mindset, which emphasises our ability to achieve self-realisation, and the 'power-over' mindset, which is a traditional understanding of power in which we essentially exercise it over someone or something to serve personal interests. However, another kind of power that reconciles the opposites—power and love—and thereby facilitates leaders to tackle complex challenges effectively and empathetically is the power-with or the power-sharing mindset (Kleiner, 2011). This mindset underlies collaboration, empathy, and connection (Kahane, 2010; Brown, 2018). The present research utilises this definition of power to explore leaders' adoption of the coaching mindset.

According to Schramer (2013), to embrace power-sharing, we must overcome the 'blind spots' that exist in our collective leadership and our everyday social interactions. This requires leaders to be aware of the deeper dimension or source from which effective leadership and social action originate. Only then can leaders change some of their own mindsets, beliefs, and behaviours. What makes coach training effective is that it can help leaders experience such a change by helping them embody the coaching mindset.

Although the impact, value, and benefits of coaching are well-documented in existing coaching research, the importance of embodying a coaching mindset and how it impacts the embodiment of power in leaders has not received sufficient attention. Therefore, the present study examines how embodying the coaching mindset influences leaders' paradigm of power (i.e., the ways in which they perceive, hold, and share power) and their leadership style.

Specifically, the study aims to achieve the following research objectives:

- To identify the types of shifts leaders experience in their understanding of and relationship to power after undergoing coach training and embodying a coaching mindset.
- To identify the ways in which leaders experience a change in their leadership style after internalising and embodying the coaching mindset.

To achieve these objectives, data was gathered from semi-structured interviews with leaders from diverse professions, who had previously undergone coach training following the ICF core competencies and guidelines. Thematic analysis was used to interpret the data. The findings section outlines the shifts that leaders experience in their relationships and their paradigm of power and leadership as they internalise and embody the coaching mindset. Next, the findings are contextualised within the broader literature, the research limitations are discussed, and implications for future research and practice are suggested. The study concludes by examining the value of investing in coach training for today's leaders.

Materials and Methods

Method

In this study, the thematic analysis was employed to analyse and interpret responses from a

diverse set of participants. Thematic analysis, a widely recognized and rigorous qualitative research method, was chosen for its ability to identify, explore, and interpret patterns, themes, and meaning within the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017). This approach offers a systematic and flexible means of examining qualitative data, enabling an in-depth exploration of the research topic.

Thematic analysis was specifically selected to uncover and understand the underlying ideas, and experiences present in the data, focusing on participant perspectives rather than theory generation as grounded theory does (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Through detailed coding, categorization, and theme development, thematic analysis provides valuable insights into participants' perspectives and experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The decision to adopt thematic analysis in this study aligns with the research objective of understanding the diverse perspectives of the participants. This method was selected with the aim of contributing valuable insights into the emergent thematic categories derived from the data analysis, thereby enhancing the existing body of knowledge.

Participant selection

A multicultural and multinational sample size of 14 leaders was targeted (11 female, 3 male; age range: 38 to 55 years) from diverse professions (entrepreneurs, HR and learning and development professionals, heads of educational institutes, and coaching consultants) from cities in India (n = 11), the United States (n = 3), and South Africa (n = 1) (see Table 1). Participants were selected using the purposive sampling method: approaching individuals who had worked in leadership or managerial capacity, had undergone coach training, and were willing to discuss their leadership experiences. An invitation to participate was sent via email. The qualitative interviews were stopped after reaching the saturation level of responses.

Table 1: Participants' details

No.	Participant Code	Professional Background	Age	Gender	Location
1	A	Entrepreneur/ Coach/ Head of a Training Firm	50	F	Bangalore, India
2	B	Entrepreneur	45	F	Mumbai, India
3	C	Entrepreneur	40	F	Bangalore, India
4	D	Human resource (HR) professional	38	M	Bangalore, India
5	E	HR professional	45	F	Bangalore, India
6	F	HR professional	48	M	Bangalore, India
7	G	HR professional	55	F	Bangalore, India
8	H	Entrepreneur and coach	45	F	Bangalore, India
9	I	Entrepreneur	40	F	Bangalore, India
10	J	Senior learning and development professional, and coach	55	M	Johannesburg, South Africa
11	K	Entrepreneur, leadership coach, and organisation change consultant	46	F	Mumbai, India
12	L	Lawyer	42	F	New York, United States of America
13	M	Dean Professional Studies	48	F	Boston, United States of America
14	N	Coach and social development professional	49	F	Berkshires of Western Massachusetts, United States of America

All participants had been trained by ICF-accredited coach training schools, whose curricula adhered to the ICF core competencies and guidelines. The duration of their training programmes varies based on the school and participants' chosen level of training. However, accredited coaches undergo at least 60 hours of coach training. The ICF's core competencies are organised into four domains: 1) 'setting the foundation' involves demonstrating ethical practice and embodying a coaching mindset; 2) 'co-creating the relationship' involves establishing and maintaining agreements, cultivating trust and safety, and maintaining presence; 3) 'communicating effectively' involves listening actively and evoking awareness; and 4) 'cultivating learning and growth' involves facilitating client growth (ICF, 2022). The foundation competency includes embodying a coaching mindset. The present research focuses on the coaching mindset as a key element of coaching practice for studying the shift in leaders' paradigm of power and leadership style.

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Data collection

Semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted to collect data. This method is commonly employed in qualitative research due to its ability to explore participants' lived experiences comprehensively and gain a nuanced understanding of the research question (Guest et al., 2006). Through these interviews, the study delves into the coaching mindset and examines the concept of power-with or shared power in leadership, capturing the diverse perspectives and experiences of the participants.

Data was collected via online interviews over ten weeks in 2020. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Zoom format was chosen based on its convenience for participants and facilitation of live, international conversations. Most interviews lasted 35–45 minutes. Each participant was interviewed once, with the permission to reach out again for further clarification.

The interview questionnaire focused on three broad themes: coaching mindset, leadership, and power. Two researchers were involved in research framing and data collection.

. The first two interviews (with the first two participants) were jointly conducted by both researchers to align their interview styles; subsequent interviews were conducted with one researcher per interview. The researchers followed an interview guide to anchor the interview process (Appendix 1). The questions were open-ended and designed to guide a conversation based on the participants' lived experiences.

The leadership theme explored the changes or shifts in the participants' leadership style after undergoing coach training. The participants were asked to describe the impact of coach training on their leadership presence and their relationship with their teams. They were also encouraged to list the skill(s) that were particularly valuable/useful to them as leaders.

With the power theme, the participants' definition of power and their beliefs around power were explored. The participants were asked to reflect on whether their initial understanding of power had changed after the training and whether they would define it differently. The questions encouraged the participants to explain where they derived power from and how they experienced it. The questions included sub-themes such as the participants' experiences of another person's power, and whether it was possible to embody power and empathy simultaneously. The participants were also questioned about their views of power in the context of coaching. The questions enabled the respondents to reflect on their experiences to analyse when and what enabled them to own their power.

The third important theme explored was the coaching mindset. The coaches were asked to define the coaching mindset, and the impact of adopting a coaching mindset in crucial conversations with their teams and colleagues.

Codes for data analysis were developed based on the interview responses. The codes significantly comprised coaching concepts and were assigned to single mentions in the data. Once all the interview transcripts were coded, repeated occurrences were noted, and similar

codes were combined to develop meaningful categories for further analysis. Interviews were concluded after no new codes seemed likely to emerge and hence a saturation level was established. One final interview was conducted in 2022 to reconfirm the saturation level of the data.

Ethics

Participants were fully informed of the purpose of the interviews and consented to being recorded for further analysis. A confidentiality agreement ensured that the participants' anonymity would be maintained and their data kept safe. The participants were also given the option to withdraw from the research at any moment during the interview stage.

Data analysis

The data analysis process involved the careful codification of the transcribed data to gain valuable insights into the respondents' experiences and address the research question. To ensure that the thinking emerged from the data, a strict coding approach was adopted. The code represented a label attached to the concept derived from the participants' words. A bottom-up approach was employed, where each code was combined to form a meaningful category. While some codes displayed overlaps between categories, they were placed within a defined bracket. The final categories were arrived at after multiple rounds of analysis and reflection to effectively capture the research findings and address the research question.

The analysis yielded four main thematic categories (Table 2), with the fourth category being an unexpected theme that emerged in the data.

Table 2: Thematic Categories and Codes

No.	Categories	Codes
1	Elements of the coaching mindset	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open • Curious • Presence • Not Fixing • Faith in the other
2	Relationship with self, team and the system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-awareness • Trust • Two-way process • Collaborative effort • Comfort with ambiguity
3	Shift in their paradigm of power and leadership style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsibility • Perspective change • Role
4.	Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women and power • Women and self-care

Findings

Coaching mindset and other core competencies embodied by the participants

The participants repeatedly referred to the significance and importance of being open, curious and client focused. Participant D believed that ‘being open to all possibilities is the biggest feature of the coaching mindset.’ Participant E expressed, ‘The first thing is to have a complete and utmost belief and regard for your client, no matter who they are, what problem or issues they have, or whatever they want to talk about.’

Some participants revealed the need to meet certain prerequisites, such as individual wellbeing, before they can effectively embody the coaching mindset. This aligns with the following elements of the coaching mindset, as outlined by the ICF: ‘Develops and maintains the ability to regulate one’s emotions’ and ‘mentally and emotionally prepares for

sessions'. Participant J explains what makes them ready to embody the coaching mindset:

The coaching mindset starts with you being healthy enough to serve others. If you're burned out or stressed, you can't coach someone, as you're all over the place as a coach... I ensure that I'm fully available to serve my client in the session. *Because availability* does not only mean that I have a slot in my calendar; it's about my whole being. (Participant J)

Some participants also highlighted the importance of being mindful of individuals' culture and context, another key aspect of the ICF's coaching-mindset definition.

Part of the compassion and love piece is being able to slow down enough to see the difference between systemic power versus individual power in another person, in a community, and in yourself...the many acts of love we can do to heal...to understand who we are and what we've inherited from society. (Participant G)

More significantly, the participants repeatedly mentioned that coach training enabled them to engage with people without feeling the need to provide solutions or 'fix' their problem. That is, from fixing problems for people, their mindset had shifted toward being present and holding space and trusting them to find their own answers. Though not explicitly listed in the ICF definition of coaching mindset, seeing individuals as 'naturally creative, resourceful, and whole', rather than as fragile and dependent, is a core component of many coaching models such as that of the Co-Active Training Institute (Kimsey-House et al., 2011). This belief provides leaders with greater creativity to explore possibilities with others rather than dictating their actions.

Instead of jumping in to help, because you need to feel a certain way about how you see yourself as a coach, when you just listen and create that space and you

don't actually have to say anything, people can feel the focus of your energy on them. You're able to be fully present with them and metaphorically hold their hand, without saying or doing anything. (Participant L)

Listening to them and giving them space to come up with their own answers is very helpful. So in my day-to-day relationships, I'm more present to people's verbal and nonverbal cues and don't personally rush to try to fix things for people. I listen more wholly now. (Participant N)

Instead of telling them ‘this is how you do’ things, after [undergoing] the coaching training, it’s more about helping them discover their own solutions to problems.
(Participant E)

Apart from the coaching mindset, many participant responses also mentioned other core competencies that brought about positive shifts in their practice: maintaining presence, active listening, and cultivating trust and safety.

Relationship with Self, Team, and System (From power-over to power-with via coaching mindset)

Participants repeatedly mentioned that embodying an open and flexible mindset made them willing to place more responsibility and faith on their teams, which transformed their relationships with their teams and their working style.

Their new-found ability to be present with others deepened their relationship with themselves and others. Some participants highlighted that earlier, they had set themselves up in the role of constantly providing solutions to meet the expectations of their organisations or team members. However, after embodying the coaching mindset, they started believing in the resourcefulness of their teams to find solutions for themselves. This shift allowed them to be more vulnerable as they challenged the traditional expectations regarding their organisational roles.

Whenever there is a learning requirement, it’s a natural tendency to think, ‘Okay, I can do this for you’. I think now we are having more diagnostic conversations as a team, to step back and find out what really is happening, and to be okay with not finding all the solutions right away. So, I think this has increased the potency of the team, and has made them more comfortable with ambiguity. (Participant I)

Through coaching, I realised that it is okay to not have all the ideas. I can tap into the team. So, [I gained] this ability to let go, to work together, make things happen (Participant F)

Respecting the other person involves making sure that you don't hold power to yourself but trust that person with power. I told my team that you've got to have faith in yourself and take charge; this is your project not mine. At the same time, I assure them that 'I'm there to hold you in case you fall, but I'm not going to be doing this for you.' So, there is a transfer of power with the assurance of faith and trust in each other. (Participant B)

The participants' embodiment of the coaching mindset also created a ripple effect by making their teams more comfortable with ambiguity. Through active listening and questioning, they could see confrontations from a different lens. Participant I noted, 'As a team, we have discovered that confrontations don't have to be unpleasant if people listen more deeply, ask the right questions, and are open to new insights.'

Most managers are only instructing people or solving problems. The coaching mindset is the exact opposite. You work together to achieve something. It is about harnessing the power of asking questions. It makes people think and helps them realise that it's okay to not have an answer right now. It is okay if we are not fully right. I have been comfortable with ambiguity, but now even the team is more capable of working through the ambiguity. (Participant F)

Participants reported that undergoing coach training had enabled them to question themselves, situations, and systems that did not feel right, a significant aspect of learning and relating that challenges the status quo.

There are two ways of looking at it: how it has impacted my own development and how it has helped me facilitate the development of people who work for me. With coach training, I've been able to question myself at various important

junctions in my life. Sometimes everyone is on the same boat. It is just that, when you look carefully, you realise that you are not being treated the right way... But with the coaching mindset, you try to question everything that is not right. So that's the biggest shift that has happened. (Participant D)

One participant also mentioned the importance of humbling oneself and learning to listen and learn from others.

Everyone's voice matters. Listen to everybody, as everybody has something to teach you, in every walk of life. And if you listen, you will be wiser than the many that walk around thinking they know because they have one opinion or two that they hold strongly. Just humble yourself and listen. (Participant J)

Shift in the participants' paradigm of power and leadership style

Many participants reported experiencing a shift in their understanding of power and leadership after undergoing coach training. They mentioned that they were able to question the traditional, top-down approach to leadership and discovered a new way of understanding and embodying power by opening up communication channels and not projecting themselves as superior to others.

I had certain ideas about traditional leadership: top-down, decisions made in a small room behind closed doors that nobody else is privy to; poor, non-transparent communication; needing to be very loud, forthright and decisive; and needing to be surrounded by other powerful people who look the same as the leader. I think part of my journey has been to recognize which situations are suitable for taking on these roles and recognizing the power in the opposite: collaboration, transparent communication, welcoming diversity of voices, and compassion and caring for people. (Participant M)

The biggest shift I experienced was learning to let go. I have always been solution oriented and conversations were a way to get things done. Eventually, I learnt that

I don't have to be solely responsible, and I can relax during conversations and trust that the other person is capable of taking care of themselves. In a sense, I relinquished how I traditionally saw power. I think being okay with not having the answer and with the other person not finding the answer, and trusting the process to reach the solution has been a significant change for me. (Participant A)

Another significant finding was that some participants reported a shift in their understanding of their organisational role as a leader: from being responsible for achieving organisational objectives to facilitating people to achieve their aspirations.

I'm here to help deliver on business objectives, but the power has been in realising that I'm also here to help people achieve their aspirations. I'm here to help them learn from failure. Earlier I had to be one step ahead and usher them to "let's go, let's go". Now, it's more about being one step behind and nudging people to keep moving in different ways. (Participant E)

Participant A, the head of a training organisation, who also offered coaching to senior leaders, reported that her clients' experience of being seen and heard in the coaching session helped them believe in themselves and shifted how they held power in their external environment.

Being understood, listened to, and valued in the coaching relationship itself makes a big difference in one's capacity to hold power outside. They [clients] get a sense that what they're saying is valid, which allows them to confidently hold power. (Participant A)

Discussion

The study aimed to investigate the impact of embodying a coaching mindset on leaders' power paradigms and their subsequent leadership styles. The results indicate a remarkable shift in the participants' perception of power, transitioning from a traditional

power-over paradigm to a power-with paradigm. Following their coaching training, participants redefined power in terms that emphasised collaboration and power-sharing, marking a departure from the conventional leadership approach that relied on dominance, exertion of power over others, and the assumption of substantial responsibility (Pedrick, 2020). This transformation, as seen above, yielded substantial personal and professional benefits.

The findings of this study align with existing studies that underscore the transformative potential of the coaching mindset (ICF, 2021; Pedrick, 2020; Ibarra & Scoular, 2019). The coaching mindset, characterised by qualities like openness, curiosity, flexibility, and a client-centred attitude, was observed to fundamentally reshape leaders' approaches, aligning with the principles of power-sharing (Kleiner, 2011) and the need to redefine power beyond 'power-over' (Kahane, 2010). This shift mirrors the core tenets of the coaching mindset, promoting the concept of 'power-with' (Kahane, 2010; Brown, 2018), which encourages collaboration, empathy, and connection.

Notably, participants in this study experienced a profound shift in their relationships with themselves, their teams, and the broader system. They began to entrust more responsibility to their teams, moving away from traditional power-over dynamics, echoing the insights of Kleiner (2011). This shift had a ripple effect within teams, fostering greater comfort with ambiguity. Furthermore, the embodiment of the coaching mindset led to a reevaluation of how participants perceived their roles as leaders and their relationships with team members.

The findings contribute to the expanding body of research on the advantages of coaching and coach training. They offer fresh insights into how the adoption of the coaching mindset can facilitate a transformation in leaders' power paradigms and, in some instances, prompt a reevaluation of existing paradigms and the status quo. Participants reported shifting

away from a top-down leadership approach to a model that prioritises open communication (Kahane, 2010; Tillich, 1963). This study provides evidence that embracing the coaching mindset can serve as a catalyst for redefining the way leaders wield power, promoting a more inclusive, collaborative, and empathetic leadership style in today's rapidly changing world (Ibarra & Scoular, 2019; Kahane, 2010).

In sum, the findings underscore the profound impact of coaching and the coaching mindset on leaders' understanding of power and their leadership practices. They highlight the potential for embodiment of the coaching mindset to shift the power paradigm from traditional, hierarchical structures towards more collaborative and empowering models, challenging the prevailing notion that coaching merely reinforces existing power dynamics (Shoukry & Cox, 2018) and offering a refreshing perspective on the transformative potential of coaching in contemporary leadership.

Implications for practice

The research findings provide valuable insights that set the foundation for important recommendations for professionals, leaders, organisations, and business schools. To begin with, there is an argument in favour of incorporating fundamental coach training and embracing the coaching mindset within the curricula of business schools. This integration could empower emerging leaders to effectively address contemporary leadership challenges, empower teams, and enhance their leadership capabilities.

Additionally, the research emphasises the potential for organisations to integrate coach training into their learning and development programmes for both managerial and senior leadership groups. Such training could help organisations be responsive to the evolving expectations of the workplace.

Leaders themselves should actively consider adopting the coaching mindset as a fundamental shift in their approach to power. Recognizing that power is increasingly shifting towards collaboration and empowerment, leaders can redefine their roles by nurturing a culture that values inclusivity, active listening, and team empowerment. This transition has the potential to positively impact team dynamics, improve problem-solving, and leverage collective intelligence. In dynamic business environments, leaders must also embrace curiosity, openness, and trust within their teams to effectively address evolving challenges by promoting diverse perspectives, constructive dialogue, and collaborative teamwork.

However, it is essential to consider that the adoption of the coaching mindset may not be universally applicable and may require tailored approaches. Leaders should conduct thorough assessments of their specific organisational context, team readiness, and challenges before implementing coaching practices. Additionally, transitioning to a coaching approach may necessitate an investment of time and effort to unlearn traditional leadership habits and acquire new skills. Therefore, ongoing support and training for leaders on this transformative journey are crucial to ensure a successful shift towards a coaching-oriented leadership paradigm. Organisations should be aware of potential resistance to change, particularly in cultures deeply rooted in traditional power dynamics. Managing this transition effectively necessitates clear communication and well-planned change management strategies to ensure a smooth shift towards a coaching-oriented leadership paradigm.

Limitations

Despite its contributions, this study has some limitations.

First, the study's findings are limited by its sample selection. This was a sample of individuals with the resources to access and afford coach training. All study participants had white-collar jobs and belonged to a relatively affluent socio-economic class. Geographically,

most lived in urban centres of India, South Africa, and the United States, and the study did not include participants from semi-rural areas.

Second, there also exists a potential self-selection bias among leaders who have undergone coach training and who have particular pre-existing perspectives on leadership and power. Further research might explore the causal relationship between these perspectives and the pursuit of coach training.

Third, the study does not track the career trajectories of participants post-interview. Future studies might maintain contact to monitor professional journeys and leadership roles, giving a longer view of any reported shift..

Fourth, the study does not place emphasis on potential limitations in the coaching approach to leadership, necessitating further research to comprehend inefficiencies, drawbacks, and inherent challenges in the approach.

Fifth, this study did not explore the impact of the organisational context on the embodiment of coaching mindset and power, or the potential for power dynamics in the coaching relationship to impact leaders' embodiment of power and their adoption of the coaching mindset. A coaching contract involves the coachee, the organisation, the coach, and sometimes even the line manager. This raises the question of who holds the power in the relationship and who defines the content and purpose of the intervention (Fielder & Starr, 2008; Fillery-Travis & Cavicchia, 2013). Furthermore, coaches may either view the organisation as an authority to be obeyed or questioned based on their power orientation and experiences (Fillery-Travis & Cavicchia, 2013 which was not examined in this research.

Lastly, the research focused on the impact of embodying the coaching mindset among the leaders, as perceived by the participants themselves. The findings were not validated through direct observations or by surveying their colleagues and subordinates. Given that power orientation, listening, and empathy come alive in the interpersonal realm, a 360-degree

feedback would help enhance the credibility of the research findings.

Implications for further research

Future studies could expand the scope of this study by including a larger and more diverse sample in terms of their ethnic, geographical, and socio-economic characteristics. This could help researchers better understand how different cultural factors impact the effectiveness of coach-training programmes.

Developing a more comprehensive process to track and monitor leaders' transformation following as a result of undergoing coach training would help provide a deeper understanding of the specific elements of the coaching mindset that create a shift in leaders. For instance, leaders' attitudes, perceptions, and behaviours could be measured at various times and stages of the coach training process: before the commencement of the entire programme commences, before and after each training module, and six months after the completion of the training. As mentioned earlier, a 360-degree feedback process can be implemented in the organisation and the community to capture the actual shifts in leaders' behaviours.

Future studies might explore the coaching contract and the interplay between the coachee, the organisational context, and coach in interventions. They should also consider the influence of the coach's background and its impact on their own power orientation.

Finally, further research could focus on how social identity and coaching mindset impact leaders' power orientation. Some researchers have produced valuable works highlighting the potential role of social identity in coaching and how it can impact leadership and power dynamics. For example, while applying an anti-racist, decolonial lens to the

coaching practice, Roche (2021) calls for a deeper understanding of coaching for social change to prevent it from being commodified by businesses for the sake of improving performance and profit. She suggests that to truly engage in coaching for social change, theoretical underpinnings and the lived experiences of those who have informed these theories must be understood (Roche, 2021). Similarly, Pinnock and Mayes (2017) propose that coaching should involve a fifth domain—connecting with the client's identities or 'selves'—to be effective. Therefore, future studies should examine how embodying a coaching mindset affects leaders' long-term orientation to shared power and how this shapes their understanding of the influence of their own and their clients' social identities. Conversely, future research might also examine whether developing an understanding of social identity can strengthen leaders' embodiment of the coaching mindset.

Conclusion

This study examined the impact of embodying a coaching mindset on leaders' paradigm of power and leadership. In this regard, it found that by undergoing coach training and embodying the coaching mindset leaders experienced major shifts in their understanding of power (from power-over to power-with), leadership, and leadership style (from the top-down approach to power sharing and collaboration). They also experienced a shift in their perceived organisational role (from problem solving to facilitating) and their perception of their team members (from fragile and dependent to resourceful and whole).

Despite its limitations, this study's findings provide meaningful insights for coaches, human-resource and learning and development professionals, and business leaders. With the onset of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, the work environment and organisational structure are undergoing significant changes, prompting individuals and organisations to facilitate greater collaboration and find new ways of working. In this context, this study's findings

provide valuable insights regarding the ways in which coach training can be used to alter leaders' leadership style and expand their toolkit. By embodying the coaching mindset, leaders can leverage the resourcefulness of their teams and discover new solutions and ways of working to address various challenges, especially technological integration. Embodying the coaching mindset could help leaders facilitate greater collaboration in contexts and cultures that still emphasise traditional working styles with significant power differentials, such as workplaces requiring intergenerational collaboration, to facilitate easier upskilling and reskilling.

Offering basic coach training to leaders would introduce them to the coach mindset and other core competencies (active listening, maintaining presence, and building safety and trust), supporting them to work better with their teams. As this study showed, embodying the coaching mindset enables leaders to 'let go' of the pressure to problem-solve for their team members, become comfortable with and enable their teams to work better with ambiguity, and see confrontation through a different lens with deeper listening and questioning—skills that are imperative in today's changing world.

Data availability statement

The participants of this study did not give written consent for their data to be shared publicly, so due to the sensitive nature of the research supporting data is not available.

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Annexure 1

1. How has coaching impacted your leadership? What do you notice as different?
2. How has coaching shifted your presence in teams? What do you see as differences in the way you take charge, collaborate, focus on tasks, or build with others?
3. What do you see as the core aspects of a coaching mindset? How does it play out for you when you are having crucial conversations with your team or clients?
4. What words or phrases would you use to describe experiencing your own power in a coaching conversation? And your client's? How do you see the gender of the coach impacting this?
5. What beliefs have you held around power? And which beliefs have been reinforced in your own journey as a coach or someone with a coaching style of leadership? What has been challenged?
6. How has coaching impacted the way you assert yourself, share your views, hold a stance or express your needs? What did you see yourself do earlier? What do you notice yourself doing today?
7. What have your family, friends, colleagues, and team members shared about your coach training? Do they experience a shift in you? What is the shift they notice?

Additional questions:

1. What have been the most significant insights in your journey of developing coaching skills? How has it impacted your leadership or the way you hold your power?
2. How have your relationships shifted after undergoing coaching? What do you see as different?