Insights into Workplace Coaching for Navigating Stress: Supporting Employees Through Organizational Change

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Article Information	ABSTRACT
  Corresponding Author: Mehdi Ebrahimi m.ebrahimi@skillsacademia.org https://orcid.org/0009-0003-7807-5045	Change and turbulence in organizations often result in increased employee stress, job insecurity, and uncertainty, emphasizing the need for effective support strategies. This study explores whether workplace coaching is perceived as a valuable tool for alleviating work-related stress and job insecurity during periods of organizational change. This paper reports on a subset of quantitative data collected as part of a larger study within Australian rail organizations, focusing on survey responses regarding employees' perceptions of coaching. Of the 128 randomly selected rail organisations invited to participate online, 52 returned completed surveys, yielding a 40.6 percent response rate. Findings suggest that both internal and external coaching are widely used within these organizations. Additionally, it was revealed that coaching practices are generally perceived as helpful in reducing stress and offering support during times of change. The study also highlights that change can lead to significant uncertainty for employees. As this study relies on self-reported perception data and does not measure actual stress levels before and after coaching interventions, the results should be interpreted as indicative rather than conclusive. Despite these limitations, the findings contribute to the ongoing scholarly discourse on workplace coaching by offering insights into how employees in a change-intensive industry perceive coaching as a resource for navigating work-stress and uncertainty. The study also provides preliminary implications for organization's seeking to integrate coaching into broader employee support, capacity-building, and change management strategies during periods of change. **Keywords:** Workplace Coaching, Work-Related Stress, Employee Support, Organizational Development, Managing Change

1. INTRODUCTION

Employees' work-related stress, one of the potential psychological effects of frequent changes and restructures in the workplace, has been documented by various authors in the literature (Fløvik et al., 2019; Jian, 2007; Li et al., 2017). This type of stress has the potential to significantly impact employee performance and wellbeing (Raudeliunaite & Volff, 2020; Tran et al., 2020; Tsutsumi et al., 2009). While some studies have highlighted the positive role that co-worker and peer support play in mitigating employee stress (Geldart et al., 2018; Yang et al., 2015). While many have highlighted the advantages of employee assistance programs (Arthur, 2000; Milot & Borkenhagen, 2018), the potential of workplace coaching in this context remains relatively unexplored.

This may be linked to the fact that, since the inception of the first generation of workplace coaching approaches in the 1990s, only about three decades have passed (Grant, 2016). Additionally, organizational coaching research is still considered a relatively new field. Change in the organisational context can trigger a range of emotions, both negative, such as stress, and positive, like hope and satisfaction (Helpap & Bekmeier-Feuerhahn, 2016). When these changes are perceived negatively, they often have an adverse effect on well-being and can lead to pathological symptoms, affecting both employees and the workplace (Huflejt-Łukasik et al., 2022; Pasieczny, 2017). Factors such as an employee's psychological capital, including hope, efficacy, optimism, and resilience (Avey et al., 2008), perceived organisational support (Srivastava & Agrawal, 2020), and an employee's perception of fairness in change management (Georgalis et al., 2015), impact employee behaviour, emotions, and intentions to resist change (Rahman et al., 2021).

Moreover, uncertainty and job insecurity, both potential consequences of organisational change, result in psychological strain (Bordia et al., 2004) and affect employee engagement, job satisfaction, performance, and wellbeing (Asfaw & Chang, 2019; Gorgenyi-Hegyes et al., 2021; Nemteanu et al., 2021). Employees' ability to cope with uncertainty (Seikkula-Leino & Salomaa, 2020) and navigate potential negative consequences of change and restructure is of significant importance. What remains a major challenge is the presence of work-related stress amid uncertainty and the complex dynamics of change, impacting employees and leading to issues such as reduced productivity and emotional exhaustion (de Vries & de Vries, 2023).

Workplace coaching is an emerging area of research, and although it is gaining increasing attention, several scholars have raised concerns about the scarcity of empirical studies in this domain (Cannon-Bowers et al., 2023; Jones et al., 2016; Silzer et al., 2016). Therefore, contributing to empirical and scholarly discourse is crucial to address this gap. Workplace coaching has been reported to be effective in helping employees reduce workplace stress (Avey et al., 2008; Ladegard, 2011; Shimazu et al., 2005), resolve a lack of hope (Leach et al., 2011), and increase self-esteem (Whitmore, 2002; Zeus & Skiffington, 2001). Gyllensten and Palmer (2005) have highlighted a notable benefit of workplace coaching by suggesting that "coaching may help to reduce stress directly if an individual is seeking coaching to deal with stress" (p.16). This notion is also supported by other studies that have proposed the need for providing coping tools to manage work-related stress and have recommended workplace coaching, which they describe as "a method for learning and development" as a potentially effective response to this need (Ladegård, 2011, p. 29).

Workplace coaching remains an emerging area of research and practice. Given that most organisations experience change, expansion or downsizing, which can negatively affect employee wellbeing, work life balance, performance and productivity, it is important to highlight how coaching is perceived in relation to managing stress and the side effects of organisational change. The objective of the present study is to explore how workplace coaching is perceived in terms of its potential to reduce employee stress during periods of ongoing change and uncertainty. This study is part of a larger research project that employed a mixed methods research (MMR) approach. The initial two phases of the study, quantitative and qualitative, previously suggested that coaching helped to promote positive behaviour and increase employee motivation in the face of change.

This aligns with the existing literature, which has confirmed that coaching can assist employees in developing and adapting new positive behaviours (Bickerich et al., 2018; Pousa & Mathieu, 2015; Rolfe, 2010). Previous findings also suggested that confidentiality and trust are considered key factors in building an effective coach-client relationship in internal coaching (Ebrahimi, 2024a)

This paper primarily focuses on a subset of results from the quantitative phase of data collection conducted in Phase 3 of the larger study. The results section also includes a brief overview of Phases 1 and 2 of the data collection. It is essential to note that, although this paper discusses coaching in the context of change and uncertainty within organisations, it cannot provide a comprehensive review of the organisational change literature due to limitations, including word count constraints.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Building upon established knowledge and theories has been a long-standing practice essential for advancing research, refining theoretical frameworks, and guiding future empirical studies (Merton, 1968). This section reviews the literature, followed by an exploration of theoretical perspectives, methods, results, and a discussion of the findings.

2.1 Stressors, Change and the Multifaceted Nature of Employee Stress

The American Psychological Association's (APA), 2017 work and wellbeing survey highlights the interplay between change and instability in organisations and chronic work stress among employees. According to APA (2017), the online survey, distributed to 1,500 individuals working in various contract and ongoing capacities in the United States, showed that those working in organizations currently undergoing change or having recently undergone change were more than twice as likely to experience chronic work stress compared to those in organisations with no recent or ongoing changes (55.0% vs. 22.0%). Notably, APA's (2021) survey, which explored employee stress and workplace experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, reported that individuals who regularly felt tense or stressed during the workday were more than three times as likely to express intentions of seeking alternative employment within the next year (71.0% vs. 20.0%).

The World Health Organization (2020) defines work-related stress as employees' response to work pressure and job demands that exceed their competencies, knowledge, and abilities. Shahsavarani et al. (2015) provide a more comprehensive occupational perspective by defining occupational stress as "an imbalance between the mental and emotional levels of an individual in the workplace. In psychological sciences, stress is a feeling of mental pressure and tension" (p. 230). Work-related psychosocial factors, such as poor organizational climate, inadequate leadership and supervision, job insecurity, and uncertainty about job future, can contribute to the deterioration of employees' mental health (Bonde, 2008; Bronkhorst et al., 2015; Hassard et al., 2017; Netterstrøm et al., 2008).

Within an organizational context, factors like job insecurity (Adam & Flatau, 2006; Schumacher et al., 2015) and work-related psychological stress (Smollan, 2015) impact the health and wellbeing of employees (Backé et al., 2012; Tsutsumi et al., 2009; LaMontagne et al., 2007). Some studies have specifically identified chronic work-related stress as a significant predictor of physical consequences, including hypercholesteremia (high cholesterol), prolonged fatigue, headaches, and gastrointestinal issues (Salvagioni et al., 2017), among other health and wellbeing consequences of persistent work-related stress.

A study by Otto et al. (2017), based on longitudinal data from 673 employees in the finance sector in Germany, demonstrated that organizational change, combined with abusive leadership behaviour and poor supervision, increased job insecurity and reduced employees' ability to cope with change, thereby impacting their wellbeing.

The intricate and multifaceted nature of rapid and frequent organisational changes reveals a complex landscape in which factors, including employees' lack of trust in management, job insecurity, and their intentions to leave the organisation, intertwine (Ferrie et al., 2002; Isaksson et al., 2002; Moore et al., 2004; Wagstaff et al., 2016). In a comprehensive study, Fløvik et al. (2019) examined 66 Norwegian organisations across diverse public and private sectors, professions, and company sizes to assess the impact of organisational change on employees. The results revealed that repeated organisational changes contributed to uncertainty, depleted employees' coping resources, and significantly diminished their sense of job predictability and future employability. Other studies have highlighted the concept of 'change fatigue,' which arises from repeated organisational changes and restructures, leading to employee emotional exhaustion and stress, primarily due to the accompanying uncertainty (de Vries & de Vries, 2023).

There are many studies that have explored the effects of work-related stress on performance, productivity and job satisfaction (Iskamto, 2021; Daniel, 2019; Shahu & Gole, 2008; Rizwan et al., 2014). Employees' sense of predictability regarding both present and future job prospects could also be affected by exposure to extensive workplace changes (Probst, 2003; Baillien & De Witte, 2009). Change naturally involves some degree of uncertainty regarding the outcome and future. As Callan (1993) indicated wisely that while promoting healthy response is of significant importance, not many organisations fully acknowledge their role to support their employees in the face of change.

Some recent studies in the context of changes in the workplace caused by the global COVID-19 pandemic also highlight the significant role of leaders, co-workers and organisational support to help employees deal with change more effectively (Da et al., 2022; Lee, 2021). So far, the workplace coaching literature indicates that workplace coaches can play an important role to equip managers and leaders with coaching skills (Grant, 2016) and "buffer the negative consequences that changes may have on an individual" (Huflejt-Łukasik et al., 2022, p.1).

The sources of stress, often referred to as stressors, can vary based on the organisation, industry, role, work environment, and specific context (Park & Min, 2020; Maqsoom et al., 2020). For instance, whether an employee works in an organisation undergoing frequent changes and the level of support provided by management during these times can influence severity and experiences of work-related stress. Moreover, the literature indicates that responses to stress can manifest in three primary domains: 1) emotional responses, encompassing feelings of anxiety, depression, worry, tension, and fatigue; 2) behavioural reactions, which may include withdrawal, aggression, and demotivation; and 3) cognitive effects, leading to reduced performance capacity and difficulties in concentration (Cooper, 1987; Michie, 2002).

Expanding on the facets discussed above, the significance of emotions and their interplay with human behaviour within organisations, as well as their implications for employee stress, performance, and overall wellbeing, has been the subject of extensive exploration by many researchers (Ashkanasy & Daus, 2002; Ashkanasy & Dorris, 2017; Muchinsky, 2000). Furthermore, the literature suggests that individuals possessing elevated emotional intelligence, characterised by traits such as heightened self-awareness and the capacity to discern the emotions of others, may be better equipped to effectively manage work-related stress (Arora, 2017). If we consider stress a threat to wellbeing, as proposed by Raudeliunaite and Volff (2020), mitigating stress should potentially help to improve wellbeing. As LaMontagne et al. (2014) point out, what is important here is that wellbeing does not refer to the absence of the negative; instead, wellbeing is most correctly defined and measured as the presence of positive feelings and well-functioning (p. 4).

As suggested by previous research on positive emotions (Diener et al., 2020; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), the potential effectiveness of workplace coaching in mitigating employee stress raises the prospect of positive individual and organisational outcomes, thus warranting further investigation.

As discussed earlier, changes in organisations can yield both positive and negative reactions, with the latter often impacting employee wellbeing and performance. Given that the association between psychological strains, uncertainty, and job insecurity has been confirmed by other scholars (Bordia et al., 2004) and the notion that coaching interventions can be effective in buffering individuals from stress (Creswell et al., 2005), it is reasonable to question whether coaching is perceived as a viable approach to mitigate work-related stress.

It is essential to acknowledge that other effective methods of assistance, such as workplace-based counselling and psychotherapeutic interventions for stress management (Riedel et al., 2017), have been widely utilised and proven to be beneficial (Arthur, 2000; Riedel et al., 2017). However, as Ladegård (2011) has pointed out, while stress management interventions may be employed for individuals with clinical levels of stress, coaching interventions, aimed at helping clients acquire skills, insights, and support, can be effective for non-clinical populations.

2.2 Workplace Coaching as Helping Intervention

Coaching considered as a science rather than an art (Passmore & Tee, 2020) has been defined in various ways by different scholars and practitioners. It is often described as a facilitation approach focused on "unlocking a person's potential to maximize their own performance" (Whitmore, 1992, p3). Coaching is also described as a developmental intervention (Grover & Furnham, 2016), or as an approach with a focus on "enhancing both the performance and the well-being of individuals and organisations" (Grant, 2016, p.1).

Workplace coaching is generally provided in two forms: internal or external, or a combination of both. Internal coaches are staff members of the organisation where they work and provide coaching to their colleagues for their individual and professional growth (Ebrahimi, 2024b, Frisch, 2001; John-Brooks, 2014). External coaches, on the other hand, are independent practitioners from outside organisations who are contracted to provide coaching for a specific duration based on contractual obligations (Nicolau et al., 2023).

While there are perceived advantages and disadvantages in each approach (Schalk & Landeta, 2017), particularly depending on the context, it can be said that internal coaches are comparable to external coaches, with the exception that they work in the same organisation as their coachee (Carter, 2005). This article does not intend to explore or identify the distinctions between the two. Rather, for the purpose of this article, both internal and external coaching are considered as forms of workplace coaching.

Some studies have also emphasised the role of coaching in facilitating and fostering learning, as well as the acquisition of new skills and knowledge (Fillery-Travis & Lane, 2006; Kilburg, 1996; Morris, 2000; Yip et al., 2020). For instance, Ladegård (2011) conducted a study to investigate the influence of learning experiences and the acquisition of new skills and insights through coaching on an individual's ability to manage stress. The study included a sample population of 56 individuals who received 10 coaching hours over a 3-month period, aimed at helping them manage work-related stress. The study was theoretically underpinned by self-regulation theory, with a focus on the impact of coaching on stress through learning experiences, particularly emphasising insight and planning skills.

The results demonstrated that planning skills, acquired through coaching, were particularly effective in reducing work-related stress in the short term. Among various coaching approaches, Cognitive Behavioural Coaching (CBC) has gained attention as a structured, evidence-based methodology that integrates principles of cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) into non-clinical coaching contexts (Neenan & Palmer, 2001). CBC is derived from the foundational work of Beck (1976) and Ellis (1994), and is grounded in the principles and practices of CBT. Related frameworks, such as Cognitive Behavioural Stress Management Coaching (CBSC), aim to improve coping strategies through self-reflection (Traut-Mattausch et al., 2021), aligning closely with Ladegård's (2011) findings, which demonstrated positive outcomes for individuals who received coaching to help manage work-related stress. At the core of these coaching methodologies and theoretical approaches is the process of learning new skills and enhancing emotional awareness, self-regulation and coping mechanisms.

It is essential to recognize that learning is a multifaceted process, and one of the key influencers of learning is emotions (Pekrun, 2011). In this context, workplace coaching becomes even more crucial as a helping intervention in organizations characterized by turbulence, transitions, changes, and restructuring. These changes increase the pressure on learning (Davachi et al., 2010), and learning under stress presents numerous challenges and difficulties (Vogel & Schwabe, 2016; Shors, 2004). Therefore, it can be proposed that if workplace coaching reduces work-related stress, it may, in turn, improve learning, among other benefits that coaching is known to offer.

While earlier studies have suggested that coaching helps foster resilience (Taylor, 1997), increase cognitive hardiness, mental health, and hope (Green et al., 2007), enhance goal commitment and goal attainment (Spence & Grant, 2007), reduce depression and stress, and assist clients in dealing with organisational change (Grant et al., 2009), the scholarly literature regarding the utility of workplace coaching to help employees manage stress in the face of change and uncertainty remains in its nascent stage, with limited scholarly attention directed toward this intriguing area.

David et al. (2016) conducted a study with 59 middle and top managers in the banking sector who received coaching. The results showed that coaching was effective in improving their performance and in managing their distress and depressed mood. Managing stress and the ability to meet key performance indicators and achieve individual and organisational goals are crucial for sustaining both individual and organisational effectiveness. Berg et al. (2008) conducted a study and distributed a survey questionnaire to 1141 white-collar workers in the commercial services industry, revealing evidence that work ability was associated with psychosocial factors at work, such as teamwork, stress handling, and self-development. It is important to note that the authors elaborated the concept of work ability, which was based on the assumption that "work ability is determined by an individual's perception of the demands at work and the ability to cope with them" (Berg et al., 2008, p.1029).

Workplace coaching as a developmental intervention (Grover & Fernham, 2016) with and with a focus "on enhancing both the performance and the wellbeing of individuals and organisations" (Grant, 2016, p.1) and with a potential to be utilised as a tool to improve coping (Quiun, 2018) and teamwork performance (Aldrin & Utama, 2019) may also support work ability of individuals which is important particularly under distressing, challenging and uncertain times of change and restructure.

2.3 Theoretical Perspectives

To better understand the role of workplace coaching in reducing work-related stress during organizational change, several key theoretical perspectives offer valuable insights into the mechanisms that underpin coaching's effectiveness. Cognitive Appraisal Theory, advanced in 1966 by psychologist Richard Lazarus, focuses on how individuals assess and respond to stressors (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This theory, in organisational context, helps understand highlight how employees appraise organizational change as a threat or challenge and how coaching can help reframe these perceptions to reduce stress.

Similarly, the theory of Psychological Capital (PsyCap) encompasses key elements such as self-efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism (Wang et al., 2022), which can be crucial for navigating periods of change. While this theory itself does not directly link to coaching, it underscores the importance of fostering these positive psychological attributes within the workforce. In this light, coaching can play a supportive role in enhancing PsyCap, thereby empowering employees to better manage uncertainty and stress during change and organisational transitions. Another relevant perspective is Self-Regulation Theory, which examines how individuals manage their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. This theory aligns with existing behavioral, cognitive, and cognitive-behavioural models of adaptation, but it also extends beyond them by outlining the problem-solving and action-oriented processes that facilitate optimal adjustments and maximise outcomes (Mithaug, 1993).

In this context, coaching can aid in developing self-regulation skills (Mühlberger et al., 20245), enabling employees to cope more effectively with stress, achieve optimal adjustment, maintain motivation, and achieve performance goals. Other theories such as Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Theory also explain how job demands can lead to strain, while job resources (e.g., workplace coaching) can help mitigate these demands and promote employee resilience, wellbeing and productivity (Taris & Schaufeli, 2015). Similarly, the Job-Demand-Control-Support (JDCS) model offers valuable insights into managing workplace stress by demonstrating how high job demands can lead to employee stress (Karasek & Theorell, 1990), which can be mitigated through increased autonomy, support tools and interventions, and assistance from supervisors and colleagues (e.g. internal coaches, peer coaches).

3. METHODOLOGY

The present study, a constituent of a larger research project that employed a Mixed Methods Research (MMR) approach. The research question guiding this study was based on what effect can coaching have on behavior during corporate restructure? This paper focuses on the aspect of how coaching was perceived to mitigate stress and uncertainty during organisational change, a key component of behavioral outcomes explored within the broader project. The larger study encompassed three phases of data collection (Ebrahimi, 2016). Ethics approval was obtained from the institutional ethics committee and informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

The first phase involved quantitative data collection using an online survey instrument to conduct a general assessment of coaching activities in rail organization's across Australia. A simple random sampling method was utilised in both quantitative phases of this study. In the second phase, qualitative, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 25 participants from two of the largest rail organizations in the country. The third phase, which is the main focus of this paper, involved the collection of quantitative data through an online survey questionnaire.

Results based on a subset of data from the third phase of data collection are reported in this paper. In Phase 3 of data collection, organizations were selected via simple random sampling from a comprehensive list of rail companies. An email invitation was sent to 128 randomly-selected organizations; 52 replied (40.6% response rate). Although the sampling frame was random, the analyzed dataset represents a self-selected subset of responders and may be subject to non-response bias. The survey instrument was piloted internally first to identify whether the questions were clear, well-understood, and free of ambiguity. Piloting allowed to assess whether the survey was too long or too short, and whether the questions were logically structured and didn't lead to response bias. The survey employed a "self-completion" method (Hair et al., 2003) and was delivered via email. Data analysis, a crucial process that informs decision-making (Hellerstein, 2008), was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS), a widely recognised software for statistical data analysis (Masuadi et al., 2021).

Importantly, this study relies solely on self-reported data from employees regarding their perceptions of coaching's role in reducing stress during organisational change; no objective measures of stress or direct assessments of coaching outcomes were collected. The limitations of this approach, particularly the need for caution when interpreting the results, are outlined in the Limitations section of the paper.

To ensure data quality, data cleaning, a significant component and a primary goal also employed in exploratory data analysis (Dasu & Johnson, 2003), was carried out. This process involved a thorough review of the data for inconsistencies, anomalies, and omissions (Ridzuan & Zainon, 2019). Subsequently, the data were analysed. It was observed that all respondents had completed the survey and responded to questions that were pertinent to the objective of the current study. To provide context for the reader, I offer a brief overview of Phases 1 and 2 of the study before presenting the results of Phase 3.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Phase 1 (Quantitative: A General Scan)

The Phase 1 survey questionnaire was sent to 129 rail organisations via email invitations through the Australian Railway Association (ARA), resulting in 65 responses. In Phase 1, respondents were also asked about their perceived main benefits that the use of coaching could offer to their organisation. As shown in Table 1, reduced employee stress, addressing behavioural issues, assisting in smoother organisational change, productivity, employee retention, and succession planning were mostly considered as important benefits.

Table 1: Perceived Organisational Benefits of Coaching Identified by Participants

	N	Percentage	Percent of Cases
Better integration of employees from overseas	8	2.3%	16.7%
Employees- reduced stress levels	14	4.1%	29.2%
Employees- verification of competency	20	5.8%	41.7%
Coaches as role models for building coaching culture	22	6.4%	45.8%
Smoother organisational and transformational change	24	7.0%	50.0%

Employees- behavioural issues addressed	24	7.0%	50.0%
Employees- raised self-awareness	28	8.1%	58.3%
Employees- performance issues addressed	30	8.7%	62.5%
Better integration of employees into new jobs	32	9.3%	66.7%
More strategic perspective taken	33	9.6%	68.8%
Increased productivity	34	9.9%	70.8%
Employee retention	36	10.4%	75.0%
Succession preparation	40	11.6%	83.3%
Total	345	100.0%	

Phase 1 served as a preliminary exploration of coaching activities and their significance within rail organisations. The insights gained from these responses informed the subsequent phases of the study.

4.2 Phase 2 (Qualitative: Semi-structured interviews)

As stated in the Introduction, this study primarily reports findings from a subset of quantitative data derived from Phase 3 of the larger study. However, the following excerpts from the qualitative results are included to provide additional context and background that may be of interest to the reader. The second phase consisted of semi-structured interviews with 25 participants, including managers, internal coaches, external coaches, and coachees from two of the largest rail organisations in Australia. Interview participants reported that workplace coaching contributed to positive behaviour adaptation and increased work motivation. In this phase participants also reported that for internal coaching practices to be more effective, confidentiality and trust within the coaching relationship needed to be addressed and that internal coaching interventions needed to take a more formal approach. The qualitative results served as the foundation for the subsequent analysis, which led to the findings of Phase 3, pertinent to the present paper.

> *...the comment I often got from many of them was that the coaching program for them, or the coaching engagement, was actually really worthwhile during the reform because it gave them somebody to talk to, it kept their motivation up* [External Coach 2]

> The coach was the one that was able to help that person through and sustain and to be able to stay motivated and achieve KPIs [Manager 4]

> *…whether or not we can give them some coaching to reduce their stress and keep them motivated depends on our financial resources and what the guys at the top think* [Internal Coach 4]

4.3 Phase 3 (Quantitative: Results Relevant to The Present Study)

The survey questionnaire in this phase, utilized for data collection, was distributed to a total of 128 potential rail organizations, encompassing both the public and private sectors, through the Australian Railway Association.

The distribution method involved sending email invitations that included a hyperlink to the online survey questionnaire. A total of 52 responses were received, resulting in an overall response rate of 40.6%. In terms

of demographic information, the respondents included both males (n = 31) and females (n = 20), accounting for 59.6% male and 38.5% female respondents in the total sample. When inquired about the duration of their employment with their respective organizations, 30.8% of respondents reported '10 years or more,' 28.8% indicated '5–10 years,' and 25% noted '3–5 years.' As indicated in Table 2, the majority of respondents (n = 42) expressed that both internal and external forms of coaching were suitable.

Table 2: Participant Preferences for Coaching Program Options in Their Organization

		Frequency	Percentage
	Internal coaches	6.0	11.5
Valid	External coaches	2.0	3.8
	Mix of internal and external	42	80.8
	Total	50	96.2
Missing	System	2.0	3.8
Total		52	100.0

The results revealed that 42.3% of respondents had received internal coaching within the past 12 months, while 19.2% of the participants reported having received coaching from an external coach during the same period. Additionally, 34.6% of respondents mentioned that they had provided coaching to others within their organisation. Consequently, it can be inferred that the respondents comprised a mix, with the majority having prior experience and familiarity with coaching.

Participants were asked about whether organizational changes and restructures had influenced their career future in their current role or in the past. As indicated in Table 3, the majority of respondents noted that corporate changes and organizational restructures had somewhat impacted their career future. It is important to note that significant organizational changes and turbulence were reported in previous phases that had impacted rail organizations and this must be taken into consideration while interpreting these results.

Table 3: Impact of Organizational Change on Perceived Career Uncertainty

		Frequency	Percentage
	A great deal	15	28.8
Valid	Somewhat	27	51.9
	Little	10	19.2
	Total	52	100.0

Survey respondents were asked about their involvement in providing or receiving internal and external coaching within the previous 12 months. This was a crucial step in examining and evaluating any potential bias in responses to questions related to an uncertain career future (refer to Table 3). For instance, it was assumed that recent coaching experiences might have influenced their perceptions of past events that led to an uncertain career future, potentially introducing bias into their self-reports regarding job insecurity and uncertainty in the past.

An analysis of their responses revealed that there was no statistically significant association between receiving internal coaching and their responses concerning an uncertain career future, as evidenced by Fisher's exact test with a p-value of .87.

Further analyses were conducted to explore differences in responses between individuals who had received coaching from an 'external coach' and those who had not. The results indicated that there was no statistically significant association between receiving external coaching and their responses concerning uncertain career prospects, as determined by Fisher's exact test (p = .65). This suggests that regardless of whether survey respondents had received coaching in the past 12 months or not, their responses regarding the impact of organisational changes on their perception of an uncertain career future were consistent. It's important to clarify that this analysis did not measure the direct impact of coaching on uncertainty. Table 4 illustrates participants' responses to the question regarding the extent to which they believed coaching could reduce work-related stress amidst continual organisational restructuring. The results showed that 59.6% of respondents believed coaching could significantly reduce stress during organisational restructuring.

Table 4: Participant Perceptions of Coaching as a Strategy to Reduce Work-Related Stress During Organisational Change

		Frequency	Percentage
	A great deal	31	59.6
Valid	Somewhat	18	34.6
	Little	2	3.8
	Not sure	1	1.9
	Total	52	100.0

Importantly, this study did not measure the relative effectiveness of internal coaching versus external coaching in reducing work-related stress. However, statistical analyses aimed at identifying differences in responses between those who had received coaching within the past 12 months and those who had not indicated no statistically significant association between receiving internal coaching (Fisher's exact test p = .27) or external coaching (Fisher's exact test p = .19) and the belief that coaching has potential to reduce work-related stress during times of change. These findings suggest that while statistical significance was not established, a majority of respondents, regardless of whether they had received internal or external coaching in the past year, believed that coaching could significantly or somewhat help to reduce work-related stress.

4.4 Discussion

Existing literature confirms that organizations undergo change for various reasons, and such changes at the organizational level can be unsettling and lead to uncertainty among employees (DeGhetto et al., 2017). The findings from this current study strongly support this notion, indicating that organizational changes and restructures can heighten job insecurity and create an uncertain career outlook. It is concerning to note that a majority of respondents reported experiencing uncertain career futures at some point in their roles when they faced change and restructure in their organizations. This may be attributed to the multiple restructures and ongoing changes they have experienced in the years leading up to their participation in this study.

It is also important to note that context and the industry in which data were collected should be taken into account when generalising these findings to other industries and sectors. Therefore, any applicability and generalisation of the findings should be done with caution. Australia's rail industry, for a long time, was

traditionally a workplace that employees spent the large majority of their entire career in that sector and the industry heavily relies on the skills and knowledge that is gained through decades and are passed to new personnel. Moreover, the ageing workforce, skills shortages and regular reforms and major changes in rail sector puts rail workforce in a considerably more vulnerable position compared to many other sectors (Young et al. 2020).

The literature has consistently shown that job insecurity and uncertainty about one's career future are major sources of stress and can lead to other psychological strains (Bordia et al., 2004; Smollan, 2015). As discussed earlier in this article, it is well-established that change can lead to uncertainty and job insecurity, which, in turn, can impact various aspects of employee performance, engagement, satisfaction, and overall health and wellbeing (Backé et al., 2012; Tsutsumi et al., 2009; LaMontagne et al., 2007). The results of this study emphasise the need for continued and proactive efforts to support employees in coping with the consequences of an uncertain career future and job insecurity, as discussed earlier in this paper.

The findings of the current study contribute compelling evidence to the growing body of literature on workplace coaching, which is perceived as playing an important role in helping employees reduce work-related stress during challenging and uncertain times of organisational change and restructuring. Previous literature had suggested that support, whether from within an organisation or external sources, can assist employees in coping with work-related stress (Smollan, 2017).

Specifically, coaching appears to function through several interrelated mechanisms. First, by facilitating a cognitive reappraisal of stressors, coaching interventions help employees reinterpret organisational changes as challenges and opportunities rather than threats—a process grounded in Cognitive Appraisal Theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Second, coaching may bolster individuals' psychological capital—enhancing self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism which equips employees with the personal resources necessary to cope with uncertainty (Avey et al., 2008; Wang et al., 2022). Third, the development of self-regulation skills through coaching, as discussed by Mühlberger et al. (2025), offers employees strategies to manage their emotional responses and behaviors effectively during change. These interlocking processes help explain why coaching is perceived to reduce work-related stress.

As previously reported (APA, 2021), high levels of stress at work are associated with an increased tendency among employees to consider changing jobs. Building on the findings of the present study, it can be postulated that if workplace coaching is effective in reducing work-related stress, it may also contribute to improved employee retention and decreased turnover rates. However, this must be explored further empirically to establish stronger evidence to support this assumption.

Furthermore, it appears that regardless of whether coaching—internal or external—is already offered within organisations, coaching shows strong potential in addressing work-related stress. It can be generalised that workplace coaching, within the Australian rail industry context—characterized by long-standing employment relationships, unique career pathways, and sector-specific challenges—workplace coaching appears to be percieved as a valuable resource for reducing work-related stress; however, caution is warranted in generalizing these findings to other industries without further comparative research (Young et al., 2020).

It is also important to note that the literature has long recognized stress as a significant threat to wellbeing (Raudeliunaite & Volff, 2020). Summarizing the discussion in light of the current study's findings and in alignment with existing literature defining wellbeing as feeling good and functioning effectively

(Jarden et al., 2015), it can be generally inferred that workplace coaching, with its potential to aid in mitigating work-related stress, may also contribute to improved wellbeing. This generalization is consistent with literature suggesting that wellbeing is positively associated with improved positive emotions (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Therefore, given that organizational change is reported to potentially lead to uncertainty, negative emotions, and work-related stress, workplace coaching can play a pivotal role in creating opportunities for positive change in individuals and within the workplace.

5. CONCLUSION

The current study being a segment of a larger study enhanced our understanding that change and restructure can cause a great deal of uncertainty and workplace coaching can potentially mitigate stress, and subsequently, contribute to improve wellbeing, performance, retention and productivity. Findings presented in this paper suggest that organizational change and restructuring, depending on the organization and the type of change, may lead to significant career uncertainty and job insecurity. The findings indicate that both internal and external coaching are utilized in organizations and that employees who receive either form of coaching perceive workplace coaching as having strong potential to reduce work-related stress during periods of change and uncertainty. These findings have significant implications for organizations, policy makers and coaching practitioners, emphasizing the need to draw on evidence from diverse sectors and industries when designing coaching programs that mitigate employee stress during periods of change and uncertainty. Effective support strategies should integrate coaching with existing employee assistance programs and mental health initiatives, ensuring these resources are accessible to employees at all levels of the organizational hierarchy.

6. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The main limitation of this study is its focus on a single sector and relatively small sample size, which may limit the generalisability of the findings to other contexts. This study did not assess or measure stress and coaching effectiveness; therefore, its findings are modest and primarily serve as a contribution to the broader discourse on workplace coaching. Additionally, due to reliance on self-report measures, the study does not allow for conclusions regarding the directionality or causality of the relationship between coaching perceptions and work-related stress. Additionally, future studies should aim to boost response rates (e.g. through follow-up reminders or incentives), and, where possible, compare basic characteristics of responders versus non-responders to assess potential bias. Future studies should consider employing longitudinal or experimental designs, along with objective stress measures, to elucidate the causal mechanisms and validate the preliminary perceptions observed in this study. While many organizations currently provide referrals to therapeutic services, such as employee assistance programs (EAPs) or formal counselling, to support employees in managing work-related stress during periods of change, future research should evaluate the efficacy of coaching as a proactive intervention for employees experiencing stress but not requiring clinical psychological treatment.

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