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Review

Towards Personal Sustainability: Renewal as an Antidote to Stress

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Abstract: Research about stress management has traditionally focused on reducing possible stressors. However, more recent studies have highlighted the importance of renewal as an antidote to stress. The purpose of this paper is to provide a theoretical explanation of how renewal activities can invoke a psycho-physiological response that enhances personal sustainability. By drawing upon recent evidence from the fields of medicine, psychology, and management, we developed a conceptual understanding of how renewal activities are characterized by the movement of the individual from a negative to a positive psycho-physiological state. Such a transition happens over a tipping point, which people can enact in themselves and in others through emotional and social intelligence competencies. We illustrate this proposition with the specific case of ideal self-based coaching in the workplace that can enhance personal sustainability among both leaders and their team members.

Keywords: personal sustainability; coaching; intentional change theory; stress; renewal

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1. Introduction

Continuously increasing professional demands have been leading to severe mental and physical distress among workers globally. A recently published study by the World Health Organization (WHO) showed that long working hours led to 745,000 deaths from stroke and ischemic heart disease in 2016, which was a 29 per cent increase since 2000 [1]. The global COVID-19 pandemic significantly added to these challenges. Feelings of fear and apprehension about having or contracting the virus impact critical work, home, and health outcomes [2]. Stress levels have jumped for many workers, but more so for working parents, particularly mothers, several of whom have been experiencing burnout [3]. It is in this context that there has been renewed scholarly attention on mitigating stress and enhancing personal sustainability in the fast-changing landscape of modern careers.

However, most studies on managing stress and reducing burnout have focused on reducing stressors, and the alternative approach of enhancing renewal has been relatively less studied [4]. Renewal activities are those activities that allow our bodies and minds to renew or rejuvenate, thus acting as an antidote to stress. Therefore, a focus on renewal, alongside stress, is likely to be a more holistic way of enhancing personal sustainability. Future research in this domain will require a better understanding of the psycho-physiological aspects of personal renewal. At a practical level, educators and managers will benefit from approaches such as developmental coaching techniques grounded in the theory of personal sustainability.

Therefore, based on the above-mentioned research and practical needs, the objective of this paper is to provide a conceptual understanding of how renewal activities can invoke a psycho-physiological response that enhances personal sustainability. We do this in the following ways. First, by drawing upon previously published medical, psychological, and management studies, we show that personal renewal and sustainability can be understood in terms of a movement across "tipping points" between two distinct psycho-physiological states. Since these states themselves are comprised of distinct emotional, psychological,

physiological, and neurological characteristics, they offer a promising theoretical framework to understand the underlying mechanisms behind how some people are able to attain better personal sustainability than others [4,5]. Next, we will describe these two states as Positive and Negative Emotional Attractors (PEA and NEA) [5], and will explain how a movement from NEA to PEA enhances personal sustainability. Finally, regarding the concerns around managing stress and improving personal sustainability at work, we explain how enhancing our emotional and social intelligence competencies can help in this process. As a practical approach, we throw light on the importance of coaching with a focus on the ideal self. The ideal self is the aspirational personal vision of one's future [6]. Such coaching is an effective workplace application of this concept to improve the personal sustainability of oneself and others [7,8]. Using the theoretical lens of the Intentional Change Theory [5], and more recent findings on the neuroscience of coaching [9], we will explain why this method is effective. We conclude the article with a discussion about the implications for future research and practice.

2. Understanding Personal Sustainability as Renewal

2.1. Personal Sustainability

Health is defined by the WHO as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" ([10] p. 1). A major factor that is detrimental to sustained good health is stress, which is ubiquitous in modern life. It keeps putting demands on individuals, engendering physical and psychological responses such as inflammation, heart disease, and psychosomatic symptoms [11]. There are different types of stress: chronic, acute, and traumatic. Individuals need to respond, recover, and renew from different types of stress in a sustainable way in order to carry out essential functions in a satisfactory manner [12].

The study of stress stemmed from Hans Selye's [13] study on stress syndrome, which he termed as general adaptation syndrome. Chronic stress is mild mental arousal, mainly emotional distress, in one's daily life [13]. It can range from small fights with spouse or children at home to managing tasks, and interpersonal relationships at work. Acute stress is caused by acute major life events, such as the major illness of one's spouse, death of a family member, or sudden change in financial status [14]. Traumatic stress comes from being personally in life-threatening events, such as terrorist attacks, physical assault, natural disasters, and wars [14].

Building personal sustainability requires individuals to be aware of the stress, manage the stress, and also thrive from it [4,15]. This means that individuals will have to demonstrate consistent stress management behavior in various contexts. Research on stress management has offered suggestions on a diverse set of behaviors that can enhance the human body's endogenous ability to self-regulate stress and stressors, i.e., auto-regulatory stress management [16]. For example, participating in pleasurable and/or social activities [17], exercising [18], relaxing through meditation or prayer [19], and ensuring appropriate nutrition and diet [20] can all improve longevity through underlying molecular and neurobiological pathways. This stream of research allows us to move from stress reduction towards amelioration of the mind and body—i.e., personal renewal, which we will discuss in detail in the following section.

2.2. Renewal as a Distinct Construct from Stress Reduction

The medical and psychological literature has numerous publications on measuring and managing stressors. These studies have generally focused on assessing change in life and lifestyle [16]; impact of stressful events, particularly traumatic events [21], the magnitude of the stressful event [22], and daily stressors as micro-events that accumulate over time [23]. An effective way of managing stress in our lives is to reduce the number and frequency of stressful experiences. Stressful experiences involve the activation of the Sympathetic Nervous System (SNS), which has a central place in homeostasis in general, and in circulatory adaptation in particular [24–26].

A different approach involves the role of what has been collectively described as renewal experiences or activities. The nomenclature comes from the understanding that such activities help the body and mind to ameliorate the negative impact of stressful experiences [4,14]. Such recovery activities, according to a meta-analysis, enable psychological detachment from work-related stress, and has been related to better mental and physical health, state well-being, and task performance [27].

Research is now rapidly throwing light on the physiological mechanisms that enable personal renewal through a range of activities. Studies have indicated that physical activity influences baseline electrocortical function and that it might affect cognitive operations [28]. Mindfulness practice improves emotion regulation and reduces stress because the fronto-limbic networks involved in these processes show various patterns of engagement during such practice [29]. Spending time with family and friends after work in helping the person recuperate from the impact of work-related stressors [30,31]. How social interactions can have affective and cognitive impacts on people is being better understood by research on the "social brain", i.e., those regions of the brain that are engaged in the processing of social information and the articulation of social actions [32]. Research in this area is showing us not only how social interactions can increase stress in some situations, but how they can help us recover from it when conditions are different.

While the neurobiological correlates of these different renewal activities are diverse, one consistent theme in several studies is that renewal involves activation of the parasympathetic limb of the autonomic nervous system, referred to as the Parasympathetic Nervous System (PNS), which originates from medial medullary sites and is modulated by the hypothalamus [33]. For example, a study that evaluated the effect of *Pranayama*, the yoga-based method of alternate and deep nostril breathing, showed that this exercise enhances the PNS significantly [34]. Another study showed that deep breathing attenuates the information transmission from the SNS to the PNS [35]. The value of this movement from SNS to PNS is underscored by the fact that stress reduction efforts can bring a person into mild stress (i.e., SNS) state [8]. However, the negative effects of cognitive, perceptual and emotional impairment remain if even mild stress arousal continues over time. The only antidote is to reverse these processes (i.e., PNS), interrupt the secretions, and change the negative effects on the person. In that sense, "renewal" is a label we give to arousal of the PNS in the context of the physical and psychological amelioration of the individual [4,9].

A review of the medical and psychological literature by Boyatzis and colleagues specified what constitutes the activities that help with renewal and enable personal sustainability in the long run [4]. The development and validation of the Personal Sustainability Index (PSI), which consisted of seventeen renewal activities (such as playing with a pet, meditating, or mentoring someone), showed that both the variety and frequency of such activities are predictors of subjective well-being, engagement at work, and career satisfaction [4]. The PSI is a novel approach to the study of personal sustainability because in it renewal is not assessed as low stress but as actual experiences that likely invoke the PNS, thereby enhancing the recovery of the person from stress-inducing events in other aspects of their daily life.

The implication of the above discussion is that renewal involves a movement from SNS to PNS activation. This constitutes what is referred to as movement across "tipping points" between two distinct psycho-physiological states comprised of distinct emotional, psychological, physiological, and neurological characteristics [5,6]. These two states, called the Positive Emotional Attractors (PEA) and Negative Emotional Attractors (NEA), are emotional in the sense that they are primarily affective in nature, and attractors in the sense that when plotted on a three-dimensional graph, they constitute a bounded region in phase-space towards which the forward trajectories of most nearby points converge. Many of these physiological, neurological, emotional, and cognitive correlates that constitute the theoretically postulated emotional attractors have been empirically validated in recent years through both laboratory and field studies.

At the physiological level, the PEA is characterized by greater parasympathetic influence, the release of oxytocin and vasopressin associated with social bonding, decreased blood pressure, and higher heart rate variability; the NEA is characterized by greater sympathetic influence, the release of epinephrine and norepinephrine to mobilize defenses, the release of cortisol, increased blood pressure and rate of breathing, and lower heart rate variability [5]. At a neurological level, the PEA is characterized by Default mode network (DMN) activation and neurogenesis, while the NEA is characterized by Task positive network (TPN) and inhibited neurogenesis [5]. The DMN is a neural network that primarily includes simultaneous activation of the prefrontal cortex (MPFC), the medial parietal cortex (MPC), posterior cingulate cortex (PCC), and the right temparo-parietal junction, and it has been associated with resting and regenerative purposes [5,9]. On the other hand, the TPN is primarily comprised of parts of the dorsal attention system, the frontoparietal control network, and the ventral attention network, and is activated by tasks requiring focused attention, working memory, logical reasoning, mathematical reasoning, and causal/mechanical reasoning [5,9]. At an emotional level, the PEA is characterized by positive effects: hope, joy, amusement, and elation; while the NEA is characterized by negative effects: defensiveness, guilt, shame, fear, and anxiety [5,36]. At a cognitive level, the PEA is characterized by enhanced working memory and perceptual openness, global attention, and promotion focus; while the NEA is characterized by decreased executive functioning, limited field vision/perception, local attention, and prevention focus [37]. At a relational level, the PEA is characterized by resonant relationships, that are characterized by hope, compassion, mindfulness and playfulness [5].

The relevance of this framework of self-regulating states lies in the fact that they help us visualize whether a person is in either an overall positive or negative affective state. Plotted on a three-dimensional graph, with PNS-SNS arousal, positive-negative effect, and DMN-TPN activation to represent the physiological, affective, and neurological dimensions respectively, the PEA and NEA can be visualized as emotional attractors (Figure 1). Since self-regulating states are inherently homeostatic [5], degeneration will likely occur over time. As we know that negative emotions have a stronger impact compared to positive emotions [38], people will tend to move into an NEA state over time if there is no effort to maintain the PEA state. Therefore, salient emotional events, or a series of such smaller events, that can act as a "tipping point" to move the person from PEA to NEA are required at regular intervals to help maintain the PEA state [6,9].

There are several ways in which being in a PEA state enhances personal sustainability. The various features of PEA, such as positive effects and emotions [39], relational trust and psychological safety [40], self-efficacy and hope [41], and values and purpose [42] are related to thriving, resilience, and vitality, thereby enhancing personal sustainability in the long run. For example, a study showed that in the wake of the 11 September attacks, positive emotions such as gratitude, interest, and love, helped in precrisis resilience and postcrisis growth among participants [39]. Another study among part-time graduate students showed that a sense of psychological safety can enhance feelings of vitality among workers, which in turn can increase levels of creativity [40]. Yet another study in the context of 11 September showed that a firm's moral purpose can be a motivational factor in and of itself during times of crises [42]. In general, the three dimensions of PEA collectively and individually enhance the resilience of individuals and groups. At the same time, there are several ways in which the NEA inhibits personal sustainability. The various features of NEA, such as negative effects and emotions [43], lack of relational trust and psychological safety [44], hopelessness [45], and a lack of meaning or purpose [46], have been related to burnout and reduced personal sustainability.

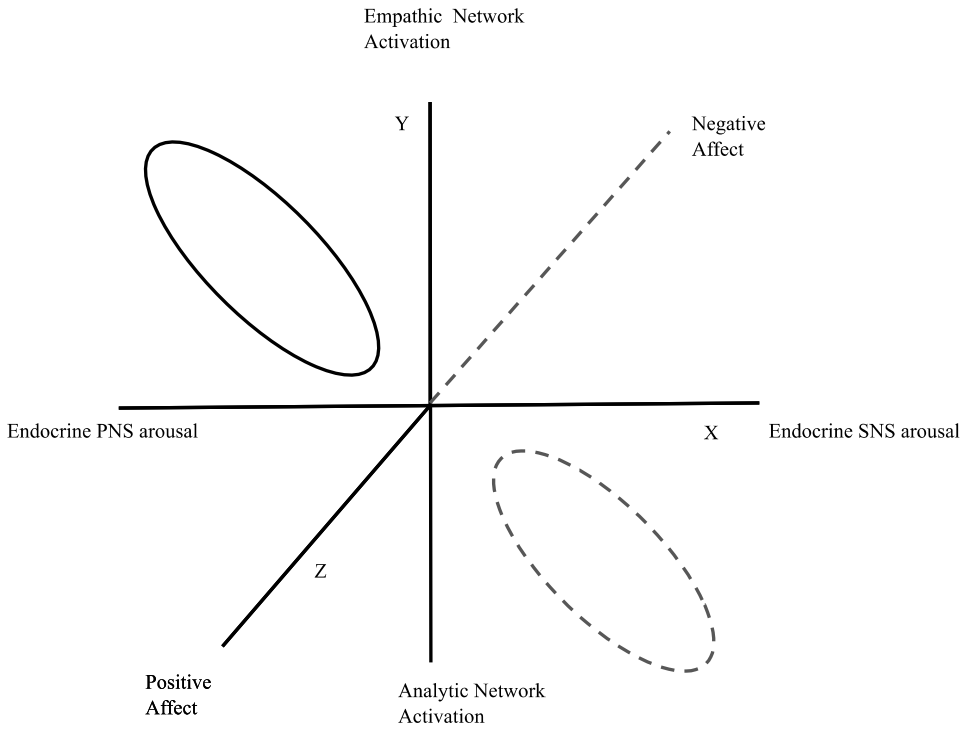

Figure 1. Graphical representation of the Positive (PEA) and Negative Emotional Attractors (NEA) in Intentional Change Theory (dotted part of the z axis and the NEA ellipse are behind the visual plane of the paper); Adapted from Boyatzis, Rochford, & Taylor (2015). [5].

3. Forms of Coaching That Enhance Personal Renewal

Since maintaining oneself or others in the PEA state is essential to personal sustainability, and adaptation through learning and development, in the long run, it raises the important question of how can one increase the frequency and magnitude of the PEA state over the NEA state. In this section, we elaborate upon the important role of emotional and social intelligence competencies in enhancing PEA. In the specific context of the workplace, we describe how coaching based on the ideal self is a particularly effective way to apply those competencies for the overall objective of enhancing personal sustainability both for oneself and for others.

3.1. The Role of Emotional and Social Intelligence Competencies

Emotional and Social Intelligence (ESI) refers to an individual's ability to discern and manage their own and others' emotions, as well as managing relationships with others [47]. ESI is measured in different ways. There are generally four streams of ESI measurements [48]: the Mayer–Salovey–Caruso model that measures ESI as ability [49,50], a group of self-assessment measures based on the Mayer–Salovey–Caruso model [51], various self-report measures, such as the EQ-i by Bar-On [52], and ESI measures that consider ESI as a competency, which measures ESI at the behavior level, such as the Boyatzis–Goleman Emotional and Social Competency Inventory (ESCI) [53].

Behavioral ESI (or ESI as a competency) regards ESI as behavioral patterns that originate from intrinsic intent [51]. The measurement is developed based on theories of competencies [53–55], physiological evidence and neuroscience [9,53], and inductive studies from various countries [56]. There are two clusters of behavior that are measured in behavioral ESI: awareness and management of the emotions in oneself, and awareness and management of emotions in others [53]. In this way, Boyatzis and Goleman advanced the idea of Emotional Intelligence (EI) to encompass a more holistic behavioral approach in social and team settings. Subsequent reviews of the literature have shown that the ESI measurement is the strongest indicator of job performance among various types of EI and

ESI measures [57–62]. As discussed previously, building personal sustainability requires sustainable behavior. As we will explain next, behavioral ESI is both a good indicator and also an enabler of such capability. Therefore, we focus on the role of behavioral ESI in this paper.

As is evident from the name, the ESI competency framework consists of two broad components: EI and Social Intelligence (SI) competencies. EI includes five competencies in two clusters: (i) self-awareness, consisting of emotional self-awareness; (ii) self-management, consisting of achievement orientation, adaptability, emotional self-control, and positive outlook [60]. SI includes two clusters of seven competencies: (i) social awareness, consisting of empathy, and organizational awareness; (ii) relational management, including conflict management, coaching and mentoring, influence, inspirational leadership, and teamwork [60].

ESI competencies enable a person to build and maintain better relationships which in turn enable more PEA moments directly and via emotional contagion. The quality of relationships in a community or an organization is built upon four important factors: the degree of shared vision, compassion, relational energy, and positive mood in a given environment [60]. EI helps to establish better relationships, and SI helps the management of stress by pivoting focus on others [60]. Compassion and empathy towards other people can activate the PNS [9]. Because of emotional contagion, positive emotions experienced at the individual level can travel to the group and community level [63,64]. The higher the quality and density of the social network, the more effectively and quickly the emotional contagion happens [65]. Social relationships are critical to coping with daily stress and thrive at work [66]. High-quality relationships create a secure base for individuals [67], a holding environment [68], and structural support to reduce anxiety in a highly fluid work environment [69]. Social support buffers acute and traumatic stress as well [70]. Individuals with stable social support will experience less physical and psychological symptoms, and better wellbeing after adversaries [71], and help reduce the risks of having PTSD in traumatic events [72].

ESI enables a person to increase the frequency or variety of renewal moments through better self-awareness, self-diagnosis, and self-correction in stressful situations. ESI fosters resilience and enables renewal from stress by regulating emotions and cognitive reappraisal of events [60–62]. ESI contributes to individuals' awareness of their emotional state in chronic stress, which leads to individuals' responses and management of that emotional state. It contributes to alleviating acute and traumatic stress by enabling individuals to actively cope with the stress through renewal activities, and reappraisal of the situation [62]. As explained by the Affective Events Theory [68], emotional reaction is largely influenced by cognitive appraisal of the situation. Reinterpreting events afterwards can help individuals reduce stress and engage in effective coping actively [72].

ESI allows a person to establish the larger context for their day-to-day actions as their sense of purpose, personal vision, or ideal self. Enhancement of ESI makes individuals better leaders, who are resonant and compassionate with others [6–8]. Individuals with higher ESI also create containing and supportive environment for people to work effectively in highly stressful situations [64]. Through the development of ESI, leaders of a family business successfully created a shared vision, which benefited not only the organization but also their family and community [60]. In addition, members with a higher level of ESI report a higher level of shared vision and perceived organizational support [60]. A study on engineers has found that a shared vision increases their engagement at work [60]. The ability to engage positively with one's context further enhances their sense of efficacy, subsequently contributing to their daily well-being [72,73]. In the following section, we will turn our focus to one particularly effective method of enhancing ESI in the workplace: ideal self-based coaching.

3.2. Ideal Self-Based Coaching

3.2.1. Coaching and Helping as PEA Relationships

Self-awareness as an ESI competency includes the ability to reflect upon the ideal self, which is one's desired image of their future self [7]. The ideal self can be highly motivating, especially when accompanied by hope, because it emerges as a result of reflecting on one's deeply held values, purpose, and identities in life [8]. Imagining and articulating one's ideal self helps a person move ahead on a journey of intentional change to adapt oneself towards their ideal. An effective way of recognizing and articulating the ideal self is through the management practice of coaching [9].

Coaching in organizations has been recognized as a relational approach to career growth [74], and has been defined as a facilitative relationship with the purpose of achieving some type of change, learning, or a new level of individual or organizational performance [75]. Coaching differs substantially from other helpful relationships such as mentoring in that the coach's approach is less directive, and from therapy, in that it is focused on people who are psychologically healthy, and it does not attempt to diagnose or treat dysfunctions [76]. Importantly, for our discussion, the success of coaching both depends on, and is integral to, fostering a PEA-based relationship, as we will explain in this section.

The journey of self-development is marked by a series of emergent "discoveries", and has been described in the Intentional Change Theory (ICT) [5]. ICT explains how human systems at various levels undergo a change that is internally desired over being externally imposed. According to ICT, desired change involves the emergence of nonlinear and often discontinuous experiences in an iterative cycle. Specifically, at an individual level there are five distinct moments of emergence: (i) the ideal self or an image of one's desired future; (ii) the real self or an awareness of how one actually acts; (iii) a learning agenda that outlines a long-term plan for movement from the real to the ideal; (iv) practice that is about experimenting with new habits; and (v) trusting relationships that facilitate openness to the moments of emergence [5]. Corresponding levels exist at higher levels, such as a team vision at a team level [76].

At a practical level, helping facilitate a person's journey of intentional change through these emergent discoveries constitutes a particularly effective form of coaching [77]. Often referred to as developmental coaching, it is a relational process that involves focusing on the other person's well-being and supporting others to achieve "their dreams or aspirations (about) changing the way they think, feel, and act", that is the coachee's self-identified developmental needs [7] (p. 12). It involves a focus on the person being coached for their development, which may or may not include a direct benefit to the organization itself [7]. Therefore it is different from most popular forms of coaching that are prevalent in business organizations, which typically focus on financial performance parameters as the desired outcome of coaching.

Our earlier discussion about the two strange attractors—PEA and NEA, lets us understand why this form of coaching potentially constitutes a PEA relationship. ESI competencies help in the process of developing and nurturing a caring relationship, in which both individuals understand and respond to each other's feelings, and have a commitment to the other person [77]. Once such a resonant relationship is developed, the leader can help the team member articulate a sense of purpose and excitement [78].

Studies that have established the effectiveness of ideal self-based coaching have delineated the specific ways in which it enhances personal sustainability by invoking more of PEA over NEA, which as we had discussed earlier is related to more of PNS over SNS activation. Ideal self-based coaching evokes a psychophysiological state characterized by positive emotions, cognitive openness, and optimal neurobiological functioning for complex goal pursuit [78]. There are several aspects of a developmental coaching relationship that can move the person from an NEA to a PEA state. The leader can ask the team-member to reflect on their reflected best self [79]. When people reflect on past experiences that they consider successful, it enhances positive emotions such as contentment and excitement [80].

The leader can also encourage envisioning the ideal self. Simply asking questions related to their dreams can make people "lean forward, open their arms, and begin talking with animation, energy, and often a smile on their face" [7], p. 160. Visioning the ideal self generates motivational resources that can boost positive emotions, such as: formation of a positive relationship, expansion of one's identity, increased vitality, activation of learning goals, and a promotion orientation [8]. During coaching, if the leader can also infuse the team member's vision with a sense of hope by offering insights on how to process towards long-term goals could be made can be made, it can further enhance the positive effect created by the ideal self [81].

3.2.2. Coaching to the Ideal Self as a Major PEA Activity for Both the Client and the Coach

By making the ideal self the basis of coaching, and doing so within a trusting environment, the coachee's PEA is enhanced by catering to their basic human needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness [77]. While focusing on both performance and development requires the development of ESI competencies in the manager [76], the payoffs can be substantial. Such coaching is perceived by employees as not only an intellectual endeavor, but also an affective one, because people feel cared for and valued as a team member [82]. The development of such a trusting and high-quality relationship also has an impact on the long-term development of the coachee, especially their own ESI competencies. An analysis of a 25-year program based on the tenets of ideal self-based coaching among full-time MBA students showed that such a developmental approach over a performance focus was a contributing factor towards developing the students' ESI competencies in the long term [60]. In an organizational context, a separate study established the relationship between ideal self-based coaching and leadership development outcomes [83].

At the same time, ideal self-based coaching benefits the personal sustainability of not just the coachee but also the coach themselves. This is especially true in the case of leaders or managers who coach their followers or team members. Both psychology and management research has long recognized that leadership is a stress-inducing role [7]. The multiple responsibilities and tasks that leadership entails what has been described as the "power stress syndrome" [8]. It emanates from a desire to have influence or impact over others, which enhances those neural circuits that reduce PNS activation, and enhance SNS activation [8]. Its physiological effects are the secretion of epinephrine and norepinephrine that elevates systolic and diastolic blood pressure, making one feel stressed and anxious [8]. This in turn leads to perceptions of even mild situations as threatening and increases power stress.

Coaching with a focus on the ideal self can assist leaders to escape this vicious cycle of stress for the leader. Helping or developing a team member involves caring for them, and developing feelings of compassion. Studies in evolutionary psychology indicate that compassion evolved as a distinct affective experience whose primary function is to facilitate cooperation and protection of the weak and those who suffer [84]. Yet, compassion also has positive effects on the person demonstrating it. These include a feeling of satisfaction that comes from helping others, the development of a prosocial identity, and being held in high regard as a leader by others [85]. These benefits arise through the activation of the PNS over SNS [9]. The implication for this to our discussion is that moving back and forth between aroused power stress and aroused compassion can enable sustained leadership effectiveness, by allowing the leader to maintain themselves in a healthier physical state and greater cognitive functioning in the long term [8,9].

Therefore, based on this discussion, we can conclude that ideal self-based coaching enhances the personal sustainability of both the coach and the coachee by consistently invoking greater PEA over NEA.

4. Discussion

4.1. Implications for Research and Practice

The theory developed in this paper has several implications for both future research on personal sustainability, and has practical implications for how stress is managed in organizational life.

Future studies related to stress should consider renewal as an antidote to it, and consider it as a variable in their statistical models. The Personal Sustainability Index (PSI), that was mentioned earlier is a possible measurement tool for such studies [4]. The relevance of the PSI in sustainability research lies in the fact that it captures not just the frequency, but also the variety of renewal experiences one has over a period of time. Yet another variable to consider in studies on personal sustainability is that of emotional intelligence, given its relevance to ameliorating stress as discussed in this paper. Measures such as the Mayer Salovey Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT) [49–51], or the Emotional and Social Competency Inventory (ESCI) [53] can be used for this purpose. To better understand the psycho-physiological mechanisms that underlie such behaviors as a response to stress or renewal activities such as coaching for performance versus coaching towards the ideal self, physiological measures such as fMRI scans should be explored further, as demonstrated by Jack and colleagues [9]. Qualitative measures such as diary methods or episodic script analyses can also be used. Ultimately, the field of sustainability research will benefit from longitudinal studies that test our proposition around how renewal activities in general, and coaching towards the ideal self in particular help personal renewal and stress-amelioration in the long term.

The theory presented here also has implications for how people can ensure their own personal sustainability, as well as that of others in their personal and professional lives. As we explain in our paper, the key to reducing the harmful effects of the stressors of modern life and work lie in involving oneself in more and in a greater variety of renewal activities. People can benefit from intentionally making time and space for renewal activities based on their interests and convenience. At work, the role of coaching in a compassionate manner with a focus on the ideal self should be encouraged by organizations. Employees, especially those in supervisory roles should be trained in key ESI competencies, and in the skill of being better coaches to their team members. This might involve efforts towards culture change, especially in business settings with a high focus on financial outcomes in the short term. Organizations are therefore encouraged to invest financial and temporal resources in this direction, since the long term benefits are likely to be substantial.

4.2. Conclusions

In this paper, we developed a conceptual understanding of how personal sustainability can be enhanced through renewal activities. Specifically, based on evidence from the fields of medicine, psychology, and management, we explained how renewal activities are characterized by the movement of the individual from NEA to PEA. People can enact such transition in themselves and in others through ESI competencies. This conceptual model provides a framework for researchers in the domain of stress and renewal to design future studies. The case of ideal self-based coaching in the workplace illustrated the practical application of this concept by showing how personal sustainability can be enhanced among both leaders and their team members.

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