

Perceived Effectiveness of Internal Executive Coaching Engagements by Participants in a High Potential Leadership Development Program

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**Abstract**

The field of executive coaching has grown in popularity as a developmental tool for leaders. With the potential for a leadership continuity gap and the desire for organizations to strengthen leadership talent pools to prepare for succession planning, there is a need for empirical research regarding the effectiveness of executive coaching. The aim of this mixed method study was to explore the factors that contribute to successful coaching outcomes. The combination of an online survey of 68 high potential leaders and follow up interviews with 40 of those same leaders yielded information about the coaching experience. The results showed a correlation between the number of years a leader was with the company and his or her perception of a positive coaching experience. In addition, the total amount of time the coach and the leader spent together was correlated with the perception of a positive coaching experience. Finally, most leaders noted that exceptional coaches demonstrated professionalism in several ways, such as listening to the client, showing an interest in the client and their development, and providing advice and helpful suggestions. A better understanding of the factors that promote successful outcomes for high potential leaders will assist coaches in having positive impact on client and organizational performance. This study is unique in that it examines coaching in the context of a larger intervention, a leadership development program, using HR professionals as internal coaches with high potential leaders. For organizations using coaching in this fashion, this study addresses gaps in the literature, which was an impetus for this research. Additional research might be valuable on how coaching clients define a successful coaching outcome, a client's readiness to change, the coach-client relationship, and factors that promote sustained behavior change in a leader.

## Dedication

To my heavenly Father, who while learning *about*, has shown me the way.

To my husband, Gary, who I have learned more about life *with* – thank you for standing by my side in my quest for lifelong learning, in and out of the classroom. You do not know how I appreciate your selflessness to allow me the time I needed while you were with the girls. I love you.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

### Background

The field of executive coaching has grown in popularity as a developmental tool for leaders and organizations around the world. The International Coach Federation (ICF 2012), one of the coaching industry's leading associations, reported an estimated global annual revenue from executive coaching of approximately \$2 billion. Executive coaching has emerged as a practice area for developing leaders. Given the potential for a gap in leadership continuity in many corporations worldwide, more and more organizations are turning to executive coaching as a solution (Dotlich & Cairo, 2003; Finkelstein, 2003a; 2003b). In some corporations, executives work with an executive coach to stretch their current performance levels, while other corporations use coaches proactively to develop their high potential leaders.

If one looks at the world of an executive, it is easy to understand how this one-on-one relationship may be appealing to him or her. They have little time to devote to reflection and self-development, their jobs are highly complex, and they receive less and less feedback the higher they go in an organization. In an article in *Training & Development* magazine entitled, "To Fill the Feedback Void," Ludeman (1995) described this phenomenon,

The fact that many executives function in a "feedback void" is understandable. Early in their careers, they tend to receive glowing performance appraisals. As they climb the corporate ladder, the flow of feedback ebbs. By the time they reach the Ivory Tower, the feedback well has dried up. The people above them are busy with big-picture planning and don't take the time to discuss performance issues. And the people below them don't feel comfortable offering criticism. That is how the feedback void is created. (p. 38)

With more organizations investing in executive coaching as a way to help current and future executives become more effective leaders, studies examining the effectiveness of coaching as a development strategy have become increasingly important.

## **Statement of the Problem**

As executive coaching continues to grow as a leadership development strategy, there is a need for more empirical evidence regarding the factors that lead to effective executive coaching and improved outcomes (Bacon & Spear, 2003; Kilburg, 1996a, 1996b; Sherman & Freas, 2004). Since the 1990s, the literature and practice on the subject of executive coaching has been growing. The majority of publications, however, 71%, are in practice journals as opposed to 15% in academic journals (Joo, 2005).

## **Purpose of this Study**

The purpose of this study was to contribute to the research literature by examining the factors that promote successful executive coaching outcomes. Specifically, this study explored the experiences of high potential leaders participating in a leadership development program in order to determine the impact of client characteristics (gender, age, type of manager, level, years in a leadership role, and years with the company) and aspects of the coaching engagement (frequency of meetings, availability of the coach, length of sessions, total hours spent together) on successful coaching outcomes. In addition, this study identified specific coaching behaviors that contributed to the leader's development process.

## **Research Questions**

The following research questions were developed for this study:

**RQ1:** What profile characteristics in the leader's' background (e.g., gender, age, type of manager, level, years in a leadership role, and years with the company), are associated with the perception of a successful coaching outcome?

**RQ2:** What are the specific conditions of the coaching engagement (e.g., frequency of meetings, availability of the coach, length of sessions, total hours spent together, etc.) that appear to be related to a leader's satisfaction with coaching?

**RQ3:** What coaching behaviors were perceived by leaders as contributing to a shift in thought processes that was pivotal to their development?

## **Significance of the Study**

A better understanding of the factors that promote successful outcomes for high potential leaders will assist coaches in having positive impact on client and organizational performance. This study is unique in that it examines coaching in the context of a larger intervention, a leadership development program, using HR professionals as internal coaches with high potential leaders. For organizations using coaching in this fashion, this study addresses gaps in the literature, which is an impetus for this research. Finally, the results of this study may contribute to the development of a theoretical foundation for executive coaching.

## **Limitations of Research**

There are several limitations to the present study. The first is that the study was done in one organization, with a small number of participants which were limited to high potential leaders nominated for and accepted into a leadership development program. These leaders demonstrated a track record of sustained high performance, aspirations for a more significant role in the organization, learning agility (the ability to learn quickly from experience and apply the learning to new situations), and a willingness to “do what it takes” (e.g., travel, relocate, or take an international assignment). Accordingly, these results may not be generalizable to other populations. Another limitation is that the coaches in the study were internal coaches. Coaching was not their full time job; they were human resource professionals who took on an additional role as coaches. Their preparation was limited to an internal training program provided by the company. Another drawback to this research is that leaders who did not have a positive experience with their coaches may not have answered the initial questionnaire and others may have decided not to participate in an interview for the same reason.

## **Definitions**

**Coaching engagement:** a period of time during which a client and a coach contract for and engage in activities leading toward a particular goal.

**Executive coach:** a strategic partner who engages in a formal coaching relationship with a leader to achieve outcomes specified by the client, typically related to enhancing performance and effectiveness of a leader. For the purposes of this study, it is an HR professional who took on the additional role of a coach.

**Client:** a leader or “coachee” who is responsible for human, financial, capital, and material resources who is interested in enhancing their learning, performance, or effectiveness. A leader in this study is the “coachee” or the person being coached.

### **Overview**

Chapter 1 provides background information for this study. Chapter 2 contains a literature review exploring the need for executive talent, the challenge of developing executives, how executive coaching emerged, and the theoretical foundations and elements of executive coaching. Chapter 3 describes the research design used in this study, specifically a mixed methods study. Chapter 4 presents an analysis of the data, and Chapter 5 presents the conclusions and implications for future research.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

The research on executive coaching has grown increasingly in the late 1990's through the present time (Joo, 2005). This literature review will offer a discussion of the need for executive coaching, definitions, and antecedents of the discipline, the rise of the profession, and outcome research.

#### **Leadership Development**

Since the 1990s, the need for organizations to have the leadership necessary to deal with increased organizational demands has been recognized due to a highly complex and a competitive business environment (Conger, 1993; Barrett & Beeson, 2002). These issues highlight the increasing importance of developing leaders that are prepared for the challenges of tomorrow. The impetus for change stems, in part, from aging demographics and the need for leaders to demonstrate leadership competencies and desirable behaviors in an atmosphere of highly scrutinized executive performance and increased potential for derailment (Drucker, 1995; Heifetz & Laurie, 1997; Teal, 1996). Sometimes, leaders have risen to positions of greater scope, authority, responsibility, and influence because of their technical or functional abilities and not because they demonstrated competent leadership skills (Lee & King, 2001). In addition, internal sourcing of candidates is on the rise as companies choose to develop their own future executives (Bernthal & Wellins, 2003; Byham, Smith, & Paese, 2002; Fulmer & Conger, 2003). Recognizing the need to predict successful outcomes for executives, companies are placing more of their resources into earlier identification and assessment of leadership potential.

The increased emphasis on leadership challenges has led to a trend in executive development. With the anticipated retirement of many leaders of the baby boom generation, leading organizations have developed executive coaching programs to groom high potential leaders and address performance issues in those who will assume senior level roles (Drake Beam Morin Career Services, 2003). Preventing executives from derailing and preparing leaders for roles at higher levels are two of the most common reasons that organizations turn to executive coaching (Bolch, 2001; Carter, 2002; Koonce, 1994; Niemes, 2002).

A study by The Boston Consulting group, in conjunction with the World Federation of People Management, found a correlation between strong leadership development and company

performance (Strack, Caye, von der Linden, Quiros, & Haen, 2012). The study, which included a survey of 4,288 HR and non-HR managers, found positive correlations between several HR areas including leadership development, and outcomes such as greater revenue growth and higher average profit margins.

The need for effective leadership is critical. Hogan, Curphy, and Hogan (1994) suggested that the rate of managerial incompetence in the United States is between 60% and 75%. Even corporate boards have influenced decisions to remove ineffective CEOs (Charan & Colvin, 1999; Kets de Vries, 1994). It is costly to ensure effective leadership. In addition, failed leadership is costly. Lombardo, Ruderman, and McCauley (1988) found that a failed general manager could cost an organization approximately \$500,000 in recruitment expenses. Additional costs include negative impacts on business revenue (McCall, Lombardo, & Morrison, 1988) and the significant cost of large severance packages or contract buyouts (Charan & Colvin, 1999). Accordingly, leadership development remains a top priority for most organizations. In the US alone, organizations spend close to \$14 billion annually on leadership development (Loew & O'Leonard, 2012).

Given the demands of the business environment, it is not always likely or realistic that higher-level leaders will engage in traditional education and development, nor is it necessarily the most effective way for them to develop. Traditional leadership training and development has been only marginally successful at best and, at worst, not at all successful (Bolt, 1993; Conger, 1993; Dhebar, 1995; McCall et al., 1988). In the 1990s, organizations brought universities into corporate settings, customized curricula to create relevance, and used action learning to enhance executive development (Ballou, Bowers, Boyatzis, & Kolb, 1999; Bassi, Cheney, & Lewis, 1998; Bolt, 1993; Dhebar, 1995; Fulmer, 1997; Fulmer, Gibbs, & Goldsmith, 2000; Greco, 1997). Emphasis on learning through developmental experiences also became important. In a survey of over 900 managers and professionals from Fortune 500 companies, Wick and Leon (1993) asked survey participants to identify three key developmental experiences, activities, or relationships that increased their ability to contribute at work. Not surprisingly, they found that 74% of those experiences occurred on the job, 19% were off-the-job experiences such as college or personal trauma, and only 7% of respondents mentioned formal training programs.

McCall et al. (1988) described what leaders need to learn and the environment in which leaders learn best:

Knowledge of how the business works, ability to work with senior executives, learning to manage people who were once peers, negotiating with hostile foreign governments, handling tense political situations, firing people—these and many others are the lessons of experience. They are taught on the firing line, by demanding assignments, by good or bad bosses, and by mistakes and setbacks and misfortune. Maybe executives are blessed with characteristics that give them the edge in learning these things, but *learn* them they must. (p. 3)

Other factors affecting leadership development include feedback from others regarding effective behavior; developing self-mastery, specifically the ability to reflect and understand the reasons that guide behavior; the willingness to accept criticism; and the willingness to change attitude or behavior (Kaplan, Kofodimos, & Drath, 1987).

Companies that rank high in leadership development employ programs that include rotations, coaching, mentoring, on-the-job training, and action learning (Giber, Carter, & Goldsmith, 2000). Companies that invest more heavily in leadership development evaluate themselves as having greater leadership capacity and are 1.5 times more likely to be at the top of Fortune Magazine's Most Admired Companies list (Csoka, 1997). The Corporate Leadership Council (2001) identified feedback and relationship strategies, including executive coaching, as the most effective leadership development tools. The present study explores executive coaching as a way to develop leaders.

### **Executive Coaching Landscape**

Since the 1990s, the practice of executive coaching has grown in popularity and, consequently, the literature on the subject has grown as well (Laske, 1999; Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001). The majority of publications are found in practice journals (71%), with 15% in academic journals and the rest in magazines (Joo, 2005). In 1996, a special issue of *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research* was devoted to executive coaching. In this issue leaders summed up the profession as it was being practiced at the time (Dietrich, 1996; Katz & Miller, 1996; Kiel, Rimmer, Williams, & Doyle, 1996; Levinson, 1996; Peterson, 1996; Saporito, 1996; Tobias, 1996; Witherspoon & White, 1996b). Since that time, several authors have provided definitions to include a notation of coaching in an organizational context. Some of these definitions are presented in Table 2.1. For the purposes of this study, the definition offered

Table 2.1

*Definitions of Coaching*

Reference	Definition
Mink, Owen, and Mink (1993)	“Coaching is the process by which one individual, the coach, creates enabling relationships with others that make it easier for them to learn.” (p. 2)
Whitmore (1994)	“Coaching is unlocking a person’s potential to maximize their own performance. It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them.” (p. 6)
Kilburg (2000)	“A helping relationship formed between a client who has managerial authority and responsibility in an organization and a consultant who uses a wide variety of behavioral techniques and methods to assist the client achieve a mutually identified set of goals to improve his or her professional performance and personal satisfaction and consequently to improve the effectiveness of the client’s organization within a formally defined coaching agreement.” (p. 142)
Kombarakaran, Yang, Baker, and Fernandes (2008)	“Executive coaching is a short term interactive process between a coach and a manager to improve leadership effectiveness by enhancing self-awareness and the practice of new behaviors. The coaching process facilitates the acquisition of new skills, perspectives, tools, and knowledge through support, encouragement, and feedback in the organizational context.” (p. 79)
Ennis, Goodman, Otto, and Stern (2012)	“Executive coaching is an experiential and individualized leader development process that builds a leader’s capability to achieve short- and long-term organizational goals. It is conducted through one- on-one and/or group interactions, driven by data from multiple perspectives, and based on mutual trust and respect. The organization, an executive, and the executive coach work in partnership to achieve maximum impact.” (p.10)

by Ennis, Goodman, Otto, and Stern (2012) is most appropriate since the coaching is conducted in an organizational context in order to help leaders with their development while achieving organizational goals.



## **Executive Coaching: Theoretical Foundations**

Individuals performing in the role of a coach are from multiple professions and academic backgrounds. The following sections discuss the influence of several disciplines, theories, and approaches that led to the profession and practice of executive coaching such as psychology (client-centered therapy and constructive-developmental psychology), training (adult learning theory), and organizational development (action science) that provide the theoretical foundations for the practice of executive coaching.

### **Psychology**

Some coaches who began their professional careers as therapists had training in psychology. One reason could be that coaching and psychotherapy both involve helping a client through change as noted by Prochaska & Diclemente (2005):

Although psychotherapists have not struggled with all the particular problems faced by different clients, all therapists have had some experience with the process of change. This is the common experiential ground that forms the basis of the relationship between the therapist and client. In general, the therapist is seen as the expert on change; not having all of the answers, but in being aware of the crucial dimensions of change and being able to offer assistance in this regard. (p. 157)

While there are many theories that could be detailed as contributing to executive coaching, two in particular are highlighted due to the specific approaches and their relationship to practices used by executive coaches.

**Client-centered therapy.** Client-centered therapy is based on trust, congruence, unconditional positive regard, and empathy (Rogers, 1961). The therapist is trained to believe in the individual's capacity for self-direction and self-understanding. As a coach, a person with this orientation can help a leader by helping them to see themselves the way others see them. Additionally, the role of the therapist, similar to that of an executive coach, is to access and draw out answers from the client using inquiry and active listening and then providing support (Whitworth, Kimsey-House, & Sandahl, 1998).

**Constructive-developmental psychology.** Constructive developmentalism describes the evolution of human thinking and suggests conditions under which thinking capacities can be

developed. To inform their practice, some coaches have used the work of a well-known theorist, Robert Kegan. Kegan is considered a constructive-developmental psychologist. This field combines two schools of thought: the idea that humans create their world through interaction and interpretation and the idea that humans enter qualitatively different phases of growth over time. Kegan (1994) suggested that transformative learning occurs when an individual can move from *subject* to *object*. This transformation refers to a shift of viewing things, relationships, emotions, or behaviors as separate from the individual, like an object, rather than a part of the individual, the subject. The work of the executive coach involves assisting clients in moving key aspects of their world from subject to object. When working with a leader, if the coach can help him or her uncover assumptions and be able to look objectively at those assumptions, he or she may gain an insight as to what might need to change. In those moments, the coach is best able to help the executive by understanding the issues from both the executive's perspective and from the perspectives of others in the organization. As noted by Fitzgerald & Berger (2002), "Often, the way an executive makes meaning of key corporate issues—rather than the issues themselves—shapes the work of the coaching." (p. 28)

### **Adult Learning Theory**

Two theories stand out relative to providing a solid basis from which the work of executive coaching is drawn. The work of Malcolm Knowles (1968, 1970, 1973, 1990, 1998) is foundational to the profession of executive coaching since a goal of coaching is to help an adult as they learn and in some cases, one might go as far as to say, transform themselves. Aspects of transformative learning by Jack Mezirow (1978, 1981, 1991, 1992, 1994, 1997) and others (Mezirow & Taylor, 2009; Taylor & Cranton, 2012) suggest adults critically reflect on their assumptions and can be prompted through the processes and outcomes in an executive coaching relationship.

**Andragogy.** The role of executive coaches as facilitators of learning is evident in the definitions of coaching cited above (see Table 2.1). The foundation of executive coaching as a learning platform can be attributed, in part, to the principles of andragogy. Malcolm Knowles described the characteristics of adult learners to assist practitioners with designing learning experiences for adults. He defined adult education as follows:

In its broadest sense, the term [adult education] describes a process—the process of adults learning. In this sense, it encompasses practically all experiences of mature men and women by which they acquire new knowledge, understanding, skills, attitudes, interests, or values. It is a process that is used by adults for their self-development, both alone and with others, and institutions of all kinds for the growth and development of their employees, members, and clients use it. An educational process is often used in combination with production processes, political processes, or service processes. (Knowles, 1980, p. 25)

Knowles (1973) described a series of assumptions that facilitators of adult learning might consider when working with adults: self-concept, experience, readiness to learn, and problem centered learning. These assumptions apply to executive coaching in the context of one-on-one coaching sessions. Self-concept refers to the ability of the adult learner to carry out their learning in a self-directed manner. Coaches, who create learning objectives and development plans for their clients, while still allowing them the opportunity to try out different learning exercises, understand the self-directed nature of adult learners. Experience refers to using an individual's experience as a learning resource. Coaches who can access prior experiences that relate to new opportunities for learning can build bridges for their clients to assist them with learning. On the other hand, coaches who approach their work by giving advice, telling, or teaching prevent the client from learning experientially. Leading a client to discovery by learning from their own experiences enables him or her to learn independently in the future. Readiness to learn refers to the fact that when there is a specific need, learning is more meaningful for adults. Adults respond best when they are internally motivated to learn, and a coach can determine this by asking specific questions about the client's readiness and willingness to change. Finally, problem centered learning refers to the identification of problems or gaps that can increase clients' desires to apply themselves to learning or change.

Later in his career, Knowles (1986) became a proponent of *learning contracts*, plans that a learner develops and to which the learner commits in order to achieve particular goals or objectives. The development plans used in many of today's coaching engagements are akin to the learning contracts referred to by Knowles. Reflecting a behavioral approach, development

plans often contain learning objectives, specific desired behaviors or experiences, learning strategies, resources, development steps, priorities, and criteria for success.

**Transformative learning.** Aspects of transformative learning parallel the activities and desired outcomes of an executive coaching relationship. Jack Mezirow (1978) developed the theory of transformative learning, which is centered on the aspect of meaning. The theory seeks to explain how adult learners make sense or meaning out of their experiences, how meaning is construed, and how internal structures influence meaning. A definition of transformative learning put forth by Mezirow that is relevant to executive coaching is:

The process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frame of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action. Transformative learning involves participation in constructive discourse to use the experience of others to assess reasons justifying these assumptions, and making an action decision based on the resulting insight. (Mezirow, 2000, p. 7-8)

Mezirow (1981) described three types of learning domains: (a) instrumental learning (task-oriented), (b) communicative learning (through human communication), and (c) emancipatory learning (transformative). Instrumental learning is similar to a scientific experiment. Learning occurs through empirical means by forming hypotheses about observable events and making predictions about the outcome. Communicative learning occurs through speaking and writing. Mezirow suggested that most significant learning in adulthood falls into the communicative domain, which involves describing and explaining intentions, values, feelings, reasons, and concepts shaped by cultural, linguistic, and social codes.

Emancipatory, or transformative, learning can occur in either communicative or instrumental learning. Emancipatory learning involves challenging perspectives and paradigms through critical self-reflection and discourse. While emancipatory learning can occur in both instrumental and communicative learning, Mezirow (1981) believed that the most significant learning occurred in the communicative domain.

Three themes permeate Mezirow's (1980) theory of transformative learning: centrality of experience, critical reflection, and rational discourse. Since Mezirow's primary interest was in

how adults construe meaning as a form of learning, his theory centers around building on the experiences of individuals, particularly how their frame of reference influences interpretation. Mezirow (1980) described meaning as an interpretation. In order to make an interpretation, meaning must be created by construing or interpreting an experience. This is accomplished by matching new experiences with prior experiences, then matching those experiences against existing meaning structures. Meaning structures contain specific knowledge, beliefs, value judgments, and feelings, all of which have been formulated through prior experiences (Mezirow, 1991). Specifically, Mezirow (1991) described meaning structures as constructs that are the product of socialization and personal history. Mezirow considered experiences to be central to the way adults learn, since they guide thinking, behavior, and feelings.

Given that meaning is tied to experiences and learning is grounded in meaning structure, new interpretations can be made by drawing on experiences through critical reflection. Critical reflection is a key concept in transformative learning. Through critical reflection, the validity or presuppositions of prior learning can be challenged. In addition to being aware of thoughts, feelings, and actions, critical reflection also involves challenging the assumptions upon which perceptions, feelings, or actions are based. Mezirow (1997) explained that most reflection occurs within the context of problem solving by reflecting on the content, process, and premise of the problem. Reframing a problem through critical reflection, which is a technique used in executive coaching, can lead to significant personal transformation.

The reflective processes described above may result in tentative conclusions that can then be validated through rational discourse, another key concept in transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991). The aim is to use rational discourse, either verbal or written, to achieve as broad a consensus as possible. Rational discourse differs from day-to-day dialogue; it is similar to scholarly debates, scientific inquiry, and courtroom proceedings in that it involves the discussion of principles and operational concepts (Mezirow, 1991). Mezirow later acknowledged the role feelings or emotions play in the transformative learning process after others offered criticisms to his theory for being too rational (Mezirow, 1997, Taylor, 1998, Mezirow, 2000).

Mezirow (1991) referred to the outcome of a changed meaning perspective as a perspective transformation. Specifically, a perspective transformation is the process of (a) becoming critically aware of how and why assumptions have come to constrain the way the world is perceived and understood, (b) changing the structures of habitual expectation to make

possible a more inclusive, discriminating, and integrative perspective, and (c) making choices or otherwise acting on these new understandings.

The key concept from transformative learning theory that aligns with the practice of executive coaching is that adults make meaning from their own experiences through critical reflection and rational discourse. As Mezirow (2000) stated, “Transformation Theory’s focus is on how we learn to negotiate and act on our own purposes, values, feelings, and meanings rather than those we have uncritically assimilated from others – to gain greater control over our lives as socially responsible, clear-thinking decision makers” (p. 8). A coach who is knowledgeable about adult learning theory and transformative learning can facilitate this process. For example, in a study of transformational learning, Henderson (2001) identified critical reflection and experience as key ways that CEOs learn to develop as leaders. Mezirow’s concepts are powerful tools that executive coaches can use to guide leaders to fundamental self-awareness and the sustained changes that come with developing self-awareness.

## **Organizational Development**

Beckhard (1969) defined organization development as an effort that is (a) planned, (b) organization-wide, and (c) managed from the top, to (d) increase organization effectiveness and health through (e) planned interventions in the organization’s “processes,” using behavioral-science knowledge. (p. 9). When coaching occurs within an organization, it can also be seen as an organizational intervention. Professionals, who serve in the role of organizational consultants, internal or external, may be used to providing feedback and coaching as a part of the intervention. Action science is one example of this type of intervention.

Action science is a strategy of organizational development that was developed by Chris Argyris and Donald Schön (Argyris & Schön, 1975). Argyris (1999) suggested that organizational development practitioners should help individuals reflect on and change their values, assumptions, and strategies. Coaches often use models as a framework to guide their approach. One such framework by McGonagill (2002) is based on the work of Argyris and Schön (Argyris & Schön, 1975; Schön, 1982). By studying professionals in a variety of disciplines, these researchers found that practitioners, when faced with multiple theories to deal with a unique situation, respond to complexity in simple and spontaneous ways. This is *reflection-in-action* and occurs when practitioners frame a problem, create and experiment with

solutions, and then reframe the situation based on the response to the solution. If practitioners are aware of the benefits and limitations of an approach they are recommending, they are more likely to view the solution as a hypothesis and make modifications and revisions as necessary.

McGonagill's (2002) model emphasizes a reflection-in-action approach to working with coaching clients. He described several influences that inform a coach's core practices, one of them is for the coach to have a vision. The coach's vision is based on values, assumptions, frames of reference, and an understanding of what guides human behavior. The coach's vision for the coach-client relationship may be guided by an orientation toward learning or change that will ultimately guide their practice. For example, a coach may approach the relationship with a client by focusing on behavior change. The coach has therefore framed the solution with a behaviorist orientation. On the other hand, coaches using a humanist orientation to frame the solution may feel that the goal is to help clients reach their full potential. That would be their vision for coaching, in general, and they would aspire to be the facilitator of this process for their clients.

### **Executive Coaching: Practice**

Most of the coaching literature refers to elements that comprise the five general steps of the coaching process: contracting, assessment and feedback, goal setting and development planning, coaching, and evaluation.

A theme from the area of organizational consulting is the need to begin with contracting (Dietrich, 1996, Flaherty, 1999; Kilburg, 2000). The purpose of contracting is to ensure that expectations are clear for both parties in the relationship. Items typically agreed upon include expected outcomes, roles, scope, timelines, coaching approaches, confidentiality, and guidelines for giving feedback. Contracting typically represents the first stage of the engagement, when the coach and client get to know each other and begin to build a relationship.

The second step in executive coaching practice is assessment and feedback. One of the most effective ways to develop an executive is to gather feedback from others who work with the executive regarding personal strengths and areas for improvement. The goal is to open the aperture of self-awareness. The assessment process can take the form of interviews or questionnaires, personality indicators, career inventories, or leadership style instruments. Information provided by key individuals who interface with the executive can be used to create a

clear picture of how the executive is perceived and can serve as the basis for development goals (Fitzgerald & Berger, 2002; Flaherty, 1999; Kaplan et al., 1987; Kilburg, 2000; Thach & Heinselman, 1999).

The third step in executive coaching practice is goal setting and development planning. At this point in the relationship, the executive should determine what he or she ultimately wants to achieve or accomplish and work with the coach to create a development plan made up of specific action steps. Examples of goals include enhancing executive performance, enhancing organizational performance, and creating more effective relationships (Kilburg, 2000; Peterson & Hicks, 1999; Whitmore, 1994).

After establishing a plan, the heart of the coaching relationship begins. The previous three steps build a critical foundation of trust between coach and client, where the executive can feel comfortable opening up and trying new behaviors (Deitrich, 1996; Hargrove, 1995; Peterson, 1996; Tobias, 1996). Through one-on-one meetings at agreed-upon time intervals, the coach and the executive implement actions from the development plan. This process may include the following: examining feedback to enhance self-awareness of current attitudes and behaviors, role-playing, observation and feedback, videotaping, strategic inquiry, and dialog to encourage reflection. Once the client and coach have accomplished their developmental objectives, the coach often transitions the client to a more self-sustaining plan for his or her own long-term development.

The final step in executive coaching practice is evaluation. Following the coaching sessions, the coach may ask the leader to provide an evaluation of the coaching process or outcome. The coach may be interested in knowing what the client learned, what behavior may have been changed, what the executive thought of the coaching techniques used, and whether the client showed improved effectiveness. The organization may also initiate an evaluation (London, 2003).

### **Executive Coaching: Research**

Early practice research on executive coaching was mostly descriptive in nature and aimed to understand who was doing the coaching and how the coaching was being carried out. In 2006, the International Coach Federation (ICF) partnered with PricewaterhouseCoopers to conduct an independent research study of the coaching profession globally. The aim of the survey was to



report on the nature and scope of the coaching profession. The sample consisted of approximately 6000 coaches, and included ICF members and nonmembers in over 70 countries. The survey found that the majority of coaches were between the ages of 46-55 years old and had been coaching for 5-10 years. Most coaches had an advanced degree (e.g., Master's or Ph.D.), were between the ages of 38 and 45 years old and more coaching clients were female (56%) compared to males (44%). The main practice areas were executive coaching (19%), leadership (18%), and life coaching (16%). The study also estimated the approximate annual worldwide revenue produced by coaches to be \$1.5 billion (USD) earned by roughly 30,000 coaches worldwide.

In 2012 the International Coach Federation (ICF) conducted another survey in conjunction with PricewaterhouseCoopers of these responses were from ICF members, demonstrating the growth of the coaching profession since the ICF Global Coaching Study in 2006 (ICF, 2006). The survey revealed that the profession had grown to an estimated 47,500 professional coaches generating approximately \$2 billion (USD) in annual income and included 12,133 responses from ICF and non-ICF members in 117 countries (ICF, 2012).

At the same time, other research began to emerge describing how coaching was being used in organizations. In May 2003, the Corporate Leadership Council (2003) published a research report that examined professional executive coaching, which was noted by their member organizations to be one of the fastest growing areas of leadership development. Given the significant costs of executive coaching, the study aimed to determine how organizations could maximize the returns on their coaching investments. The data were drawn from 45 corporations who were members of the Corporate Leadership Council. The four key findings from this report showed: (a) a growing trend toward using executive coaching as a leadership development intervention due to its positive impact, (b) a preference to use executive coaching by executives even though it is very expensive compared to other leadership development activities, (c) inconsistent implementations of coaching inside organizations, and (d) inconsistent returns on coaching investments due to inconsistencies in implementation.

The growing trend toward using executive coaching as a leadership development practice coupled with the high cost of implementation suggested the need to better understand its impact. A number of studies undertaken since 2000 looked at the effectiveness of executive coaching, and most of that research was based on self-perception data obtained from individuals who

received coaching (Orenstein, 2006; Kombarakaran et al., 2008; de Haan, Bertie, Day, & Sills, 2010a, 2010b). Oliverio, Bane, and Kopelman (1997) studied the effects of executive coaching in a government agency as a transfer-of-training tool. They followed 31 managers who participated in a management development program followed by eight weeks of executive coaching and found that the leadership training portion of the program increased managerial productivity by 22.4% while the coaching portion of the program increased productivity by 88%.

In another study, behavioral change, organizational outcomes, and return on investment (ROI) were examined in 100 executives (McGovern, Lindemann, Vergara, Murphy, Barker, & Warrenfeltz, 2001). The study employed Kirkpatrick's (2006) four-level model for evaluation (reaction, learning, behavior change, and business results) and added a fifth criterion, ROI (Phillips, 1997). The results showed that 86% of participants were *very satisfied* or *extremely satisfied* with the coaching process. Learning included enhanced leadership and management skills, enhanced business agility, improved technical or functional credibility, and enhanced interpersonal skills. Behavioral change was measured by asking participants to rate their effectiveness at achieving their goals. The executives considered 73% of their goals to have been achieved *very effectively* or *extremely effectively*. Organizational outcomes were divided into tangible and intangible impacts on the business, as reported by the executives. Tangible results included increased productivity (53%), quality (48%), organizational strength (48%), and customer service (39%), while intangible results included improved relationships with direct reports (77%) and other stakeholders (71%) and improved teamwork (67%). Using conservative estimates, 43% of executives were able to quantify the costs of coaching compared to ROI, reporting an average ROI of approximately \$100,000, or 5.7 times the initial investment.

Multi-rater or 360° assessments are often used in leadership development programs and in executive coaching. These instruments have been used for feedback in fields other than coaching for several years. Two studies showed that using these instruments in combination with executive coaching led to better outcomes (increased effectiveness). In the first study, using a quasi-experimental pre-post control group design, 404 of 1,361 senior managers who received multi-rater feedback also worked with an executive coach to review their feedback and set goals (Smither, London, Flautt, Vargas & Kucine, 2003). One year later, managers who had worked with an executive coach were more likely to set more specific vs. general goals and ask for improvement ideas from their supervisors. Smither et al. (2003) also noted a small increase in

positive 360 ratings from supervisors and direct reports for those managers who worked with executive coaches versus those who did not. In another study, Thach (2002) tracked the progress of 281 executives participating in a six-month coaching process involving 360° feedback. According to the post-360° survey results, leadership effectiveness increased by 60%.

The majority of the research on executive coaching has involved independent, external coaches. Increasingly, organizations are using internal resources as coaches. Internal coaches know the organizational culture, the industry, and the key players in the organization (Frisch, 2001). Some organizational cultures may not respect an outsider (Strumpf, 2002). Other reasons for using internal coaches include cost containment, the ability of the internal coach to see the engagement from idea to implementation, and the opportunity to expand an in-house capability to foster continuity. On the other hand, there may be issues with power as it relates to reporting relationships and credibility for internal coaches (Tobias, 1996). An external coach, on the other hand, may have instant credibility, may be perceived as more trustworthy, more objective, more professional, and more suited to executive levels (Tobias, 1996). Coaches whose sole focus is as their coaching role may have an advantage over internal coaches, who are challenged with juggling multiple roles and who may not be able to provide the leader with the attention required (Strumpf, 2002). In the 2013 ICF survey (ICF, 2013), many organizations reported using a hybrid model of executive coaching that included a mixture of internal and external coaches. In this model, coaching services are not limited to senior-level executives, but are provided to individuals identified as key talent or high potential. The survey also revealed that the level of training obtained by internal coaches may vary widely.

Several studies have highlighted the importance of the coach-client relationship. When analyzing the factors that lead to goal achievement, McGovern et al. (2001) found that 84% of study participants emphasized the quality of the relationship between the executive and the coach. Smither et al. (2003) reported that 86.3% of the 404 senior managers they surveyed said they wanted to work with a coach again. When examining the factors that have a positive impact on the coaching experience, Thach (2002) found that 34% of leaders who had positive experiences working with an executive coach to implement a 360° feedback process attributed their positive experiences to the coach. In considering areas for improvement, lack of chemistry between coach and client (i.e., poor coach match) was noted. This finding was supported by the results of a study by the Corporate Leadership Council (2003), which showed that three of the

five barriers to effective implementation of executive coaching had to do with the coach-client relationship. Specific challenges included difficulty finding coaches who were a good fit with the organization, poor matching of the coach to the executive, and inconsistent delivery and quality of coaching.

In a study by McGovern et al. (2001), 84% of clients reported that the quality of the relationship with their coach was critical to coaching success. Kombarakaran et al. (2008) surveyed one organization's executives and found that 94% were pleased with their coaches and the assistance they provided in achieving their goals. Studies by Digman (2004) and Berry, Ashby, Gnilka, and Matheny, (2011) found that the quality of the coach-client relationship led to higher levels of self-efficacy. Others studies have reported that the coach-client relationship is the single biggest predictor of a successful coaching outcome (Baron & Morin 2009; Boyce, Jackson, & Neal, 2010; Stewart, O'Riordan, & Palmer, 2008). Most of these studies looked at external and, in some cases, professionally certified coaches. More research on the dynamics of the coach-client relationship in the case of internal coaches is needed.

Joo (2005) proposed a conceptual framework for successful coaching (Figure 2.1). In this framework, Joo lists the antecedents of successful coaching as the characteristics of the coach, the characteristics of the client (the coachee), and the support provided by the organization sponsoring the coaching. The process consists of the approach used by the coach, the relationship between the coach and the client, and the client's receptivity to feedback. Joo notes two different kinds of outcome: proximal and distal. Proximal outcomes refer to the behavioral change and learning exhibited by the client. Distal outcomes refer to the success of the individual and the organization; these may be considered as the ultimate goals of coaching. The conceptual framework presented by Joo may help guide future research on the factors related to successful coaching outcomes and help guide practitioners in setting up successful coaching engagements or programs.

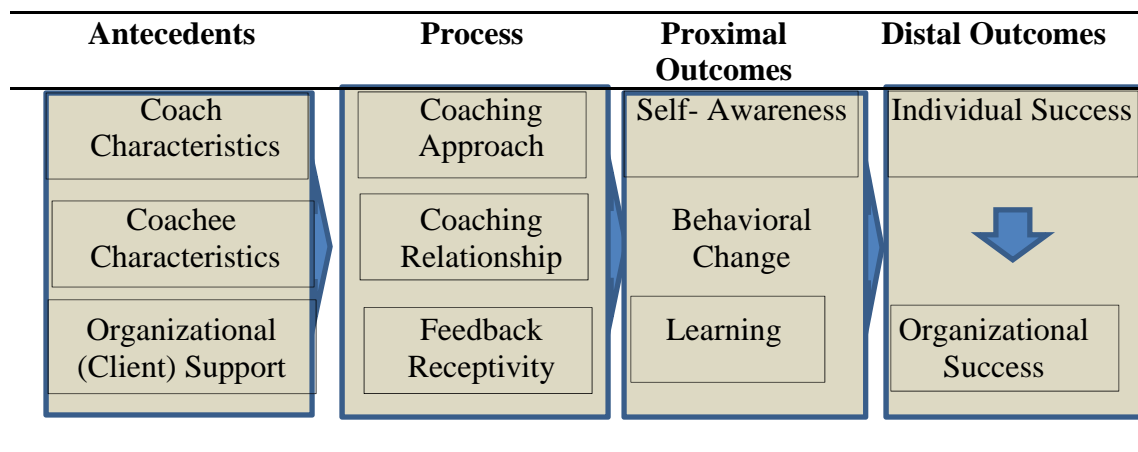


Figure 2.1: A conceptual framework for successful Executive Coaching (Source: Joo, 2005). Used with permission, personal communication March 23, 2014.

While the field of executive coaching has grown rapidly since the 1990’s, much of the literature on the subject has focused on the definition and origins of executive coaching and understanding the extent to which it is being used. Outcome research has also been prominent in the literature, but studies that explore the factors that contribute to successful outcomes are only recently emerging. Kombarakaran et al. (2008) identified positive outcomes from executive coaching in terms of the way an executive manages people, builds relationships, sets goals and priorities, and engages others with communication and dialog. They found that leaders were able to achieve these outcomes by building on their strengths, uncovering blind spots, developing their own coaching skills, and strengthening their relationships with managers, direct reports, and peers.

While understanding the factors that lead to a successful outcome in executive coaching is important, de Haan and Neiß (2012) also emphasized the need to consider the coaching process from the perspective of both the coach and the client. A handful of studies have looked inside the coaching engagement at critical moments, defined as “an exciting, tense, or significant moment experienced during coaching sessions” (de Haan, 2008, p. 92). While experiencing a critical moment was not found to be necessary to all good coaching, when critical moments did occur, they were mostly positive and associated with important outcomes for clients (de Haan, Bertie, Day, & Sills, 2010a, 2010b). De Haan (2008) also studied critical moments experienced by executive coaches in which they experienced anxieties or doubts regarding their ability to

coach through particular situations. The author reported that, in those critical moments, a coach becomes effective because they ask questions to guide themselves through their doubts and uncertainties.

In the present study, some elements of Joo's (2005) framework and the concept of critical moments were studied to determine their relationship to a successful coaching outcome as perceived by leaders receiving executive coaching from internal coaches. This study explored specific client (leader) profile characteristics (gender, age, type of manager, level, years in a leadership role, and years with the company) and specific aspects of the coaching engagement (frequency of meetings, availability of the coach, length of sessions, and total hours spent together) to determine their impact on successful coaching outcomes. In addition, leaders were interviewed to identify behaviors used by the coach that contributed to critical moments or shifts in thought processes that were considered pivotal to leader development. This research contributes to the body of process research on coaching effectiveness and provides useful information for researchers and practitioners in the field. While the current study does not employ all the factors proposed by Joo, it is unique in examining these aspects in relation to perceptions of successful coaching outcomes.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH METHODS**

The aim of this mixed methods study was to identify the factors that promote successful executive coaching outcomes. Specifically, this study explored the experiences of high potential leaders participating in a leadership development program in order to determine the impact of client characteristics (gender, age, type of manager, level, years in a leadership role, and years with the company) and aspects of the coaching engagement (frequency of meetings, availability of the coach, length of sessions, total hours spent together) on successful coaching outcomes. In addition, this study identified specific coaching behaviors that contributed to critical moments in the leader development process. The specific research questions formulated for this study are as follows:

**RQ1:** What profile characteristics in the leader's' background (e.g., gender, age, type of manager, level, years in a leadership role, and years with the company), are associated with the perception of a successful coaching outcome?

**RQ2:** What are the specific conditions of the coaching engagement (e.g., frequency of meetings, availability of the coach, length of sessions, total hours spent together, etc.) that appear to be related to a leader's satisfaction with coaching?

**RQ3:** What coaching behaviors were perceived by leaders as contributing to a shift in thought processes that was pivotal to their development?

Leaders were surveyed using an online questionnaire to gather specific information about their coaching experience. The survey included open-ended questions that focused on critical moments during the coaching experience, the context in which those critical moments took place, and the resulting changes in thought processes or behaviors that contributed to leader development. The questionnaire was supplemented with semi-structured interviews with a small subset of leaders that served as case studies to better understand their experiences.

#### **Participants**

The participants in this study were vice presidents, directors, and managers participating in a high potential leadership development program at an industrial company. Leaders were divided into two types: profit and loss leaders (those with responsibility for profit and loss for

their business) and functional leaders (those with responsibility for a function or overhead department). These leaders were designated as high potential leaders due to the fact that they demonstrated: a track record of sustained performance, aspirations to higher levels or more complex roles in the company, learning agility (the ability to learn quickly from experience and apply the learning to new situations), and a willingness to “do what it takes” (e.g., travel, relocate, or take an international assignment). The two-year leadership program consisted of the following components: an executive assessment, an interview-based 360° assessment, an internal coach, an executive mentor, and a two-week curriculum.

Coaches were HR professionals internal to the company who were either in an HR Generalist or Learning and Development position. The assignment to be a coach was a role the HR professional took on in addition to their full time job. They were not full time coaches nor did they have the same domain expertise of the leaders, but they did complete an internal coach certification program facilitated by an external coach certification consulting group. Coaches and leaders were paired based on them being in the same business unit or function, in the same geography and according to similar leadership levels.

### **Research Design**

A mixed methods research design was used for this study. A mixed methods design integrates quantitative and qualitative forms of inquiry. The reasons for using a mixed methods approach are to determine if the results from different types of instruments are consistent, to build on the findings of one method with another, and to demonstrate how results from one method can inform subsequent research methods or future directions for the research (Caracelli & Greene, 1997). Mixed methods designs can be fixed or emergent. “Fixed mixed methods designs are mixed methods studies where the use of quantitative and qualitative methods is predetermined and planned at the start of the research process, and the procedures are implemented as planned” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, pp. 54-55). On the other hand, emergent mixed methods designs can evolve over the course of the study depending on what the investigator learns as the research is being conducted. The present study employed a fixed mixed methods design. Grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and case study (Creswell, 2003) approaches were considered for the present study, but deemed less appropriate given the different types of data gathered to answer the research questions.



It was determined at the start of the study that quantitative data would provide answers to two of the research questions (RQ1 and RQ2) and that qualitative data would provide answers to the third research question (RQ3). Because data for this study were collected sequentially, in two separate phases, this fixed mixed methods design can be described specifically as a sequential explanatory design as Creswell (2003) explained.

[Sequential explanatory design] is characterized by the collection and analysis of quantitative data followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data. The priority is typically given to the quantitative data, and the two methods are integrated during the integration phase of the study. This strategy may or may not have a specific theoretical perspective. The purpose of sequential explanatory design typically is to use qualitative results to assist in explaining and interpreting the findings of a primarily quantitative study. (p. 215)

### **Data Collection**

Quantitative and qualitative data were gathered using an online questionnaire (executive coaching survey) and additional qualitative data were gathered through interviews with a subset of questionnaire respondents. The executive coaching survey consisted of 18 questions that were developed based on the analysis of two pilot projects, conducted earlier by the primary investigator. The survey contained a mix of forced-choice and open-ended questions regarding participant demographics, the conditions of the coaching engagement, an example of a critical moment in the coaching experience, and satisfaction with the coaching experience. In a paragraph explaining the survey, participants were informed that their confidentiality would be maintained and that their coach would not be given a copy of their specific responses. At the end of the survey, subjects were given the opportunity to participate in in-depth interviews that served as case studies. An email invitation to participate in a research study about the effectiveness of the coaching component of the program was sent to all 118 leaders who had completed the program. Sixty-eight participants took the online survey, a response rate of 58%.

To augment the results of the questionnaire and to add richness to the data collected, follow up interviews were conducted with survey respondents who agreed to participate in this second phase of the study. The aim of these interviews was to determine whether specific coaching behaviors contributed to critical moments in the coaching experience that led to a

sustained behavior change as part of the leader development process. The interview consisted of a set of open-ended questions with probes to gain a more in-depth understanding of participants' thought processes during critical moments in the coaching experience (see Appendix D). All interviews were audiotaped for convenience and accuracy of data transcription. Participants were asked to sign a consent form acknowledging the recording of their responses. The researcher also asked the participants for permission to follow-up with them if there were any additional questions for clarification; no interview participants refused this request.

The mixed method design of this study enabled the researcher to gather an initial set of qualitative and quantitative data about coaching engagements through the survey and then explore specific aspects of the data in a deeper way to provide a richer description of the phenomenon. The interviews provided the researcher with the opportunity to understand the phenomenon under investigation from the perspective of the participants and in their own language. Each participant was given a copy of *The Successful Executive's Handbook* (Gebelein, Lee, Nelson-Neuhas, & Sloan, 2003) for his or her participation in the study.

### **Data Analysis**

Due to the mixed methods nature of the research design, data in this study were analyzed using procedures designed for both quantitative and qualitative research. All quantitative analyses were conducted using SPSS and all qualitative data were analyzed using procedures of grounded theory and Nvivo software (an application for qualitative analysis).

For the first research question (RQ1), six leader profile characteristics were assessed: gender, age, type of manager, level, years in leadership role, and years with the company. For the second research question (RQ2), four aspects of the coaching engagement were assessed: the frequency of coaching sessions, the availability of the coach, the length of each individual session, and the total hours spent together. Descriptive statistics were calculated for these 10 independent variables. Details for each of these variables are provided in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1

*Definitions of Leader Profile Characteristics*

<b>Profile Characteristic</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Leader's Background</b>	
Gender	Male or Female
Manager Type	Profit & loss leadership or functional leadership
Level	The position of the leader in the organizational hierarchy
Years in Role	How long the leaders had been in a leadership role at the time of the survey
Years with Company	Length of time with the company
<b>Coaching Engagement Conditions</b>	
Frequency	How often the leader and their coach met
Length of Session	The amount of time in each individual coaching session
Availability	Frequency with which the coach was available to meet with the leader
Total Hours	The total amount of time the leader and the coach spent together

The dependent variable in this study was a rating of the coaching experience. Rating categories were *poor*, *good*, *average*, and *exceptional*. The frequencies of these categories were examined to ensure adequate cell sizes for prediction. After examining the frequencies, it was determined that responses for *poor*, *good*, and *average* were not high enough to serve as a basis for predictive analysis, therefore these categories were collapsed to one outcome. A new dependent variable was established, *exceptional rating*, with a binary value where 1 = *exceptional* and 0 = *not exceptional* (i.e., *poor*, *average*, or *good*).

Next, crosstabs were conducted with the new dependent variable and all categorical independent variables to ensure adequate cell sizes. Examination of categories with very small cell sizes revealed that no categories of independent variables needed to be collapsed. Correlation analyses were then conducted to examine the relationships between the independent

variables and the dependent variable. In addition, a binary logistic regression was conducted to examine whether any of the 10 independent variables could predict an exceptional rating of the coaching experience.

In order to answer the third research question (RQ3), qualitative interviews were conducted with a subset of survey respondents who agreed to participate in this second phase of the study. The interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. According to Boyatzis (1998), “Thematic analysis enables scholars, observers, or practitioners to use a wide variety of types of information in a systematic manner that increases their accuracy or sensitivity in understanding and interpreting observations about people, events, situations, and organizations” (p. 5). Thematic analysis was used in the present study to analyze qualitative information and convert it into quantitative data.

Interviews were transcribed and separated into individual files. Thematic analysis, informed by open coding, was used to analyze the interviews. Each interview was reviewed to get a general sense of emergent themes or major categories. Eleven broad categories emerged and these categories were loaded into Nvivo for further analysis. Categories were refined into codes; codes that seemed redundant were collapsed with other codes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). To validate the final framework, narrative passages that conveyed sentiments of a code were identified and used to illustrate and reinforce the intent of the code (Creswell, & Plano Clark, 2011). All categories and codes were integrated or brought together to answer the research questions. Finally, a panel of senior executive coaches, who had completed an advanced coach certification and had experience coaching a similar population, served as peer advisors to the primary investigator. Members of the panel reviewed the categories and codes through presentations and dialogue with the primary investigator and were asked questions about the findings to validate the final framework used in the analysis.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **RESULTS**

The aim of this mixed methods study was to identify the factors that promote successful executive coaching outcomes. High potential leaders participating in a leadership development program at an industrial company were surveyed using an online questionnaire to gather specific information about their coaching experience. The survey included open-ended questions that focused on critical moments during the coaching experience, the context in which those critical moments took place, and the resulting changes in thought processes or behaviors that contributed to leader development. The questionnaire was supplemented with semi-structured interviews with a small subset of leaders that served as case studies to better understand their experiences. Of the 118 leaders who received an invitation to participate in this study, 68 (58%) completed the questionnaire and 40 (59%) of the 68 questionnaire respondents agreed to be interviewed for the second phase of the study. These response rates are considered very good. Online survey response rates via email are considered to be average if a 40% response rate, good with a 50% response rate, and very good with a 60% response rate or higher (The University of Texas at Austin, 2007). This could be attributed to it being an internal survey, which generally have a higher response rate and to the fact that the survey came from the office which ran the leadership development program, a familiar source of the survey (The University of Texas at Austin, 2007).

#### **Leader Profile Characteristics**

The first research question of this study (RQ1) explores the relationship between leader profile characteristics (gender, age, type of manager, level, years in a leadership role, and years with the company) and successful coaching outcomes. Of the 68 respondents, there were 47 males (69%) and 21 females (31%), ranging in age from 35-59. The type of leader was almost evenly split between 38 profit & loss leaders (56%) and 30 functional managers (44%). A majority of the participants 35 (51%) were vice presidents; followed by 27 directors, (40%); 4 managers (6%); and 2 presidents (3%). Approximately one third of them, 20, (29%), had been in a leadership role for 20-24 years; followed by 18 (26%) who had been in their role between 15-19 years, then 14 (20%) in their role from 10-14 years; and finally two groups of 8 (12%) who had been in a leadership role from 5-9 and 25-29 years respectively. Table A.1 in Appendix A presents the complete list of participant (leader) characteristics.

As described in Chapter 3, correlation analysis was performed to determine the relationship between these six independent variables and the dependent variable (exceptional coaching experience rating). The results are shown in Table 4.1. The only variable with a significant slight positive correlation to exceptional coaching experience rating was the number of years with the company ( $r = .29, p < 0.05$ ). This result suggests that the longer a participant was with the company, the more likely he or she was to rate the coaching experience as positive.

Table 4.1

*Pearson Correlation Matrix for Leader Profile Characteristics and Exceptional Coaching Experience Rating*

	<b>Exceptional Coach Rating (ER)</b>
<b>Gender (G)</b>	-.172
<b>Type of Manager (TM).</b>	.114
<b>Level (L)</b>	-.069
<b>Yrs. in Leadership Role (YLR)</b>	.110
<b>Age (A)</b>	.091
<b>Years with Company (YC)</b>	.294*

\*  $p < 0.05$

Next, a binary logistic regression was performed to determine whether any of the six variables relating to leader characteristics could predict an exceptional coaching experience rating. Results are shown in Table 4.2. As with the correlation analysis, only the variable *years with the company* was significantly related to an exceptional coaching experience rating ( $\beta = .55, \sigma = .26, df = 1, \text{Exp}(\beta) = 1.74$ ). This finding suggests one could predict that the longer a leader was with the company the more likely he or she would rate their coaching experience more favorably.

Table 4.2

*Binary Regression of Leader Profile Characteristics and Exceptional Coaching Experience Rating*

	<b>B</b>	<b>S.E</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Exp (B)</b>
<b>Gender (G)</b>	1.04	.69	1	2.84
<b>Age (A).</b>	.250	.386	1	1.28
<b>Manager Type (MT)</b>	-.415	.638	1	.660
<b>Level (L)</b>	-.198	.537	1	.820
<b>Years in Leadership Role (YLR)</b>	.171	.301	1	1.187
<b>Years with Company (YC)</b>	.554	.265	1	1.740*
<b>Constant</b>	-3.14	1.935	1	.043

\*  $p < 0.05$

To further explore these findings, interview data from participants with the most and the least amount of experience with their company were examined. First, participants with over 25 years of experience with the company were reviewed, beginning with those with 30 to 34 years of experience. These participants gave examples illustrating the communication skills of the coach, specifically through the use of questioning techniques, and facilitation of the coaching process:

Two things made her exceptional in my view. She held me accountable. ‘What did you do? What did you do differently? How did you apply it?’ Specific questions. Not just, ‘Are you doing better? Yes’. That’s the end of the conversation. ‘Well, how are you doing better? What is that you are doing differently?’ Again peeling the onion and making me answer the question and be accountable for the growth. ‘Have you done anything yet? If you did do something different what was it?’ Not just letting me answer the question yes or no but asking ‘Why? Why? Why? How? How? How?’ She did this until she got me to the point where I had to reveal it all. This is what I did. This is what helped and this is what didn’t help. I feel comfortable with the tools she has given me – or no, this book didn’t work. ‘Do you have something else?’ It was an exchange of information.

What made her exceptional to me was the fact that she interviewed my VP and asked him lots of really neat questions. Then, she was able to pass on to me his comments about

what does it mean to go from my job to the next level. ‘What will change in my job? What are my skill sets? What are my strengths that he sees?’, things like that. Having him specifically tell her that he thought my strengths were strategic planning and some of the things that he thought I was really good at.

Well, I had worked with her and seen her on an assortment of settings over my career and her career. One of the things that she does extremely well...is a way to facilitate and communicate with groups of people even on subjects that she doesn’t really have that much knowledge in. She just has a way of doing that and a way of getting people to see other peoples’ sides of things and in doing 360s and in reviewing the feedback from 360s and presenting information. I think she does a great job of presenting things in a positive light. Things that are strengths to make sure you know that they are strengths and things that you need to improve on, done in a positive manner so that you take it very constructively and recognize the benefit of. I think she can be very persuasive in her communication style. I think the same in the way she facilitates meeting in getting other people to consider things rather than just be blind and say no I don’t want to go do it. I think that is a skill, or a talent really is a better word, a talent she has.

Participants with 20 to 25 years of experience had more varied responses, including recognizing the experience of the coach, being persistent with the schedule, being a good listener, coaching to the client’s agenda, and showing dedication as demonstrated in each of the following accounts by five different individuals:

I think his ability to pull in experiences and provide coaching advice from having a broader background having worked outside the company and actually I think he actually was outside of the division, I think he worked at XY as well. So he has certainly seen a lot of changes...and growing a number of people into responsible positions. He has also had to deal with some tough situations, so I felt like he had some good experiences, some good insight into how successful organizations work and unsuccessful organizations work from his perspective. My background has been limited to working here at ABC as well as 2 ½ - 3 years stint up at corporate. I’m familiar with a lot of the business units...and I recognize cultural differences, but I still really didn’t benefit from seeing how these cultural differences, what’s good, what’s bad, how does it help the overall health of the organization, so my coach was very instrumental in helping with that.



I think he is a fabulous listener. And his background in OD, he too has a good ability, not answering for you, but making you think, like he'll ask a question to help you think further. 'Why you are feeling the way you are' – I think of it as self-help – but the ability to - he'll keep asking questions, 'Why are you feeling that way?' or 'Talk to me a little bit more about this', 'Let's explore that.' And that ability to make you think...further analyze why you are feeling the way you are feeling or whatever it may be or why you are struggling with a certain issue. It was really good for me because I would take it a step further and a step further and the more I talked about the answers to the question, I'd finally get to the root cause and the root cause then might have been something totally different than what I was thinking initially.

Well, I think he was, in my mind, able to work that coach conscience type thing. Let me give you an example of that. A lot of coaches I've had in the past will sit down and it's a conversation – but I'm kind of driving the ship. What I thought my coach did was he came and he heard me out then went and validated what I said was either correct or not correct. He was not shy, probably a good word, to say, 'I'm hearing this' and that's what I think really kind of differentiates coaches. If they can come through and say, 'You know, you want to be careful you don't drink your own bath water on this thing.' And yet they're working with people that are potentially higher level in the organization.

Going into this process there was a level of cynicism on my part that while if we think we veil it, we don't. And I think my coach recognized early on that we had some frank discussions early on about: 'What was this about? What did I intend to get out of it? What I could get out of it?' I think he very early on kind of molded his approach to say, 'Look...', he wasn't a parrot to sit there and show, '...here's our leadership competencies – here's what you need to do,' on an intellectual basis everybody understands that pretty quickly. He worked more on saying, 'Well let's talk.' – And that's how we got to – 'Well how do you spend your day?' He wasn't a salesman- he didn't continually parrot and sell what he was doing it was really about – 'Well let's take this and figure out the best way we can get value to you.' By going through this process- everybody is different and everybody has different styles and different preconceived notions, and I thought he was very good at being able to quickly recognize what mine were and pattern what we were doing to be more focused on the areas that I would perceive as value.

The first was just his dedication. I knew it wasn't he was just checking the box. My coach was dedicated, he wanted to do the right things, and he wanted to help me with my career, so dedication. The second was, his mastery of the task and I happen to luck out, because it was skill he happened to have a passion for...he did the research, always on the web, always reading books in these areas, quoted books to me all the time, like I said before, sending me excerpts from books. And then the third was just the relationship he and I established, to the point where today I am comfortable calling him and saying, 'I'm having a real issue with this or that'. Everything we discussed, I know stayed between the two of us and we got into some dicey discussions at times and I knew I had his trust and confidence so that personal relationship that he forced us to form was the third thing.

Participants who had less than 10 years with the company rated their coaching experience as exceptional because they met the leaders' expectations. A participant with the least amount of time with the company (0 to 4 years) and one with 5 to 9 years both cited the coach's ability to meet their expectations:

Like I said I could not have had a better coach. From my experience and my expectations, she is just the perfect coach because she does everything that I would expect a coach to do. We have a good relationship not only at work but if I have something personal at home, I can talk to her and get guidance as well as a friend. I just cannot say better things about her. She is just exceptional.

...and you know what I think is key is for the coach to very clearly define the role at the beginning with the person that they interact with, to say, 'Here is what I'm going to be doing for you.' Or, here is what I'm thinking a coach is really going to mean for you'. That way you don't set up wrong expectations.

### **Aspects of the Coaching Engagement**

The second research question of this study (RQ2) explores the relationship between aspect of the coaching engagement (frequency of meetings, availability of the coach, length of sessions, total hours spent together) and successful coaching outcomes. Respondents were almost equally divided in answering the question about the frequency with which they met with their coach. Most met either monthly, 18 (26%) or quarterly, 18 (26%), followed by 16 (24%) who indicated that they met every other month. The remaining participants indicated they met every

other month, 7 (10%), annually, 4 (6%), twice per year, 2 (3%) or weekly, 2 (3%). When they met, the majority of respondents indicated that the length of their meetings were for 1 hour, 43 (63%), followed by 1.5 hours, 12 (18%), then 10 (15%) who responded that they met for 30 minutes and one participant who indicated they met for 90 minutes 1 (2%).

At the time of the survey, the majority of participants were almost equally divided in their responses to the question of how much total time that they spent with their coach: 0-9 hours, 18 (27%); 10-20 hours, 17 (25%); 21-30 hours, 16 (24%). The remaining participants indicated they had a total number of hours greater than that: over 41 hours, 10 (15%) and 31-40 hours 6 (9%). Finally, the majority of participants indicated that their coach was either always, 29 (43%) or almost always, 27 (40%) available to meet with them. A smaller number of participants responded that their coach was either sometimes available 7, (10%) or never 3, (4%) available to meet with them. Table A.2 in Appendix A presents the survey results regarding aspects of the coaching engagement.

As described in Chapter 3, correlation analysis was performed to determine the relationship between these four independent variables and the dependent variable (*exceptional coaching experience rating*). The results are shown in Table 4.3. A strong positive correlation with *exceptional coach experience ratings* was found for the *total hours* spent together ( $r = .49, p < 0.001$ ). Positive correlations with *exceptional coach experience ratings* were found for the *frequency* of meetings ( $r = .32, p < 0.05$ ), and *length* of sessions ( $r = .27, p < 0.05$ ). In addition, a positive correlation was found between the *frequency* of meetings and the *total hours* spent together ( $r = .57, p < 0.01$ ). These results suggest that three aspects of the coaching engagement that have to do with how much time the coach and the leader spent together were related to the perception of a more positive coaching experience by the leader. Specifically, the more frequently a coach met with the leader, the more total hours they spent together, and the longer their sessions are all related to the leader rating the coaching experience as positive.

Table 4.3

*Pearson Correlation Matrix for Aspects of the Coaching Engagement and Exceptional Coaching Experience Rating*

	(TH)	(ER)
<b>Frequency (F)</b>	.571**	.321*
<b>Length (L)</b>	.185	.270*
<b>Availability (A).</b>	.154	.185
<b>Total Hours (TH)</b>		.494**
<b>Exceptional Rating (ER)</b>		

\*  $p < 0.05$  \*\*  $p < 0.001$

Next, a binary logistic regression was performed to determine whether any of the four variables relating to aspects of the coaching engagement could predict an *exceptional coaching experience rating*. Results are shown in Table 4.4. The only variable that showed a significant relationship to an *exceptional coaching experience rating* was *total hours spent together* ( $\beta = .62$ ,  $\sigma = .28$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $\text{Exp}(\beta) = 1.86$ ). This finding suggests one could predict that the more time a coach and leader spent together, the more likely he or she would be to rate their coaching experience as positive.

Table 4.4

*Binary Regression of Aspects of the Coaching Engagement and Exceptional Coaching Experience Rating*

	B	S.E	df	Exp (B)
<b>Frequency (F))</b>	.298	.288	1	1.348
<b>Availability (A)</b>	.637	.452	1	1.890
<b>Length (L)</b>	1.221	.679	1	3.392
<b>Total Hours (TH)</b>	.621	.289	1	1.861*
<b>Constant</b>	-7.357	2.812	1	.001

\*  $p < 0.05$

To further explore these findings, interview data from five participants with the highest *total hours*, were examined. Four participants with 31-40 hours and one participant with 50+ hours with their coach were reviewed to determine if themes were present. Three participants gave examples illustrating some of the advantages of being an internal coach, such as being able to see the leader in a variety of different work situations, having experience within the company, and knowing who to talk to in order to make connections to assist in the participant's development:

There would be 2 things. One is that first of all, I think...I'm not sure how to categorize it, but XY was my coach, XY was also, from an HR perspective, the support for the larger organization I was a part of. At first, some people might think that puts her too close to me from a daily interaction or all the other things that go on, but what it actually did was gave me tremendous insight that once we sat and had those discussions, she knew the areas I was trying to work on, it gave her many other opportunities to observe me, the behaviors during other meetings, other situations that we were just naturally in together. So it gave her a wealth of visibility and therefore, me a wealth of feedback. Knowing that, that was what I was trying work on and then she would see me in different situations and be able to provide that feedback to me. If my coach was from a different organization or further away, there probably would not have been as many natural situations for her to observe those types of things and provide that type of feedback. So, I don't know how you categorize that or what you call it, but the actual closeness of where she was within the organization actually made that a much richer experience than if someone was further removed from your day-to-day type of items. And the second one is that the coach's interest in truly helping and working, I mean no point in time did I feel this was just another 'go do' on her list. She definitely took a genuine interest in my development and stuff and that clearly came through in the time, the quality of effort she put in to it and the effort she put in to providing feedback and those types of things. Those are the 2 biggest things that made it very beneficial for me.

And the other thing--I don't know that it had as high degree of bearing---but, AA had significant time in site X and knew a lot about the business climate. She could resonate to some of the issues, organizational issues, team issues things like that that I was facing in the assignment. That also we could use to benefit, for example: there were some things within the area that were generally called communications that I wanted to work on and

we would work out what sort of a test ground for new techniques and sort of knowing the pace of business operations and so on – some of the actions we took weren't very dramatic individually for example: At that time, I was spending a lot of time going out and having an informal conversation at our individual unit meetings, meeting the folks here on the team and in some cases renewing acquaintances since I was in site X in the 80's but a lot of time out on the floor with the engineering community which at that time was important to this team because of the business climate and the fact that we trying to reenergize the team, it was also important to me because it gave me an opportunity to be out and practice some skills that we wanted to work on for AA as part of the development plan. We were able to use our time as a discussion to say, 'OK, how do we match up my needs with organizational needs? And do things efficiently.' That type of discussion was very, very useful. I guess part of the reason I rated that exceptional wasn't just because it was helping me but, we were advancing company operations. There was business impact from what we were doing in my opinion.

MM also encourages me to speak to others about my career and about how I can fit in – I think I've said that a couple of times now. I've actually gone and talked to many, many, many people as a result of that within my business area and the corporation other business area – quite a few people. Because I've done that I've got a much broader perspective than just MM's concerning where I should be going and what I should be doing and where I should be focusing my efforts. She has also made some connections for me in terms of opening some doors so that I can speak to people that maybe otherwise might not have known who I am and might not be that aggressive about coming and speaking to me. For example,...I'm about 2 years into starting this business that I'm in and I began to talk to MM about potentially thinking about my next position and she made a whole bunch of calls for me. And said she's got me talking to the VP of HR, who[m] I only barely know and we had a very nice conversation as a result of MM's introduction and she's contacted other people within my business area and within the corporation as well, to begin that process of me beginning to look around at what's out there in the future for me. Is all of the above narrative from just one person?

Two other participants referenced the dedication and commitment of the coach, either by meeting consistently with the participant, or in terms of their development:

Part of it certainly was the structure approach and the frequency. I mean the commitment to me from my coach and to the relationship was phenomenal because we were able to make progress on a regular basis and just check in some times. She used to keep track, and I think the coaches have to do that, our contact hours, and it was substantial over 6 month or a 9-month period. Certainly, the level of contact was important and the structured approach was important because it was her being efficient about our time as well. She also brought subject matter expertise that I leaned on. We tested different things. What would work what wouldn't work in terms of the coaching and one of the things I sort of chuckled – Hey JJ you know I take homework assignments well. She would occasionally say, 'Here is an article to read or here's a book I think you ought to pick up – next time you're on a plane.' – that type of thing. She was a resource for me in terms of outside material as well it was more than just how are things going – coaching relationship.

What was effective about her as a coach was that it was: consistency hanging in there for the long term; we still talk even today and I still ask her questions about my career and about my performance- and understanding what I can do and what I can do better. She also has a lot of clarity in – I definitely get the sense that she has assessed many people over the years herself and that she has a lot of clarity in what the business requires and what it takes to be a good contributor. She seems to have a lot of experience. I think she also recognizes that when people are in a corporation it's a partnership between the individual and the corporation and that the corporation may have needs but the individual has needs as well. And that goal here is to find a match here between those two needs so that you get the most out of each other basically. I think that she looks at it that way; I think that she doesn't look at it as being for the individual and she doesn't look at it as being for the corporation. She looks at it as a partnership between the two and a meeting of life goals – I suppose. And she has actually expressed it that way – the whole situation many times to me and so that's helped me kind of figure out how to fit in, just to have her come at it from that attitude.

Two participants who rated their coaching experience as exceptional and had 30 or more years with the company also spent the most time (total hours spent together) with their coach.

Their responses reflected accountability and consistency:

She was persistent. I tended to get busy and not do the things and set up the coaching things and she would get persistent – we need to get together. She pushed me a little bit, which I think was good. A lot of her coaching sessions were over lunch, sit and talk informally. When she first became my coach she was the HR representative and I think that worked out well because she could observe me as I was interacting, cause she sat in a lot of the same meetings I did. And so you could get more real time feedback. ‘Hey you know you came over as a little bit strong – you sounded like you were really getting irritated – you may want to watch that,’ or it’s more I guess real time.

Finally, one leader described the value derived from the client-coach relationship in three different ways:

Ok if you were to net out, what was it specifically – pushing back or challenging, helping to reframe...if you were to net out, what were the three things that my coach did consistently? Well, first of all, a sounding board. So I think it was helpful, I could whine. So, the coach was a ‘safe haven’, if you will, so you need a chance to get the frustration out, if you will, but then didn’t let me wallow in it. So my coach would bring me back to, ‘how are we going to tackle this?’ and that would be point two. Point three would be to challenge me to think differently...in a constructive, positive way.

### **Coaching Behaviors**

The third research question of this study (RQ3) explores the specific coaching behaviors that contribute to the leader development process. To address this research question, survey participants were invited to participate in interviews for the second phase of this study. Forty of the 68 questionnaire respondents (58%), ranging in age from 35 to 59 years old agreed to be interviewed. The interview respondents were also predominantly male, 26 (65%) compared with 14 (35%) female. Half of the respondents, 20 (50%) were vice presidents, followed by 18 (45%) directors, and 2 (5%) managers. Respondents were evenly split between 20 (50%) functional managers and 20 (50%) profit & loss managers. Eleven (27%) had been in a leadership role for 20-24 years; 10 (25%) of them were in a leadership role for 10-14 years; followed by 9 (22%) who had been in a leadership role for 15-19 years; then 5 (13%) for 5-9 years and 5 (13%) for



25-29 years. The complete demographic profile of the participants is shown in Table A.3 which can be found in Appendix A.

As described in Chapter 3, thematic analysis was used to analyze interview data and convert it into quantitative data. Specifically, the interview data were examined closely to look for patterns or themes in the data that described the experience or phenomenon related to the questions posed by the interviewer. These themes became the categories for analysis, which were further refined into codes. The thematic categories and their codes are presented below.

### **Thematic Category 1: Reason for Coaching**

The first thematic category describes the specific situation for which the leader was being coached. Table 4.5 shows the three code items for this category, the number of people who cited each code item, and the number of references made to each code item.

Table 4.5

#### *Thematic Category 1: Reason for Coaching*

<b>Code</b>	<b># of Sources with at Least One Response</b>	<b>Total # of References</b>
Business Challenges	41	53
Development of new skill or approach	22	31
Career Development and Recent Promotion	6	6

The first code item in this thematic category is *business challenges*. These were challenges the leader was facing during the normal course of their job, from reorganizing to fixing problem areas:

I wanted to reorganize and what I wanted to do was functionalize the organization to try to optimize resources across MXX which hadn't been done in that organization yet. It was still very, what I would call stove piped by the line of businesses.

The organization was facing a number of business challenges, a number of programs that were not in the best of shape, and some very specific corrective action need to be put in place.

Some of the *business challenges* involved challenges with people at work, such as a peer, direct report, or team as described below:

First, there was another female member of the staff who unbeknownst to me was back talking and stabbing me a bit in the back and undermining me.

And that my actions to date had been very disloyal and that I needed to not ever come down and seek guidance from corporate without first talking to FF. They thought I was very disloyal for not bringing SS forward and it was just one more example of that.

And we were talking about ways to energize a staff that was in some ways feeling a little beat up. Beat up by the business climate, perhaps beat up a bit feeling that way from the number of reviews, including corporate audits and all and so on, and so forth. All of which were absolutely appropriate but just the total weight of the effort that the team had to expend during that time frame to turn the local business around a bit was pretty tough.

The second code item in this thematic category is *development of a new skill or approach*, which often involved reviewing and understanding feedback. Note how the leader identifies the specific areas they discussed with their coach:

When we both reviewed the outcome of how I react to things, how I deal with situations and observations of personalities and stuff like that, we felt like it was almost like what she knew of me and what I felt of myself and like it was totally a whole different guy. We believed that it did not represent what we both believed my strengths were weaknesses, personality traits whatever else you are supposed to get out of that interview.

And so for me, part of growing in that area is being uncomfortable when you're in the social environment. You all have to go to the cocktail thing. You'll have to go to the party, you got to go to the events – whatever the event is: the management event, the company picnic with all the employees and that kind of stuff. And so I have an uncomfortableness in having these casual conversations with people. I have a lot of friends that are really good at it and they get in there and the conversation just flows and they ask all kinds of questions and they can carry on these long conversations. Where I'm like, 'How are you today?' And that's kind of the end of the conversation. This is what we were going to work on.

The third code item in this thematic category is *career development and recent promotion*. In some cases, leaders had just been promoted into a higher-level position or they were taking on expanded responsibilities, some examples of which are described below:

I was leading an international group and I was asked to go lead an effort on a proposal. It was a large position coordinating across multiple companies internally and multiple external companies and it was a pretty overwhelming position.

The promotion was coming out of director's role in [function] and going to a VP role in [function] and what I ended up picking up new in that assignment was a large growth to my org was the [function] and the [function] and bringing that on board in to this group and actually this group reported in to [function].

## **Thematic Category 2: Coaching Behaviors**

The second thematic category describes specific coaching behaviors. Table 4.6 shows the eight code items for this category, the number of people who cited each code item, and the number of references made to each code item.

Table 4.6

*Thematic Category 2: Coaching Behaviors*

<b>Code</b>	<b># of Sources with at Least One Response</b>	<b>Total # of References</b>
Assisted in thinking through a situation	17	31
Presented or provided feedback	18	28
Provided advice or made recommendations	18	26
Asked questions	15	26
Managed schedule and tempo	12	17
Reframed a situation	10	15
Provided resources	10	12
Made leader feel comfortable	7	11

The first code item in this thematic category is *assisted in thinking through a situation*. In the examples below, the leader describes how the coach does this:

...he really walked through how to take this enormous problem...how an executive would break this down, each step into manageable elements so that you could really work through it, right.

I thought that was extremely positive from the stand point just to really help me think it through. So, it really was just that sounding board and being there and being able to bounce those things off of her, but more importantly that little bit of a forcing function to continue to peel back the onion. And...we could see the clear linkages between the feedback, the actions that were planned and then the desired impact that those actions would have.

The second code item in this thematic category is *provided feedback*. Feedback may come from a 360° assessment, the participant's manager, or direct observation by the coach. The first example below shows how the leader valued the fact that the coach was able to provide feedback to the leader since the coach and the leader worked in the same business environment. The second example shows how the coach made 360° assessment feedback meaningful for the leader:

And it was extremely fortunate because that enabled the coach to more readily see me in a day to day environment and I started using the coach as the objective observer. We would sit down perhaps after a staff meeting, after a presentation, after whatever an interaction might be and then get feedback in terms of the way she saw things playing out. And so it gave me a mirror if you will. Sometimes when you're in the moment you don't fully appreciate everything or maybe I was communicating with one individual but I was missing body language of others that were seated or other responses where she can kind of look back and see the whole scene.

I think her synthesis of the data and starting to see patterns between, you know, multiple people providing similar feedback was also very enlightening. Her having gotten that as an independent third party, you know a disinterested party if you will, who had no vested interest if the feedback was good, bad or indifferent I think was a very positive venue for getting me the kind of feedback I needed. And again, her being able to see patterns between more than one element of feedback was very positive.

The third code item in this thematic category is *provided advice or made a recommendation*. In some cases, after listening to what the participant described in their situation, the coach provided advice on how to handle the issue as described below:

Having DD was someone who I could sit down and have candid conversations [with]; let her know what had been going on and she had just very pragmatic advice about how to handle the situation and comments and conversations and helped me strategize on how to put things onto a better footing. And I think successfully within a short period of time.

...her advice was you need to figure out a better delegation approach, a better delegation methodology, otherwise you will never survive any broader jobs than this. And that was very true.

The third code item in this thematic category was *asked questions*. Some participants noticed the questioning techniques employed by the coach:

GG kind of took a step back and he says, 'Why are you questioning your own approach before you even get started?' He says, 'First of all, why are you going to do this if there are no advantages to doing it? Tell me what the advantages are, what are you going to talk to these VPs about?' And, as I started telling him about it and I was kind of bouncing against a third party he says. 'You know that's kind of hard to argue with.'

She would always ask me kind of probing questions and listen to me for a while and my responses and then rather than just telling me what she thought she would kind of pick at details, and probe and question and lead me around to see what I believe was her point so she helped me find my way over to her perception of a situation. Rather than telling, she was hoping for self discovery.

The fourth code item in this thematic category is *managed schedule and tempo*. For some leaders, one of the elements they valued the most was that the coach helped them to stay on track with their schedule of meetings as noted below:

The other thing that I would observe, just in terms of the way JJ approached coaching, she was – it was helpful to me that she was very detail-oriented and essentially kept me on schedule, on track if you will, with regularly scheduled meetings and her administrative assistant would work it out with mine. But, we kept it on a very rigorous, pretty frequent interaction basis, probably for the first year of the coaching we had

biweekly phone calls. Every other one was just the 10-minute sort of check in, with no lengthy agenda. We'd alternate – so we'd have once a month we had an hour or hour and half blocked out where we'd spend considerably more time going thru a variety of things. We would sort of set up thru the continued interaction. So, we had a very structured relationship and that's not to say that we didn't go off into sort of new areas of discussion, depending on circumstances of interest for either one of us. That was very helpful to me and the engagement was very useful.

We discussed a business rhythm and how often we would meet. If it were every 2 months or every 3 months, it probably wouldn't have done me any good. But, we started out weekly, just touching base until I had a plan in place and then we dropped it down to a month – monthly – just a status on where you're at in the plan. It's just like most of the employees we have – we're human too and a little guidance and prodding upfront until you get a plan in place and you kind of get over that comfort barrier and then it requires very little pushing to keep going.

Another code item in this thematic category is *reframed a situation*. In some cases, the coach helped the leader think about a situation differently than they had thought about it before. In the examples below, note how a leader describes how he or she is thinking differently about his or her situation:

Yea – because I thought it was...and in fact you know it was one of these things looking back, you think I should have known this, but what you should know and what you consciously use aren't always the same. And I had always – it's been years, you know I've been with the company more than 25 years now and my opening line to every boss I've ever had is when we talk about career development, is whatever happens, I don't want your job and then I keep ending up getting their job.

And so, sort of my mind was sort of on you have to keep their legacy alive, right, and I hadn't thought about what if you went into a role almost, almost completely on the page that says, 'I don't want to keep that legacy alive, I could do something different with this or I could evolve this.' You know it doesn't have to be a revolution, it could be an evolution.

It was just going through things on a routine basis and never even considering that was something I wanted to give up because nobody ever said, 'Hey RR why don't you let

us do it.’, nor do I think it was really a burden, but the way it was portrayed to me it made me do some thinking – I said you know what you’re right, this is the right thing to go do and it freed up some time for me to do other things.

Another code item in this thematic category is *provided resources*. The simple act of providing a resource that the participant found useful made an impression on some of the participants. The following examples are when a coach provided the leader with a book or tool the leader found useful:

So what helped me was for her to identify a couple of books – and I don’t remember the names of them now – I have them at home. But – that say here are some tips on how to do that, here are some skills – some questions – here is the area of questions.

Well, the coach gave me a document. Ok, like a piece of paper - that I could carry with me and put in the back of my notebook. That basically shows a four quadrant document per se - and walked me through it and say, ‘Ok here is something you need to observe.’ and that for me worked very well, because I’m visual. So I know where the different pieces fit now when I’m talking to somebody – I’m thinking, ‘Ok this person fits here-therefore my messaging ought to be done this way verses this other way,’ for example.

The last code item in this thematic category is *made the leader feel comfortable*. Some participants were appreciative of the environment created by the coach as illustrated by the following examples:

She was so good at making me comfortable. Ok, this is somebody I can be honest with, be revealing to, and feel safe. Because you feel a little stupid when you say – well I don’t know how to carry on a conversation when I’m at a party – that sounds stupid.

I think the success of a great coaching relationship is that both parties feel comfortable enough to share some personal things and you really build a close relationship, you build a friendship - and if you can’t do that then it probably isn’t going to work.

### **Thematic Category 3: Critical Moments**

The third thematic category describes critical moments in the coaching experience. A

critical moment is “an exciting, tense, or significant moment experienced during coaching sessions” (de Haan, 2008, p. 92). Table 4.7 shows the three code items for this category, the number of people who cited each code item, and the number of references made to each code item.

Table 4.7

*Thematic Category 3: Critical Moments*

<b>Code</b>	<b># of Sources with at Least One Response</b>	<b>Total # of References</b>
Role expectations	12	16
Leadership style or behavior	18	21
No particular pivotal moment	3	4

The majority of critical moments described by participants had to do with expectations of their role or their behavior as a leader. Some participants stated they did not experience any particular pivotal moment. The first code item in this thematic category is *role expectations*: and the examples provided below show how the leaders reflected on their roles:

Where he helped me was kind of reflecting that executives, the CEO, VPs and Presidents don’t necessarily understand everything about everything they are managing. It’s about putting people into positions that you can trust that they would understand and kind of relying on them and looking at the signs of when things are on track and when things aren’t on track and how to do that, really moving it from more of a mid-level manager position to an executive manager position and the techniques to do that.

I realized in my new role I couldn’t do that. I needed to be much more careful about going and having those conversations with him because he was going to react stronger than he had when I was just a junior person that he could just chat with.

The second code item in this thematic category is *leadership style or behavior*. This describes critical moments that provided insight to participants regarding their own leadership style or behavior. The two examples below illustrate two examples of the leader reflecting on his or her style:



And the insight, the ‘ah-hah’ insight that I got once I engaged with my coaches and mentors was, ‘Hey, well you still gotta be you.’ Hopefully I’ve got some inherent leadership skills and these tools are supposed to take me up to the next level or help me get there but you still gotta be you – and that was sort of the ‘ah-hah’ moment for me and, you know, I’ve surveyed a lot and seen a lot of different leadership types and some of them fit well with me and some of them I can use these tools to do better but others, that’s just not me.

I think it was more on how to approach the conversation and disarm the person. And kind of get them away from their perceived issue and try to more address what the real issue was even though that was not what that person perceived. It was really the technique. Because one of the things the coach had asked me was – what do you really think the issue is? And we talked it out. This person may feel a little threatened and they may think I’m going to take over their position or if they work for me I’ll hire somebody else to take their position. It just is how the person is presenting the issue to our collective management - if you will.

The final code item in this thematic category refers to the situation where participants did not experience or recall a *critical moment* in their coaching experience. In the examples shown below, one leader viewed their experience as part of a process and another states not only did he or she not experience a pivotal moment, they did not experience a change as a result of coaching:

I don’t know if that was necessarily....I don’t know if I would call it a pivotal moment – it was to me – looking back on it – it was sort of an evolution, just part of a process to go through. I don’t know if I would call it necessarily pivotal.

There really was no pivotal moment. I will say that my performance and my attitude about my job has not changed in an extreme way as a result of coaching.

#### **Thematic Category 4: Coaching Outcomes**

The fourth thematic category describes the outcomes of the coaching experience. Table 4.8 shows the two code items for this category, the number of people who cited each code item, and the number of references made to each code item.

Table 4.8

*Thematic Category 4: Coaching Outcomes*

<b>Code</b>	<b># of Sources with at Least One Response</b>	<b>Total # of References</b>
Changed leadership approach	21	27
Improved team or organizational performance	8	11

The majority of participants reported that, because of the coaching they received, they changed their leadership approach as illustrated in the examples provided:

It kind of opened up what I thought were my options of how I could handle things. I didn't have to right away take a hard stance or handle things that – I could pick and choose my battles easier. You just say, 'Ok, I'm not used to doing things this way, but let's just see if it works out.' But if your way works out for me then it's a win-win. Typically it did. In the group I was in before, for 7 years, I was very set in how I like to run financial reporting and how I like to run programmatic reporting and so in this, with MM's help I kind of reflected back to, 'Maybe I can learn something here, maybe there is some other better way here.' I could kind of blend my style to kind of fit the style that's already in place. And then slowly eliminate the dysfunctional parts of it.

I ended up kind of putting the recipe book on the shelf – had it quite memorized, worked with the group to identify where they felt they were struggling organizationally with gaps between organizations as well as looking at the performance and what the performance needed to be.

Other leaders said the coaching experience improved team or organizational performance as seen in the statements provided:

The team has changed a little bit, we've adopted, I'd say, it's a little bit more traditional staff meeting agenda currently again.

...and I say this is what I want, what I expect and I think it just puts it all right out on the table. It's clearer for everybody. I think it has increased the effectiveness of the team, because people know exactly what it is that I'm expecting.

It helped with productivity and development.

So I think it really helped bring the team together, really on a strategy versus just a grind through get the job done kind of mentality.

**Thematic Category 5: Sustained Behavior Changes**

The fifth thematic category describes behavior changes arising from the coaching experience that were sustained beyond the duration of the coaching program. Table 4.9 shows the two code items for this category, the number of people who cited each code item, and the number of references made to each code item.

Table 4.9

*Thematic Category 5: Sustained Behavior Changes*

<b>Code</b>	<b># of Sources with at Least One Response</b>	<b>Total # of References</b>
Changed approach with others	30	59
Increased self-awareness	10	27

The first code item in this thematic category is *changed approach with others*. When the leaders were asked about what they were still doing, some leaders how they are leading people differently or how they are communicating differently:

...sort of the lead and inspire others to do bigger and better things than they would think to do on their own, or what they think possible on their own. Focus on that help people see the opportunity and the vision of how to get there, the ‘to be state’ vs. looking back and trying to emulate everything we have done in the past.

...building a social environment at work, to where we’re family vs. separating completely work and your social life I think are always to motivate and inspire your employees to do good things vs. intimidating them into stay extra hours and working extra hard.

Like I said – I’m much better able to think ahead or for example take Joe Smith as an example – I know XYZ issue is going to be a hot button with Joe so think ahead when going into a conversation with him about what you want to do, and how you want to approach the conversation. It still doesn’t stop me from having the conversation but I think more about it before I go and do it. I’m fairly direct and I tend to like to roll up my

sleeves and get things done, but when you know you are going to have a challenging conversation with that style. My former style would have been to just go and have that conversation and not think a whole lot about it but it was a conversation that needed to happen – I know what I wanted so go have the conversation. Now I stop and think about what is the conversation going to be and how am I going to be able to communicate in a way that's better, going to achieve the objectives I have.

The second code item in this thematic category is *increased self-awareness*: and the examples below demonstrate the leaders' use of reflection:

I think I learned that I second-guess several things. Even though you may know the answer, I think I have been a little bit more sensitive and cognizant to the fact that people tend to have better results and do better if they come up with it on their own, even if you have to coach them a little bit to come to that revelation.

There was a heightened awareness for me in terms of a style standpoint – you know I've been to other meetings people don't wind up challenging whoever is at the head of the table. I have been in a lot of environments where, unless someone's called on, nobody is going to speak up. I don't like that type of environment. And I know as I have moved up, you have to do more to even encourage it even more because it's harder to get all of the opinions and all of the views that you may need to make the best decisions. But I always think about when we are going to have that discussion and setting it up and setting the ground rules so that everybody understands what page we are on especially with there always being a lot of different people in the room.

### **Thematic Category 6: Qualities of Exceptional Coaches**

The sixth thematic category describes participants' responses to questions about what qualities are associated with an exceptional coach. Table 4.10 shows the two code items for this category, the number of people who cited each code item, and the number of references made to each code item.

Table 4.10

*Thematic Category 6: Qualities of Exceptional Coaches*

<b>Code</b>	<b># of Sources with at Least One Response</b>	<b>Total # of References</b>
Approach role with professionalism	25	31
Assist leader to become more effective	9	11

The first code item in this thematic category is *approaches role with professionalism*. This was demonstrated by the coach showing the leader that they were engaged in the process. The examples below show that the leader values the coach taking their role seriously, valuing the leader’s time, keeping the leader accountable, being proactive and showing an interest in the leader and their development:

She seems to take it very, very seriously and gets very, very involved so that’s what a coach needs to be.

She is always available and values my time.

He stays on me.

...Very proactive.

...whose got ability to sit and you can recognize they are listening to you...and not just doing it because they have to go do it. They show interest in you and make you feel important. That period of time is with you, their mind is not wandering someplace else, they are giving you 100% commitment and concentration at that time.

In addition, professionalism was equated with knowing the coach was properly educated as described below:

...more senior HR Business Partners that have been coached and have had appropriate skills training augmenting their own experiences. They tend to have done very well as I’ve observed. Where we’ve had some junior coaches – there are a couple of instances that I don’t think things have worked so well. And one of the reasons isn’t that the more junior person isn’t necessarily prepared but rather maybe on a track for a succession of quick promotions and fairly quickly gets into different geographic locations or something akin to that sort of derails the coaching relationship earlier than one might like. We love to see our young HR professionals – perhaps a recent college graduate – making a quick

succession of moves. If they happen to also be a coach during that time period you can get into a move dynamic or something that really hinders the coaching relationship.

In this case you get people who have been properly trained, have the educational background for it and to my understanding there is also a certification process that you use so I think that is absolutely commendable and could probably be expanded.

The second code item in this category is *assist leader to become more effective*: by helping the leader to reflect, reach their potential, provide practical advice or provide feedback: ...being able to allow the coachee to really think through and self-analyze themselves and help them to do that is how they get better.

...looking for someone who could help me get past that more than I am.

...to have that practical advice.

...always provides good feedback you know because he is just a very good collaborator with me and he speaks very honestly.

First, it would have to be somebody you know you could have a conversation with and a dialogue with in a positive and constructive manner. In other words, you want somebody to be honest with you, but they have to be constructive and be willing to listen and be willing to give you honest feedback and/but make you feel good about the experience. I don't think you are looking for a drill sergeant. At least the old military drill sergeant, I think you want somebody who is willing to listen and be able to give you that honest feedback.

Honest feedback. I mean you really need to get the honest feedback and it doesn't have to be perceived as negative. One of the things I have always believed in and used to put on people's evaluations over the years is the ability to provide constructive criticism or constructive feedback and the ability to accept it. And how to, as leaders, we all provide it but you need to take it as well.

### **Thematic Category 7: Rating the Coaching Experience**

The last thematic category identified from the interview results relates to the rating given by participants to describe their coaching experience. Table 4.11 shows the four rating levels, the number of respondents who gave each rating, and the number of references for each rating.

Table 4.11

*Thematic Category 7: Rating the Coaching Experience*

<b>Code</b>	<b># of Sources with at Least One Response</b>	<b>Total # of References</b>
Exceptional	22	22
Good	12	12
Average	0	0
Poor	1	1

**Post Hoc Exploratory Analyses**

Post hoc chi square tests for independence were used to determine whether there was a difference in findings depending on whether or not a leader participated in the interview phase of the study. The researcher was interested in whether these two groups differed in terms of the significant predictors of successful coaching outcomes and their rating of the coaching experience. Three post hoc research questions (PHRQ) were proposed:

**PHRQ1:** Is there an association between whether or not a participant gave an interview and whether or not they rated their training experience as exceptional?

**PHRQ2:** Is there an association between whether or not a participant gave an interview and the number of years with the company?

**PHRQ3:** Is there an association between whether or not a participant gave an interview and the total number of hours spent with the coach?

With respect to PHRQ1, the percentage of participants that reported having an *exceptional coaching experience rating* was greater for those that gave an interview (65.8%) than for those who did not give an interview (33%). A chi square test for independence with a continuity correction for a 2x2 table indicated that this difference was significant ( $\chi^2 (1) = 4.989$ ,  $p = 0.026$ ). According to Cohen (1988), this is a moderately strong relationship ( $\Phi = 0.317$ ,  $p = 0.013$ ).

With respect to PHRQ2, a chi square test for independence indicated that there was no association between whether or not a participant gave an interview and the number of years with the company ( $\chi^2 (6) = 5.919$ ,  $p = 0.432$ ).

With respect to PHRQ3, individuals who gave an interview spent more hours with their coach than individuals who did not give an interview. Specifically, 42.9% of individuals who did not give an interview reported spending between 0 and 9 hours with their coach, compared to 15% of individuals who gave an interview. On the other hand, 22.5% of individuals who gave an interview reported spending 50+ hours with their coach compared to only 3.6% of individuals who did not give an interview. A chi square test for independence indicated that there was a significant association between whether a participant gave an interview and the number of total hours spent with the coach ( $\chi^2 (5) = 11.438, p = .043$ ). This relationship was moderate to large in strength (Phi = 0.410,  $p = 0.043$ ).

In summary, the answers to the research questions revealed several findings. First, the longer the leader was with the company was associated with a perceived successful coaching outcome. Second, in general, the more time the coach and leader spent together, the more likely the leader was to rate the coaching experience as exceptional. Third, not all leaders noted experiencing a critical moment that led to their perception of an exceptional coaching experience, but did note several coaching behaviors that they found helpful for their development. A summary and further discussion of these results will be discussed in the next chapter.



## **CHAPTER 5**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **Summary**

With the growth of executive coaching as a development strategy for leaders, research into the factors that relate to a successful coaching outcome for the leader and the organization is needed. While organizations may use external coaches, internal coaches, or a hybrid approach, the present study focused on the use of HR professionals as internal coaches with high potential leaders who were selected to participate in a leadership development program. The purpose of this mixed methods study was to understand the factors that promote successful executive coaching outcomes, using both qualitative and quantitative data.

#### **Conclusions**

This study explored the experiences of high potential leaders participating in a leader development program in order to determine the impact of client characteristics (gender, age, type of manager, level, years in a leadership role, and years with the company) and aspects of the coaching engagement (frequency of meetings, availability of the coach, length of sessions, total hours spent together) on successful coaching outcomes. In addition, this study identified specific coaching behaviors that contributed to critical moments in the leader development process. Accordingly, participant satisfaction with the coaching process was an important outcome measure for this study, similar to the study by McGovern et al. (2001). Specifically, the perception of a successful coaching outcome was addressed through the following research questions:

**RQ1:** What profile characteristics in the leader's' background (e.g., gender, age, type of manager, level, years in a leadership role, and years with the company), are associated with the perception of a successful coaching outcome?

**RQ2:** What are the specific conditions of the coaching engagement (e.g., frequency of meetings, availability of the coach, length of sessions, total hours spent together, etc.) that appear to be related to a leader's satisfaction with coaching?

**RQ3:** What coaching behaviors were perceived by leaders as contributing to a shift in thought processes that was pivotal to their development?

Data analysis, both quantitative and qualitative, led to the development of an organizing framework of factors in the current study considered for a successful coaching outcome (see Figure 5.1).

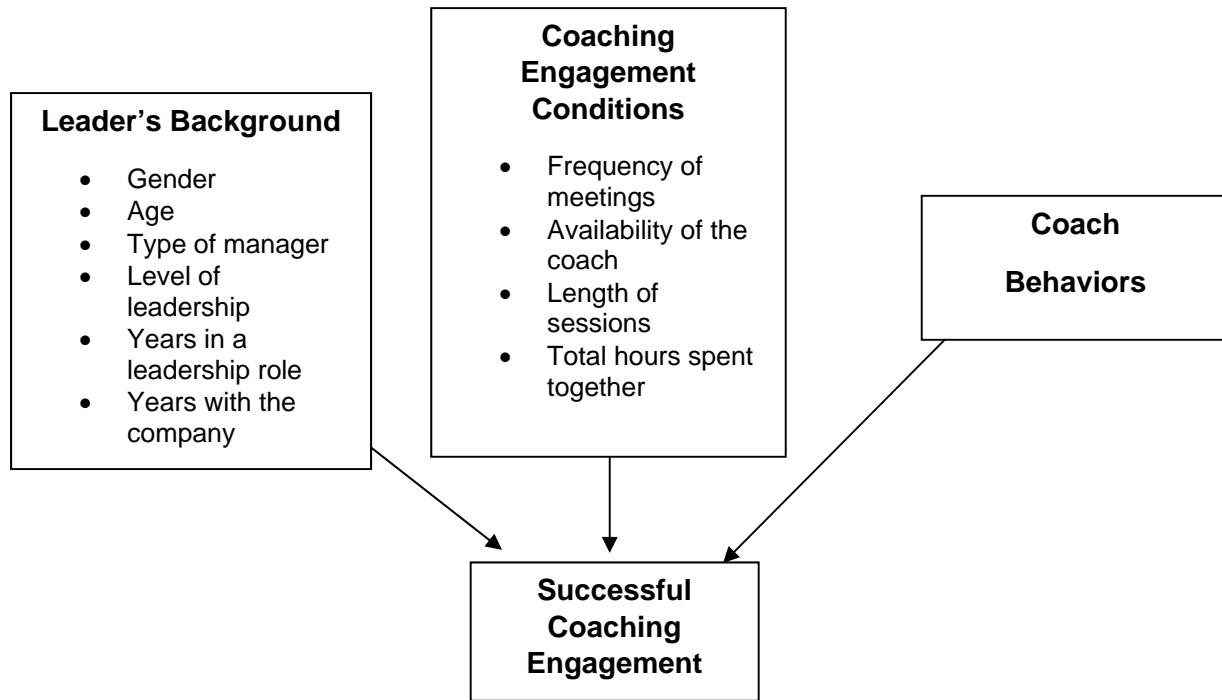


Figure 5.1. Organizing framework of coaching engagement factors.

### Research Question 1

The first research question asked: What profile characteristics in the leader's' background (e.g., gender, age, type of manager, level, years in a leadership role, and years with the company), are associated with a perceived successful coaching outcome? There was a slight positive correlation between the number of years with the company and an exceptional coaching experience rating ( $r = .29, p < 0.05$ ), suggesting that leaders who were with the company for a long time were more likely to rate the coaching experience as exceptional. This finding was supported through the use of binary logistic regression analysis, which found that for each additional year that a leader remained with their company, that leader was 1.74 times more likely to rate their coaching experience as exceptional.

There are several possible explanations for this finding. First, leaders may consider the leadership development program as a positive gesture on the part of the company in return for

their many years of service. Second, leaders who have been with their company for many years may feel a sense of loyalty to the organization and, as a result, take the coaching experience more seriously. Therefore, their own motivation may lead them to invest more deeply in a positive outcome with their coach. Finally, leaders who have been with their company for many years may be more motivated and dedicated to their development as leaders.

Interviews of leaders who rated their coaching experience as exceptional were analyzed in terms of the specific coaching behaviors that were associated with a positive coaching experience. Leaders with the most number of years with the company (over 25 years) emphasized the importance of communication skills, specifically through the use of questioning techniques, and facilitation of the coaching process. Beyond these items, participants offered various reasons for providing an exceptional rating for the coaching experience, including the coach holding the leader accountable to the schedule, being a good listener, coaching to the client's agenda, meeting expectations, and dedication to coaching. The findings from examining the second research question, which explored the factors present in the coaching engagement conditions may offer support to these perceptions by the leaders. For example, since the more time the leader and coach spent together was correlated to an exceptional coach rating, through the interviews leaders may be pointing out what they specifically valued from the coach (being held accountable, being listened to, etc.) which supports the quantitative finding.

These behaviors suggest that the coach was engaged with the leader and showed an interest in them and their development. While no studies have been identified in the literature showing a positive correlation between a leader's tenure with a company and executive coaching satisfaction, some studies have shown that the coach and the coaching process impact coaching outcome (Baron & Morin, 2009; Berry et al., 2011; Digman, 2004; Kombarakaran et al., 2008; McGovern et al., 2001; Thach, 2002).

## **Research Question 2**

The second research question asked: What are the specific conditions of the coaching engagement (e.g. frequency of meetings, availability of the coach, length of sessions, total hours spent together, etc.) that appear to be related to a leader's satisfaction with coaching? These factors are elements of the coaching approach in the conceptual framework for successful executive coaching developed by Joo (2005; see Figure 2.1). The results of the present study

showed that, in general, the more time the coach and leader spent together, the more likely the leader was to rate the coaching experience as exceptional. Correlations were performed to explore the relationship among variables related to the coaching engagement and an exceptional coaching experience rating. The results showed that the frequency with which the coach and the participant met, the total amount of time they spent together, and the length of the coaching sessions were all positively correlated with an exceptional coaching experience rating. These findings suggest that the more frequently a coach and participant met and the more time a coach and participant spent together (i.e., total time together), the more likely the leader was to perceive the coaching experience as positive. The results of binary logistic regression analysis showed that the total hours spent together by the coach and leader predicted an exceptional coaching experience rating. For each additional hour that a coach and leader spent together, the leader was 1.86 times more likely to rate the coaching experience as exceptional.

As indicated in the research from Chapter 2, the quality of the coach-client relationship is a predictor of success and if the results of working with a coach are favorable, many will report wanting to work with a coach again (Smither, London, Flautt, Vargas, & Kucine, 2003). These findings suggest that the more time a coach and client spend together, the more likely the client is to evaluate the coaching experience as positive in terms of achieving developmental goals. While no studies were identified in the literature that examined these specific variables as they relate to coaching effectiveness, favorable coaching outcomes are associated with the desire to continue working with a coach (Smither et al., 2003).

In reviewing the interview data from participants who had the most number of hours with their coach, several reasons were cited as to why the leader rated their coaching experience as exceptional. These reasons included the dedication and commitment of the coach and the emphasis placed on accountability and consistency. Several participants believed that having an internal coach was an advantage because the coach could observe the leader in a variety of different work situations, had experience within the company, and knew whom to talk to in order to make connections and assist the leader with their development.

### **Research Question 3**

The third research question asked: What coaching behaviors were perceived by leaders as contributing to a shift in thought processes that was pivotal to their development? Specifically,

participants were asked about coaching behaviors that precipitated a critical moment that was pivotal to their development as leaders. Leaders reported that coaches were able to help them problem-solve by thinking through a situation or by providing advice about a situation. Coaches also asked questions and provided feedback to the leaders. Other behaviors related to managing the schedule and pace of the sessions, reframing a situation, providing resources, and making the leader feel comfortable. While most coaching behaviors employed higher order skills, such as problem solving and reframing, to cause a shift in leader thought processes, this may not represent the only way to promote a leader's development. Some leaders may be content just knowing that the coach is actively managing the coaching schedule and knowing that the coach will meet with them regularly and hold them accountable for their development.

The reasons for the coaching sessions fell into two main categories: leader development and solving a business problem. This is similar to the conceptual framework for executive coaching success developed by Joo (2005), which posits that outcomes can include individual and organizational success (see Figure 2.1). Given that all leader participants in the study were enrolled in a leadership development program, the identification of leader development as the most common reason for coaching was not surprising. Coaches helping leaders to solve business problems could be viewed as a positive reflection of the value placed by the leader on the coaching engagement.

This study also explored whether leaders experienced a critical moment during the coaching engagement. The critical moment was an insight the leader had at some point, either during a discussion with the coach or afterwards, while the leader was receiving coaching. In the present study, the majority of critical moments identified by participants had to do with expectations of their role or behavior as leaders. De Haan (2008) found that when coaches experienced a critical moment in which they had doubts or anxieties about what to do in a specific situation, their own uncertainty led them to ask questions of the client to determine how to help them with problem solving.

In the present study, not all leaders reported having a critical moment, nor did this seem to be related to whether they rated the coaching as exceptional. These results suggest that critical, or "ah ha," moments are not a requirement for perceptions of positive coaching outcomes. This finding is consistent with research by de Haan, Bertie, Day, and Sills (2010a), who found that while some coaching clients experienced a critical moment, it was not necessary for a positive

coaching outcome. This experience with executive coaching may be compared to the experience of hiring a personal trainer. For some, gaining insight into how to change diet and exercise habits to reach a fitness goal may be considered a positive outcome, while for others, knowing they have someone coming to their house every Thursday night forces accountability and is enough to make weekly progress that could be perceived as leading to a successful outcome. Future research should explore this area further. For example, if the conditions of the coaching engagement were held to a constant whereby all coaches followed the same schedule, held leaders accountable for their development, etc., what would the other factors be that influence a successful coaching outcome? Additional questions were asked during the interviews to gain further insight into the factors related to a successful coaching outcome. The majority of leaders reported that, as a result of the coaching they received, they changed their approach or behavior as a leader. Other participants mentioned increased self-awareness and improvements in team or organizational performance. These outcomes are similar to the proximal and distal outcomes identified by Joo (2005) in his conceptual framework for executive coaching success (see Figure 2.1). Finally, the majority of leaders believed that exceptional coaches were exemplified by professionalism. The leaders defined professionalism in several ways: listening to the client, showing an interest in the client and their development, and providing advice and helpful suggestions.

Findings from this study support the definition of coaching as put forth by Ennis et al. (2012). As a leadership development process, it was demonstrated that executive coaching was used to help a leader build awareness and capability while also contributing to increased organizational impact.

### **Limitations of Research**

The present study has several limitations. The first limitation is that the study was done in one company, with a small sample size, and limited to high potential leaders who were nominated for and accepted into a leadership development program. With regard to the participants, the designation of high potential in itself, while reflective of leaders who may be candidates for executive coaching, may not reflect all individuals who receive coaching. These leaders demonstrated a track record of sustained high performance, aspirations for a more significant role in the company, learning agility, and a willingness to “do what it takes” for the

organization. Accordingly, these results may not be generalizable to other populations. Another limitation is that the coaches in the study were internal HR professionals who took on the role of a coach; coaching was not their full time job, nor did the majority of them have a coaching credential recognized by an external certification body. Their training was limited to an internal training program provided by the company. To that end, some of the coaches may not have been as committed to the assignment since it was not their primary responsibility as is the case when an external executive coach is hired by an organization. They may have also been very busy with their full time job and this role was something they had to find time for in addition to their other responsibilities. Another limitation is that leaders who did not have a positive experience with their coaches may not have answered the initial questionnaire and others may have decided not to participate in an interview for the same reason.

### **Recommendations for Future Research and Practice**

Based on the findings of this study, future studies of coaching effectiveness should emphasize how to optimize results in the shortest amount of time. The ICF's 2012 survey revealed that profession had approximately 47,500 professional coaches generating approximately \$2 billion in annual income collectively (ICF, 2012). Studies that focus on executive coaching return on investment, specifically aiming to determine the factors that make a difference in individual and organizational outcomes, would be beneficial for research and practice. In a 2001 study by MetrixGlobal, (Anderson, 2001) respondents reported that executive coaching should be integrated into the organization by linking it to business outcomes, selection and succession processes, and other leadership development initiatives.

It would also be helpful to know how leaders or coaching clients define the factors that lead to a successful coaching outcome. For example, it may be helpful to understand the goals of the leader and then conduct the coaching based on the type of goal the leader would like to achieve. In the 2001 study by MetrixGlobal, 58% of coaching clients who worked on tactical issues reported that their coaching significantly impacted the business while 100% of clients whose coaching focused on more strategic issues reported significantly impacting the business. Finding the sweet spot as to how to maximize or fully integrate individual and organizational needs would also be of value to have more research on for the future (Schein, 1978). This might also be a consideration for practice. Coach assignments, in a structured leadership development

program, could be made based on what type of coaching is desired, as stated by the client, needed by the organization, and coaches could be assigned based on their individual strengths, specialties, or cost.

Future studies should also explore the coach-client relationship. Drawing on research from a more mature profession, psychotherapy, McKenna and Davis (2009), noting a meta-analysis in Lambert (1992), found the quality of the relationship between the therapist and the client accounted for about 30% of the variance in psychotherapy outcomes. Similarly, there is much more to learn regarding the how to optimize the relationship between executive coach and client. The leader's learning style in a one-to-one relationship as well as the style used by the coach would be very helpful to match or pair the coach to the client. In addition, would it make a difference to the success of the coaching engagement if the coach had domain expertise in the same area as the client to lend credibility to the coach and further to the successful outcome of the coaching engagement?

Further, understanding the personal characteristics of the leader that would make them a good client for coaching, such as their willingness to change, would also be helpful. Again, borrowing lessons learned from psychotherapy, Prochaska & Diclemente (2005) note, "Once a client's stage of change is clear, the therapist would know which process to apply in order to help the client progress to the next stage of change." (p.149). In the same way, more research done on a leader's readiness for coaching would help them to target the approach in coaching to meet the client where they are and determine what processes to use to ensure success. Applying the principles of self-directed learning (Knowles, 1975) to coaching clients would also be valuable to understand which coaching clients would have the greatest propensity toward taking charge of their development and learning.

Finally, longitudinal studies of the specific factors that promote sustained behavior change in a leader would also be beneficial to add to the research literature in order to inform practice. It would be interesting to determine if any of the early improvements made by the leader while the coaching was in process or upon completion was sustained over time. In addition, would the changed behavior lead to career advancement for the individual leader or retention of high potential leaders, in general? In the current research study, there was only one question in the follow up interviews that sought to understand if a change the leader reported was



something he or she was still doing. Responses included an increased self-awareness or something about the approach they used that changed.

It is clear that more research is needed to determine what factors or combination of factors play a part in achieving a positive coaching outcome that contributes to lasting behavior change for individuals who have received coaching.

### **Closing**

The overall results of this study yielded two key insights regarding successful executive coaching outcomes:

Insight #1: In the contracting phase of a coaching engagement, coaches should spend time determining what is important to the leader in terms of defining a successful coaching experience. Whether it be regularity of coaching sessions, challenging the leader's thinking, or being a trustworthy sounding board for the leader, determining this upfront is essential to the contracting phase of the coaching engagement. This is foundational to adult learning.

Insight #2: Coaches should demonstrate full engagement and interest in the client's success. This may seem obvious for an external executive coach, but for a busy HR professional taking on the additional role of a coach, it is critical. This begins with an investment of time, which was shown in this study to correlate with positive coaching outcomes. After this foundation has been laid, determining how to help a leader achieve sustained behavior change would be critical for continued success as a coach.

The results of this study may be helpful in advancing the profession of executive coaching. More importantly, the findings of this study may assist executive coaches in having a positive impact on leaders in the business community.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**LEADER PROFILE CHARACTERISTICS AND COACHING ENGAGEMENT**  
**CONDITIONS**

Table A.1

*Leader Profile Characteristics*

Variable	Questionnaire Respondents (N = 68)	
	n	%
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	47	69
Female	21	31
<b>Age</b>		
<34 Years	0	0
35-39 Years	2	3
40-44 Years	20	29
45-49 Years	28	41
50-54 Years	11	16
55-59 Years	6	9
Missing	1	2
<b>Type of Leader</b>		
Profit & Loss Managers	38	56
Functional Managers	30	44
<b>Level of Leader</b>		
President	2	3
Vice President	35	51
Director	27	40
Manager	4	6
<b>Years in Leadership Role</b>		
5-9 Years	8	12
10-14 Years	14	20
15-19 Years	15	26

(continued)

Table A.1 (continued)

*Leader Profile Characteristics*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Questionnaire Respondents (N = 68)</b>	
	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
20-24 Years	20	29
25-29 Years	8	12
<b>Years with Company</b>		
0-4	4	6
5-9	7	10
10-14	3	4
15-19	8	12
20-24	31	46
25-29	12	18
30-34	2	3
Missing	1	1

Table A.2

*Aspects of the Coaching Engagement*

Variable	Questionnaire Respondents (n=68)	
	n	%
<b>Frequency of Coach Meetings</b>		
Annually	4	6
Bi-Annually	2	3
Quarterly	18	26
Every Other Month	16	24
Monthly	18	26
Bi-Monthly	7	10
Weekly	2	3
Missing	1	2
<b>Availability of Coach</b>		
Never	3	4
Sometimes	7	10
Almost Always	27	40
Always	29	43
Missing	2	3
<b>Length of Session</b>		
30 min	10	15
60 min	43	63
90 min	12	17
120 min	1	2
Missing	2	3

(continued)

Table A.2 (continued)

*Aspects of the Coaching Engagement*

Variable	Questionnaire Respondents (n=68)	
	n	%
<b>Total Hours Together</b>		
0-9	18	26
10-20	17	25
21-30	16	23
31-40	6	9
41-50	10	15
51+	0	0
Missing	1	2

**Table A.3***Leader Profile Characteristics of Interview Participants*

Variable	Questionnaire Respondents (N = 40)	
	n	%
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	26	65
Female	14	35
<b>Age</b>		
<34 Years	0	0
35-39 Years	1	2
40-44 Years	15	38
45-49 Years	13	33
50-54 Years	8	20
55-59 Years	4	7
<b>Type of Leader</b>		
Profit & Loss Managers	20	50
Functional Managers	20	50
<b>Level of Leader</b>		
Vice President	20	50
Director	19	45
Manager	2	5
<b>Years in Leadership Role</b>		
5-9 Years	5	13
10-14 Years	10	25
15-19 Years	9	22
20-24 Years	11	27
25-29 Years	5	13

(continued)

**Table A.3** (continued)*Leader Profile Characteristics of Interview Participants*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Questionnaire Respondents (N = 40)</b>	
	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Years with Company</b>		
0-4	2	5
5-9	2	5
10-14	1	3
15-19	4	10
20-24	20	50
25-29	8	20
30-34	2	5
Missing	1	3



## **APPENDIX B**

### **INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

Doctoral Dissertation Research  
Marilyn Figlar  
Ph.D. Candidate – Adult Learning & Human Resource Development Program  
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

**Dissertation Title:** Pivotal Moments in Internal Coaching Engagements of High Potential Leaders in a Large Corporation.

#### **I. Purpose of Project**

The purpose of this study is to explore the perceived effectiveness of internal coaching by human resource professionals. Specifically, the study will examine pivotal moments in a coaching engagement that were critical to the perceived success of leaders' development. This study is significant because it will contribute to the growing body of literature about executive coaching. The specific information gained about the coaching practices employed by the company's internal human resource professionals who serve as coaches will also be helpful for their own continuing development.

The method is a multiple case study approach. Multiple coaching cases will be examined in order to determine if there were common themes in the processes used by coaches or specific conditions that led to the outcome of a sustained behavior change as perceived by clients. This approach will enable the researcher to create more rich descriptions and explanations to help other coaches achieve similar results, thus increasing the usefulness of the findings. In this research, the general aim of the activity is to understand what aspects of the coaching experience contribute to a sustained behavior change

#### **II. Procedures**

All participants were sent web-based questionnaire designed to better understand their perceptions of the impact of coaching they received. In particular, the researcher will be trying to understand the pivotal or "breakthrough" moments in a coaching engagement that led the clients to a change in their thoughts or actions resulting in a favorable outcome for them. Following administration of the questionnaire, to augment the results and add richness and variety to the data gathered, a select number of interviews will be conducted with those participants who responded that they would be willing to be contacted by the researcher to better understand their experiences.

The purpose of this interview with you is to follow-up on the questionnaire and to gather more in-depth data. The interview format will consist of a set of open-ended questions, with probes to gain a more in-depth understanding as to what occurred in your thought-process during a pivotal moment in the coaching you received. The interviews will be tape-recorded for convenience and accuracy of data transcription. To ensure accuracy and completeness, you will be asked to review the transcript.

### **III. Risks**

The risks in this study are minimal. You will be asked questions to elaborate on your answers from the questionnaire. When recalling specific incidents, you may describe certain situations that you have experienced in the workplace. All of the information you provide will remain confidential. Protection of this risk will be carefully followed and includes your right to refuse to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time. Your exercise of your rights will be respected.

The benefit to this study is to gain a better understanding of your experience from the coaching engagement that you perceived has provided a benefit to you. Your participation is very important and it is hoped that you can use this opportunity to speak candidly about your experiences, while being assured confidentiality.

If you would like a summary of the research results at a later time, you may contact Marilyn Figlar.

### **IV. Confidentiality Statement**

- A. Your interview will be tape-recorded and all of the information will remain confidential. All identifying information, for example, names of the participants, names of individuals mentioned in the interview, work locations, business units, programs, and events will be removed from the document.
- B. The researcher is the only person who will listen to the tapes. Her analysis will be based on the information in the transcripts. Once transcribed, the original tapes will be secured in a locked file cabinet at the researcher's residence and she will be the only person to access the tapes.
- C. The tapes will be kept beyond the completion of the dissertation for purposes of verification of information and in the event that there will be a need to continue or expand the research. Upon completion of those tasks, the tapes will be destroyed.
- D. You will be given the final version of their transcript to verify accuracy and completeness. You may correct or add to the transcript at any time.

### **V. Compensation**

No additional form of compensation will be earned for participating in the interview phase of this study.

### **VI. Freedom to Withdraw**

You may refuse to answer any question, comment on any issue or withdraw from the study at any time. Your rights will be granted and respected.

## VII. Approval of Research

This research project has been approved, as required, by the Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, the Department of Research.

## VIII. Participant's Responsibilities

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have the following responsibilities:

- Participate in the interview
- Review the interview transcript

## IX. Participant's Responsibilities

I have read and understand the Informed Consent and conditions of this project. I have had all of my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent for participation in this study.

I understand that I may withdraw at any time without penalty.

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Signature

Date

Please fax this form to Marilyn Figlar at xxx-xxx-xxxx

Should I have any questions about this research or its conduct, I can contact:

Marilyn K. Figlar, Investigator

Phone: xxx-yyy-zzzz  
email

Marcie Boucouvalas, Ph.D.  
Professor  
Virginia Tech University

Phone: xxx-yyy-zzzz  
email

**APPENDIX C**  
**COACHING SURVEY**

Thank you for your participation in this survey. As a participant in the ABC program, we would like to better understand what value you gained from the coaching you have received. More importantly, we would like you to comment on the specific incidents and actions that were pivotal to your development because they led to a change in your thought process or behavior. There are no right or wrong answers. Your confidentiality will be maintained and your coach will not be informed of your specific responses. All coaches will receive a report of the study findings that will include only an aggregate of all of the responses to this survey.

**1. What year did you start in the ABC program**

- 2002
- 2003
- 2004

**2. How long have/had you been working with your coach?**

- 3-6 months
- 6-12 months
- Over 1 year
- Over 2 years
- Over 3 years
- other, please explain

**3. Is this the first executive coach you have ever worked with?**

- Yes
- No
- other, please explain

**4. Did you and your coach establish a formal development plan?**

- Yes
- No
- other, please explain

**5. How often do you/did you meet with your coach?**

- Once a week
- Twice a month
- Once a month
- Once every other month
- Once a quarter
- Once a year
- other, please explain

**6. How long do/did your coaching sessions typically last?**

- Half hour
- Hour
- Hour and a half
- Two hours or more
- other, please explain

**7. How available is/was your coach when you needed to meet with him or her?**

- Always available
- Almost always available
- Sometimes available
- Not available most of the time
- other, please explain

**8. Is/was your coaching relationship in-person or over the phone?**

- In person
- Over the phone
- other, please explain

**9. Approximately how many contact hours have you spent with your coach thus far?**

- Less than 10 hours
- 10 - 20 hours
- 20 - 30 hours
- 30 - 40 hours
- More than 50 hours

10. Think back to a time when you were working with your coach, to a moment or event that was pivotal to the success of your development. This could have happened during a particular session, or at a certain point in the course of working with your coach. It could be something that the coach suggested, a question he/she asked that was very thought-provoking or powerful for you, or a story that triggered a new idea or realization. (For example, shifted your thinking, had you see things from a new or different perspective, or was a catalyst for you implementing new behaviors not evidenced in the past.)

**10a. What was the situation?**

**10b. What did your coach say or do that was a catalyst in this situation?**

**10c. What was the result in terms of changed thought processes or behavior on your part? For example, what did you START doing, STOP doing, or CONTINUE doing?**

**10d. Did the significance of this occur to you at the time, or is it upon reflection that you realized the impact of that event on your learning and development?**

**11. At what point in your coaching relationship did this moment or event occur?**

- 3-6 months
- 6 months-12 months
- After the first year
- After the second year

other, please explain

**12a. Did this incident change the way you worked with your coach? For example, were you able to work at a deeper level of understanding or work in a different way?**

- Yes
- No

other, please explain:

**12b. If you answered yes above, please elaborate. In what way did this incident change the way you and your coach worked together?**

**13. Please check all the responses below that apply to the following areas of potential business impact as it relates to the results of your coaching experience:**

- Increased productivity
- Increased appreciation of diversity
- Retention of key talent
- Increased team member satisfaction
- Increased customer satisfaction
- Improved teamwork
- Increased quality of work

other, please explain

**14. If you were able to assign a monetary benefit to any of the items you noted positive improvement in from the question above, please select from the ranges below:**

- 1x your salary
- 2x your salary
- 3x your salary
- 4x your salary
- 5x your salary

other, please fill in

**15. Would you consider the coaching you have received to be:**

- Exceptional
- Good
- Average
- Poor

other, please explain

**Would you be willing to be contacted for a phone interview to further discuss your responses?**

- Yes
- No

If yes, please provide your name:

Demographics

**Please indicate your gender:**

- Male
- Female

**Please indicate the type of position you are in:**

- Program or Line of Business Manager (Profit & Loss Manager)
- Functional Manager

**Please indicate your position level:**

- President or GM
- Vice President
- Director
- Manager

**Please indicate the number of years you have been in a leadership role - with this company or with another company:**

- 0-4
- 5-9
- 10-14
- 15-19
- 20-24
- 25-29
- 30-34
- 35-39

**Please indicate your age:**

- 25-29
- 30-34
- 35-39
- 40-44
- 45-49
- 50-54
- 55-59
- 60-64
- 65-69
- 70-74
- other, please explain

**Please indicate the number of years with the company:**

- 0-4
- 5-9
- 10-14
- 15-19
- 20-24
- 25-29
- 30-34
- 35-39
- 40+



**If you would like to receive a copy of The Successful Executives Handbook as a result of your participation in this survey, please provide your name below:**

**Informed Consent: With completion of this survey, I acknowledge my consent for my answers to be used for the purposes of research toward increasing the understanding of coaching effectiveness.**

- Yes
- No, I do not wish to have my responses be included.

Thanks again for your time in taking this survey!

**APPENDIX D**  
**INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

**Date:**

**Name:**

**Title/Group/Function:**

**Company:**

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Mention taping of the interview. Also ask: Would they be willing to sign a consent form?

Would they mind reading the transcript when it is finished to ensure this is what they meant to say? And be willing to have a second interview if needed for further clarification?

***Purpose of Research/ Positioning of Interviewer***

“Thank you for taking the time to let me follow up with you to gain a better understanding of how your coaching relationship worked. What I would like to spend our time on is understanding is how specifically the coach helped you.”

In the survey, you were asked to think back to a time when you were working with your coach, to a moment or event that was pivotal to the success of your development. This could have happened during a particular session, or at a certain point in the course of working with your coach. It could be something that the coach suggested, a question he/she asked that was very thought-provoking or powerful for you, or a story that triggered a new idea or realization. (For example, shifted your thinking, had you see things from a new or different perspective, or was a catalyst for you implementing new behaviors not evidenced in the past.)

“In this interview, I am going to ask you a few questions about the situation you cited in the survey.”

### *The Situation*

**LEAD 1:** In the survey when you answered the question by saying (read survey response).

- a) Can you tell me a bit more about the circumstances that surrounded the situation?
- b) Who was involved (in the situation, decision, etc)?
- c) What was happening at work during this time?
- d) What other barriers were you facing or did you think you were facing?

OK, thank you, this helps me to better understand the situation. I would like to move on now and better understand how your coach helped you and how you responded.

### *The Actions of the Coach*

**LEAD 2:** You mentioned that the coach (did or said) \_\_\_\_\_ in this situation or in your coaching engagement. Can you recall what specifically the coach said or did? Can you walk me through how the discussion occurred?

For example:

- a) Did he/she ask you a question?
- b) Was it a specific piece of advice?
- c) Did they offer a point of view that helped you see things differently?
- d) Is there something you would have done differently simply because of the feedback alone? How did your coach help you use the feedback?

Finally, I would like to better understand what you have done differently as a result of that situation or working with your coach.

### *The Result*

**LEAD 3:** You said in the survey that as a result, this caused you to \_\_\_\_\_ or you started doing \_\_\_\_\_. Can you tell me more about that?

- a) Has this made you more effective at work? How? How do you know?
- b) Has this change helped you in other circumstances or situations?

Additional Follow Up Questions:

**Is this something you are still doing?**

You rated your coach as XXX, why did you rate them that way?

What could the coach have done to make you put him/her in the Exceptional category?

You rated your coach as Fair or Poor? What could have the coach done differently?

What do you think makes a great coach?

***Closing***

**LEAD 4:** In asking the above questions, I have been mostly directing the discussion. At this point, I would like to ask you are there aspects or issues re: your coaching engagement that I have not touched upon that you consider important?

- a) Do you have any other information you would like to add?
- b) What additional questions should I ask? (What is *the* question that I haven't asked?)
- c) After we finish today, what is that one thing that you will wish that you would have told me?
- d) Who else would you recommend I talk to?

OK, thank you. I would also like to mention that you may withdraw at any time from the interview and the survey.

Thank you very much for your time and perspective today.