Executive Coaching: An international analysis of the supply of executive coaching services

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Abstract

This study allows us to deepen our understanding of various aspects of the supply of executive coaching services used by international companies. Employing an exploratory research methodology the study offers findings in three key areas: the identity and backgrounds of executive coaches; the ways in which executive coaches organise themselves to address the demand for their services and finally the ways in which organisations meet the challenge of finding and working with executive coaches given a steadily increasing demand for their work.

The study shows that although executive coaches have diverse backgrounds there are certain elements that often recur. Executive coaches are likely to have spent a significant part of their working lives as employees in organisations before they transition into the field of executive coaching. However having made this change most of them are now established as self-employed professionals. Their average age is a few years higher than that of professional coaches in general and the balance between men and women in this kind of work tends to vary between North America and the United Kingdom, where women are in the majority and Continental Europe where more men are taking up the role.

Given executive coaches' preference for remaining relatively independent, many of them leverage skills and practices that allow them to team up effectively with fellow colleagues when client opportunities require teams of professionals. This study tests a categorisation of types of executive coaching supplier that reflects the different configurations in which professionals organise themselves, such as being employed by a consulting firm, running a training institution or working independently with or without a network of colleagues. The study also discusses the emergence of professional communities for executive coaches, and the particular challenges which come with being a multi-disciplinary field drawing on the work of more established professions.

The study found that as organisations learn more about executive coaching they are developing their own practices and processes for working with coaches,

which cover aspects such as coach and coachee selection, matching of coaches to coachees, measuring effectiveness of coaching engagements and partnering with third-party service providers.

Finally, given the exploratory nature of this study, it concludes with a range of recommendations for future research and ongoing professional practice.

This work is dedicated to Graciela, my inspiration.

What a journey we are on!

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

Coaching, in one form or another, has been referred to sporadically in the academic literature as far back as 1937 (Carter, 2001; Grant & Cavanagh, 2004). However the practice of coaching individuals has been developing in earnest since the mid-late 1980s in North America (Williams & Davis, 2002), and since the mid 1990s in the UK and Europe (Carter, 2001). Measures of these developments include a surge in media coverage and articles, practitioner conferences and training and a steady increase in the number of doctoral dissertations published on coaching topics since 2000 (Grant & Cavanagh, 2004).

Coaching has taken on many forms as it has evolved to meet the needs of different types of client. These clients (or "coachees") range from private individuals pursuing their own personal development goals through to corporate employees at various organisational levels, from newly appointed managers getting to grips with their first leadership role right through to the most senior executives digesting the huge scale of their jobs. Corporate clients may be offered coaching as part of a professional development process or seek it out in response to particular challenges or opportunities. The offer of coaching is even seen in some situations as recognition of the coachee's value to the organisation to the point where having a coach bestows status akin to a corner office or a high-end company car.

The accelerating pace of change in business life creates a relentless pressure on executives – the more senior their position, the more important it becomes for them to be able to draw on high levels of emotional intelligence, as well as political and leadership skills. *Executive coaching*, with its potential to be customized to the needs of individual clients, has surged in popularity and gained in acceptance as a widely used development tool for executive development (Corporate Leadership Council, 2003; Jarvis, 2004). Rather than be squeezed into "one size fits all" leadership development courses, executives enter a coaching relationship that can be continually adapted to their short and long term needs.

Approaches similar to executive coaching have been in existence for decades, with executives engaging a range of professionals to support them with their workplace and personal agendas. However the term *executive coaching* appears to play a role by providing a neutral container into which various elements of the professional disciplines which contribute to this practice can be placed, such as clinical psychology, psychotherapy, management and organisational consulting, education and sports psychology (Carter, 2001). Whilst some of these other practices on their own may provoke resistance or ambivalence amongst this executive population – the blended approach and positioning of executive coaching has proved appealing to many.

1.2 Research Problem

As the practice of coaching and executive coaching has become more mainstream academic researchers have begun to show increasing levels of interest. Until recently, most research into coaching and executive coaching has been carried out by practitioners and scholar-practitioners. Many of the doctoral dissertations to be found are produced by "mature" students who, like this researcher, already practice as coaches or executive coaches.

As the coaching phenomenon has spread researchers have begun to examine how coaching works and what factors are needed to support its success. Researchers have looked both at coaching in general and coaching for specific client groups such as managers and executives. However, there have been only a few attempts to understand something about the people who operate as coaches in the marketplace, and none of these have looked explicitly at coaches who focus on working with executives, either in small or large organisations.

Executive coaching is an expensive proposition. Practitioners are typically experienced and highly trained professionals commanding high fees.
As executive coaching has proliferated so have the calls for research that demonstrates the efficacy of the approach and quantifies the return on investment that might be expected. Studies looking at what makes coaching effective have started to emerge (Bush, 2004; Hurd, 2002). To date, however, there has been

little explicit attention paid to the differences between clients, the differences between coaches and the resultant complexity of the coach – client pair.

Each individual coaching relationship combines a unique coach and a unique client. The client's uniqueness consists not only of his/her culture, his/her business background and their age but also a myriad of other specific pieces of personal history and present day motivation. The reasons for executives to work with a coach are many and varied. These include for example: the desire to have a sounding board or personal confidante with whom to test out ideas; the need to strategise and plan for the future; the wish to have some one with whom to explore feelings and dilemmas, and from whom to learn new skills.

However client backgrounds and motivating reasons are only one half of the story – the other half is the executive coach. As coaching is a relatively new and largely unregulated profession it would be unrealistic to expect executive coaches to have negotiated a consistent approach to their work, let alone a common path of professional development. In practice it would appear that executive coaches operating in the marketplace at the beginning of the 21st century possess varying degrees of experience, whether as a coach or developmental professional, or as an executive or business person. These different backgrounds can be expected to influence each executive coach's view about priorities in their work. For example, it might be tempting for an experienced business-person to underestimate the importance of behavioural skills in coaching, just as an experienced behavioural professional might down-play the importance of business and organisational understanding. In practice an executive coach needs to be able to integrate these different perspectives along with a variety of others. To date not enough is known about the backgrounds, skills and opinions of those who are practicing as executive coaches.

Therefore to date the academic world has provided little guidance to corporate executives, and those people that support them, in understanding some of the key factors to be considered in selecting a supplier of executive coaching services. Similarly there are few resources available, beyond their own direct experiences, to help executive coaches understand the different ways in which

fellow practitioners are organising themselves to address the market. This study aims to shed some light on this problem by focusing in on the identity and organisation of executive coaches.

1.3 Research Questions

This research study is intended to further our understanding of the supply of executive coaching services in the international business world.

In order to achieve this I firstly explore the literature on executive coaching as a whole, and then provide an empirical examination of the following two research questions:

- What are the academic, professional and personal backgrounds of executive coaches?
- How do executive coaches organise themselves to meet the demand for executive coaching services?

1.4 Significance

This study is important in providing a detailed exploration of the sources of supply of executive coaching – a service which is cited as one of the most popular leadership development interventions sought out by international companies (Corporate Leadership Council, 2003). Not only do executive coaches possess a variety of relevant sources of training and experience, they are organised in a range of ways to meet the high levels of demand in the marketplace.

This study is important for academics, for executive coaches and the wider coaching field and for potential purchasers and recipients of executive coaching services.

These findings will help *academic researchers* to design studies that isolate the characteristics that distinguish executive coaching and executive coaches from other kinds of coaching and coaches. The findings show the wide diversity of backgrounds of executive coaches, which will be an important dimension for further research into executive coaching practice and outcomes. The study points

to a variety of follow up research into aspects of the executive coaching business and executive coaching practice. Potential future research is described in more detail in Chapter 4.

The study provokes *executive coaches and coaches in general* to understand more deeply the diversity of thinking from which coaching and executive coaching have emerged. In particular the study points to challenges for the future for these fields if they are to mature into distinct professions akin to the pre-existing disciplines that have provided much of coaching and executive coaching's theoretical base.

This study provides support to *purchasers of executive coaching* in making effective decisions in choosing a professional service provider that will help them extract the potential that executive coaching, managed responsibly and effectively, can provide. These findings are also valuable to potential executive coaching clients in thinking about the different kinds of coach available to them and how to choose a good match for their needs.

1.5 Arrangement of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organised into four chapters. This first chapter provides an introduction to this research project by summarizing the context of the research, laying out its objectives and suggesting how these can be significant for academics, practitioners and clients.

The second chapter consists of a review of the existing literature, both from academic and practitioner sources. This review develops through four stages; (i) defining coaching and executive coaching; (ii) distinguishing executive coaching from three related disciplines; (iii) exploring the wide range of executive coaching applications and approaches and finally (iv) examining a range of issues related to the procurement of executive coaching services and the matching of coaches to executive clients, such as coach background, coach competencies, professionalization and how coaches organise themselves to supply the market.

The third chapter first lays out this study's research methodology and then details and discusses both qualitative and quantitative findings from the empirical research work.

The fourth and final chapter offers conclusions and recommendations both for future research and the development of executive coaching practice.

2 GENERAL THEORETICAL CHAPTER

2.1 Definition of Coaching and Executive Coaching

The existing literature on coaching and executive coaching has been created for the most part by practitioners rather than academics. Hence their definitions have been evolving through practice rather than academic debate.

Coaching in organisations has its theoretical roots in several fields, notably developmental psychology and sports coaching (Hudson, 1999; Peltier, 2001). It has also been influenced by established professional disciplines such as management and organisational consulting, clinical, organisational and counselling psychology and mentoring (Hudson, 1999; Wilkins, 2000; Zeus & Skiffington, 2003). The following definitions and descriptions of coaching from the literature illustrate the combination of relationship, communication style and commitment that underlies the concept:

> *" (Coaching is) the art of creating an environment, through conversation and a way of being, that facilitates the process by which a person can move toward desired goals in a fulfilling manner." (Gallwey, 2000)*

> *" Coaching is unlocking a person's potential to maximise their own performance. It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them." (Whitmore, 1996)*

> *" Coaching delivers results in large measure because of the supportive relationship between the coach and the coachee, and the means and style of communication used. The coachee does acquire the facts, not from the coach but from within himself, stimulated by the coach." (Whitmore, 1996)*

> *"Coaching is a relationship wherein a coach supports, collaborates with and facilitates client learning by helping a client to identify and achieve future goals through assessment, discovery, reflection, goal setting and strategic action." (Wilkins, 2000)*

> *"Coaching is a collaborative process of facilitating a client's ability to self-direct learning and growth, as evidenced by sustaining changes in self-understanding, self-concept and behavior." (Stober & Parry, 2003)*

These definitions share some common themes. Coaching is oriented towards results and goal achievement. Coaching is conversation based. Coaching is about supporting the client in unlocking their own potential, with the client not the coach generating solutions. Coaching is a helping relationship.

The definitions of coaching above are not context specific, since they apply both to personal and professional situations. With a general conception of coaching as a foundation we can consider definitions of coaching that takes place in an organisational setting, and in particular with executives.

The literature offers a confusing array of terminology around coaching in organisations, reflecting in part the different ways in which coaching practice is developing. However it is possible to build an understanding of the important elements of executive coaching from the following definitions:

> *"Helping executives to achieve their goals is what executive coaching is all about. A good coach creates the environment where the executive learns how to learn, ... A partnership between executive and coach fosters personalised development that encourages business executives to make the most of their unique abilities." (Witherspoon & White, 1998)*

> *" ... coaching is a way of working with people that leaves them more competent and more fulfilled so that they are more able to contribute to their organisations and find meaning in what they are doing." (Flaherty, 1999)*

Flaherty's definition introduces the dimension of the organisation into the coaching relationship. This is also developed by Ennis et al. (2001) who define executive coaching as follows:

> *" (Executive coaching is) a collaborative partnership between a middle- to upper-level executive, her organisation and an executive coach. The purpose of this partnership is twofold: to facilitate both the executive's and the organisation's learning and/or to achieve identified business results"*

Kilburg (2000) provides us with a definition which includes more information about what is meant by 'executive', what the coaching process consists of and the contractual nature of the relationship:

> *" executive coaching is defined as a helping relationship formed between a client who has managerial authority and responsibility in an organisation and a consultant who uses a wide variety of behavioural techniques and methods to assist the client to 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 organisation within a formally defined coaching agreement"*

This definition contains some important elements that benefit from further examination:

- there is a mutually identified set of goals, a clearly defined way of measuring success;
- the coach/consultant uses a wide variety of behavioural techniques and methods, there are many ways to provide coaching, and never only one right way to achieve the desired result;
- professional performance and personal satisfaction go hand in hand – in fact personal satisfaction is acknowledged as an important foundation for professional performance;
- improving the effectiveness of the client's organisation follows from improvements in the client's own performance and satisfaction;
- there is a formally defined coaching agreement clarifying issues that might otherwise be a distraction, such as confidentiality, meeting times, duration and fees.

Executive coaching, as stated above, supports leaders in getting results, and it does so whilst explicitly and implicitly engaging leaders on subjects such as self-awareness, fulfilment, learning, systems thinking, performance and meaning - elements of leadership which Lyons (2000), Senge (1999), Goleman (2000) and Koestenbaum (1991) assert are critical to success.

Having defined executive coaching, it is useful to distinguish it from some related practices with which it is at risk of being confused, namely mentoring, consulting and psychotherapy, not least because executive coaching is a reformulation of ideas and approaches from the fields of psychology, philosophy, adult development, consultation and mentoring.

2.2 Comparing Executive Coaching to Related Disciplines

There is understandable confusion in organisations, and even in the literature, in distinguishing between executive coaching, mentoring, counselling/psychotherapy and consulting. These disciplines are indeed different, but also share some common ground, as is discussed below. Zeus & Skiffington (2003) suggest that coaching is a synthesis of the best that consulting, therapy and mentoring have to offer, whilst being a "profession with a difference" which must maintain its distinctiveness from these other disciplines.

2.2.1 Mentoring and Executive Coaching

Executive coaching and mentoring share certain core characteristics, and are different in some crucial dimensions. Wilkins (2000), in her extensive review of existing definitions of mentoring, offers us the following distilled definition:

> *" Mentoring is a one-on-one relationship where an experienced member of an organisation (mentor) officers advice, feedback and support to a less experienced, usually younger member of an organisation (protégé) for the purpose of aiding the mentee in learning about organisational culture,*

structure and practice so that the mentee may advance in the organisation and in their career."

Though Wilkins (2000) finds more similarities than differences between coaching and mentoring, she stresses two critical differences (i) coaches are paid whilst mentors are not, and (ii) coaches are expected to withhold advice while mentors are expected to give advice. It should also be stressed that whilst mentors are typically experienced members of the organisation in which the mentee works, executive coaches are usually external to the organisation (see later for a further discussion of this point.)

Whilst many companies have developed sophisticated mentoring programmes, Greco (2001) suggests that as a result of increased pressures on executives that the growth in executive coaching activity might reflect a *de facto* out-sourcing of some companies' mentoring efforts – an idea which supports Wilkins's assertion as to the common ground between the two processes.

The distinction between executive coaching and executive mentoring is less clear in some countries than others. For example, in the U.K. where a strong tradition of mentoring preceded the emergence of coaching, several influential practitioners and trainers prefer to use the term "coaching and mentoring". For Clutterbuck and Megginson (1999) "mentoring relationships often slide into coaching and vice versa".

Some of the key similarities and differences between mentoring and executive coaching are summarized in Table 1 following. Similarities include the focus on the development of the mentee or coachee, the creation of a functional working partnership that is both supportive and challenging and the willing commitment of both parties to the process. Both approaches require good listening and questioning skills from the mentor or coach as well as other behavioural competencies such as patience and empathy.

Table 1: Executive Coaching Compared with Mentoring

Similarities
• Focus on development of the mentee/coachee • All parties committed to investing time in the process • Use of effective communication skills and priority-setting • Partnership based on mutual trust and respect • Mentor/coach acts as a role model • Mentor/coach is supportive, challenging, patient, empathetic • Learning from successes as well as failures • Mentee/coachee must be willing to be mentored/coached • Discussing sensitive issues • Exploring blind spots, biases and shortcomings

Mentoring	Differences	Executive Coaching
• Greater emphasis on sharing organisational and technical knowledge • Mentor typically more senior (can also be external) • More likely to be formalised • Mentor usually not paid		• Greater emphasis on learning by discovery • Coach can be manager, peer or external • Often informal (if internal) • Opportunity for on-the-job, real time learning, including feedback

2.2.2 Consulting and Executive Coaching

Definitions of consulting in the coaching literature place an emphasis on understanding consultants as experts in their field, engaged by a client lacking specific content knowledge and/or implementation skills. Coaching practitioners tend to describe coaching as quite distinct from their definition of consulting – rather than providing expert advice, coaches focus on facilitating the client's own learning through reflection and dialogue (Wilkins, 2000).

Though this distinction is frequently cited in the coaching literature, it is worth noting that Kilburg's definition above (see page 9) points to executive coaching being performed by a consultant. Kilburg's definition reminds us that

certain schools of consulting approach organisational and individual behaviour in a way that creates openings for the process of executive coaching. A high proportion of consulting work is indeed about evaluating client issues and recommending solutions. However there has been an increasing trend over the last few decades to accompany the client during the implementation of these solutions. Whilst much of the implementation is of a technical nature, there are also important elements that involve the human aspects of organisational change.

As might be expected, those references to coaching and executive coaching that occur in the consulting literature are often characterised as interventions used by consultants as part of a wider process (French & Bell, 1999).

Supporting this perspective O'Neill (2000), Orenstein (2000) and Schein (2000) advise that coaching interventions should be reviewed for their systemic implications - whether these are acknowledged or not. These would include overt systemic factors such as organisational structures and business processes (Ennis et al., 2001) and covert psychodynamic processes which are at play (Kilburg, 2000). All of this data gives coaches and consultants the opportunity to understand the context in which their coaching work is taking place. This context might support the work or dramatically limit its potential.

Jamieson (1998) describes six dimensions of the consulting role which reveal some of the diversity within consulting practice.

1 Task/content or process orientation (Margulies & Raia, 1972): In the task/content orientation the consultant operates primarily as a technical expert providing specific recommendations. On the process side the consultant stays focussed on how the client goes about its work, decision-making and problem solving with the intent of helping the client improve those processes, and hence the way in which the organisation works (Schein, 1987).

2 Directiveness (Lippitt & Lippitt, 1986): A role continuum in which consultants position themselves between non-directive (using observations, questions, reflecting, mirroring, feedback and idea generation) and directive (telling, persuading, advocating, asserting and deciding.)

3 Centrality: The degree to which a consultant is "up front" steering a process or "behind the scenes" in a coaching or shadow role.

4 Capacity-Building: Choosing between an educative orientation focused on client learning, transfer of competence and development of the client's independent capability and an orientation without concern for the client's learning, rather a focus using the consultant's expertise to get the job done.

5 Confrontation and Support: A continuum with challenging even confrontation of the client at one end and support on the other. The former may be needed to produce momentum for a change or to provoke a new perspective, the latter to support the client during difficult moments where he/she may need reassurance and courage.

6 Facilitation: Here facilitation styles vary between hands-off approaches where the facilitator leaves the client to work out their own solutions and a more involved approach (Justice & Jamieson, 1998).

Jamieson's consulting dimensions help to explain the confusion that exists in distinguishing executive coaching from consulting. Some consultants who employ more of a task focus, prefer a directive approach, take up more of an up front role and are working in a way which is quite different from executive coaching. Whereas other consultants focus on process, use non-directive approaches and focus on capacity building and hence might also describe their work as executive coaching. These similarities and differences between executive coaching and different approaches to consulting are shown in Table 2 following.

Table 2: Executive Coaching Compared with Consulting

Similarities
(Where consultants with a process orientation focus on capacity building, using a non-directive approach) • Focus on behaviours, attitudes and/or cognitions of the client • Discussing delicate issues • Exploring blind spots, biases and shortcomings • Shedding defensive behaviour • Systems focus, taking in boss, colleagues, organisation and family • Focus on business context, requiring some specialist knowledge of business • Attempting to alter perspectives and learn new behavioural skills

Consulting	**Differences**	**Executive Coaching**
• Tend to focus on the organisation more than individuals or teams • Many consulting approaches focus on providing expert advice • May not result in a transfer of skills of competence to clients • Some consulting approaches extend to implementation of solutions by the client		• Tend to focus more on individuals and teams • Less of emphasis on advice giving, more on guiding client to a solution • No hands on involvement • Opportunity for on-the-job, real time learning, including feedback

2.2.3 Psychotherapy and Executive Coaching

A body of authors and practitioners argue that coaching is distinct from psychotherapy or counselling since results are achieved through a dialogue about conscious and rational behaviours, involving clarifying goals, identifying actions and providing the support to achieve those actions including diligent follow-up (Whitworth, Kimsey-House, & Sandahl, 1998; Wilkins, 2000).

Wood and Petriglieri (2005) are concerned about whether this distinction limits the value which coaches can achieve - that coaches are limited to working

at "conscious, overt and rational" levels with their clients, whilst psychotherapists are also equipped to work with "the unconscious, covert and irrational influences in human behaviour."

Williams (2003), who specializes in training therapists to enter the field of coaching, offers some distinctions between psychotherapy and coaching, both in terms of the processes involved and the way in which practitioners take up their roles. These distinctions are summarized in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Coaching Compared with Psychotherapy
(Adapted from Williams, 2003 p24)

MODEL AND PROCESS

PSYCHOTHERAPY	COACHING
Is a medical clinical model which relies on diagnosis and pathology	Is a learning/developmental model, focussing on attainable goals and possibilities
Deals with identifiable dysfunctions in a person	Deals with a healthy client desiring a better situation
Therapy patient usually has difficulty functioning	Coaching client desires to move to a higher and better level of functioning
Is about fixing the past	Is about understanding the past as context and creating the future
Helps patients resolve old pain; focuses on relieving pain and symptoms	Helps clients learn new skills and tools to build a more satisfying future; focuses on goals
Progress is often slow and painful	Growth and progress are rapid and usually enjoyable

PRACTITIONER'S ROLE

THERAPIST	COACH
Doctor/patient relationship (the therapist has the answers)	Co-creative equal partnership (coach offers perspectives and helps client discover own answers
Therapist style is one of patient nurturing, evocative, indirect, parenting, cathartic	Coaching style acts as catalyst for change, is direct, uses straight talk, accountability
Limited, if any, personal disclosure by the therapist	Personal, relevant disclosure by the coach used as aid to learning
Therapist is responsible for both processes and outcomes	Coach is responsible for process; Client is responsible for results

It is notable that the split between the two models as described above also has a parallel *within* the psychology profession, with Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) stirring a debate about the place for "positive psychology". They describe the prevailing emphasis of clinical psychology as having a "preoccupation only with repairing the worst things in life" and being "a disease model of human functioning". In reaction they call for a focus on developing human strengths;

> *"the major strides in prevention (of serious psychological and social problems) have come largely from a perspective focused on systematically building competency, not on correcting weakness".*

Turning our attention to executive coaching, Kilburg (2000) contends that executive coaches and consultants, though they need not, and perhaps should not, have a clinical training,

> ... *"must have at least a rudimentary understanding of the nature and extent to which unconscious forces shape behaviour for individuals, groups and organisations."*

Kilburg believes that such knowledge can radically improve the ability of coaches to manoeuvre in often difficult and conflict-ridden situations that exist in organisations. At a minimum, coaches must develop a network of other helping professionals to whom they can turn for advice, and refer cases where they feel the situation is beyond their skills or training.

Whilst other psychologists urge caution Berglas (2002), whose article in the Harvard Business review carried the title "The Very Real Dangers of Executive Coaching", takes a more alarmist position citing cases from his own clinical practice instance where executive coaches without a rigorous psychological training "make a bad situation worse". He argues that executive coaching often fails to address underlying psychological problems that in some cases might even be aggravated by inappropriate work.

Kilburg (2004) counters this position from a positive psychology perspective:

> *"Executive coaching focuses on improving the performance of leaders in organisations. To be sure, there are many situations in which clients need assistance in changing behaviors, attitudes, values, and emotions that are problematic and interfere with effective function. However, the focus nearly always remains on how to help people who have already demonstrated a great deal of competence and success get even better at what they do."*

Whilst asserting that executive coaching "draws heavily on psychotherapeutic frameworks and skills, Kets de Vries (2005) emphasises the importance of executive coaches understanding both organisations in general and the particular organisational contexts in which they are operating. He continues:

> *"coaches are expected to know not only the essentials of psychotherapy, but also the ins-and-outs of management"*

Judge and Cowell (1997) observe that executive coaching processes draw heavily on theoretical frameworks and practical skills developed by the psychotherapeutic community. Table 4 below summarises their observations on the similarities and differences between psychotherapy and executive coaching.

Table 4: Executive Coaching Compared with Psychotherapy I

(Judge and Cowell, 1997)

Similarities	**Differences**
• Focus on behaviours, attitudes and/or cognitions of the client • Discussing delicate issues • Exploring blind spots, biases and shortcomings • Shedding defensive behaviour • Attempting to alter perspectives and learn new behavioural skills	• Often pre-defined in length and short-term in nature (Levinson, 1996) • More of a "Development Partnership" than a "Therapeutic Alliance" • Systems focus, taking in boss, colleagues, organisation and family • Focus on business context, requiring some specialist knowledge of business

Peltier (2001) considers a wide array of psychological approaches which, when carefully chosen and at times adapted, can be used as part of executive coaching work. These include psychodynamic, behavioural and person-centred approaches, cognitive psychology, family systems and hypnotic approaches and social psychology.

Kiel et al. (1996) describe their executive coaching assignments in which engagement teams of two coaches always include one member with clinical psychological skills and the other with organisational development skills. They elaborate on the thinking behind this pairing, in a way that also illustrates an important difference between psychotherapy and executive coaching:

"Unlike individual psychotherapy, in which the goal is exclusively increased personal effectiveness, the primary goal of executive coaching is for the business itself to become more successful. This is accomplished by increasing the client's personal effectiveness, but also by using interventions to help the organisational system become more effective."

Pinchot and Pinchot (2000) note that:

"the benefits and necessary boundaries in executive coaching more closely match those normally found in client-centred psychotherapy than in familiar leadership training programs."

However they go on to write that executive coaches, rather than being in a position to provide therapy to someone regarded as dysfunctional, are working with "admirable people who are often highly advanced in their understanding of themselves and how to get the most out of who they are."

Similarly Grant & Cavanagh (2004) re-iterate that:

"professional coaching is aimed at skills development, performance enhancement and personal development with non-clinical populations; that is individuals who do not have abnormal levels of psychopathology or acute mental health issues. Whilst often therapeutic, coaching is not a substitute for appropriate medical or psychological therapy"

In summary Kilburg (2000) suggests that the lines between executive coaching, consulting and psychotherapy are not so easy to formally define, whether in terms of individual contacts or the relationship as whole.

This means that executive coaches in particular need to be extremely conscious and responsible for the engagements that they take on and their subsequent professional behaviour. Peltier (2001) points out the clash of professional culture, especially regarding ethics, between the business world and

clinical practice that raise important questions for executive coaching practice. He asserts that a variety of issues which are treated differently by clinicians and consultants need to be carefully considered by executive coaches. These include clarifying who the client is (individual or organisation), coach-client confidentiality, consent to the relationship, boundaries, record keeping and whether there is a duty to warn others if a client is judged to be at risk of harming themselves or others.

The table below draws on the variety of perspectives described above in summarizing the similarities and differences between executive coaching and psychotherapy.

Table 5: Executive Coaching Compared with Psychotherapy II

Similarities
• Focus on behaviours, attitudes and/or cognitions of the client • Discussing delicate issues • Exploring blind spots, biases and shortcomings • Shedding defensive behaviour • Attempting to alter perspectives and learn new behavioural skills

Psychotherapy	**Differences**	**Executive Coaching**
• Clinical model – focus on diagnosis and pathology • Less well functioning clients • More a doctor/patient relationship • Therapist style tends to be patient, nurturing, evocative • Tends to focus on individual • Usually longer term		• Learning, developmental model – focus on goals and possibilities • Better functioning clients • More a co-creative partnership • Coaching style tends to be catalytic, direct, action-oriented • More often focuses on wider system (boss, colleagues, organisation, family) • Usually shorter term

2.2.4 Integrating Different Disciplines

The practitioner literature offers us many examples of executive coaching. Some appear to employ techniques that are at least on the surface, independent of consulting and psychotherapeutic methodologies (O'Neill, 2000; Whitmore, 1996; Wilkins, 2000). Others integrate coaching processes with consulting and/or psychotherapeutic methods (Kiel et al., 1996; Kilburg, 2000; Orenstein, 2000).

Kilburg (2000) believes that executive, managerial and performance coaching will play an increasingly important role in enabling individuals, teams and organisations to formulate and implement the different strategies for survival that are required in these increasingly chaotic and challenging times. With so much at stake it is perhaps understandable that professional rivalries might be aroused.

It appears that there is both conscious and unconscious rivalry at play in this maturing field. Those professionals from more of a business and/or training background tend to down-play the importance of psychological methods, whereas those from a clinical background convinced of the value this foundation can offer, are mistrustful or critical of approaches which discount it (Berglas, 2002).

Another factor contributing to reluctance to highlight the common ground between coaching and psychotherapy is the risk of stigmatization that appears to be attached to working with a psychotherapist (or other types of psychologists) – clients fear being perceived as in some way deficient or flawed. As we have seen coaching and executive coaching often involve approaches grounded in psychological theories. However the practice is framed in a different way which tends to calm the fears of potential clients. This may well have helped to broaden its appeal. Executive coaches need to be on their guard for clients for whom the more rigorous clinical approaches would be appropriate, especially since some clients might choose executive coaching either because they think it will include intensive psychological examination or because they hope it will be a quick fix without having to dig too deeply into underlying causes of dysfunctional or ineffective behaviour.

It should also be stressed that executive coaching is not automatically within the competence of otherwise well-trained psychologists. Key differences mean that additional training and awareness are needed, and that many of the clinical approaches will simply be inappropriate in an executive coaching context.

Though not as contentious, the potential for rivalry between consultants and executive coaches is also tangible. As incumbents in the field of providing advice to executives on a wide range of issues the rise of executive coaching has led to many new entrants competing for their clients' attention. It may well be that the emergence of executive coaching has been connected to a wider trend of increased investment in executive development. This trend has also benefited consulting firms.

The professions of consulting and psychology have developed a well functioning collaboration with many consulting firms employing psychologists around leadership and organisational behaviour work, and the development of academic disciplines such as Organisational and Industrial Behaviour and Consulting Psychology. However, the rapid emergence of executive coaching has brought large numbers of new players into the market whose academic and professional background is primarily in business (Bono, Purvanova, & Towler, 2004; Grant & Zackon, 2004; Liljenstrand, 2004) and whose psychological training does not follow a standardised path.

As we have seen in the previous sections it is already clear that mentoring, consultation, psychotherapy and executive coaching do indeed have similarities as well as differences.

Thus far only a few commentators (Grant & Cavanagh, 2004; Zeus & Skiffington, 2003) are writing about executive coaching in language that points towards an integration or synthesis of these different disciplines and approaches. Such an approach appears to be an important innovation in the discourse about executive coaching. This has consequences for the training and practice of executive coaches and is a critical issue if coaching and executive coaching are to take the steps necessary to be distinguished as a profession. This theme is developed further in section 2.4.3 later in this chapter.

2.3 Executive Coaching Processes

This following section looks at various dimensions of executive coaching processes namely the different modalities used in executive coaching, the variety of applications that it has in practice and some examples of specific elements of an executive coaching assignment.

2.3.1 Executive Coaching Modalities

Koestenbaum (1991) reminds us that leadership is teachable, by being in his words:

> *"facilitated or challenged into existence .... Plato wrote that human beings are born with wisdom. Teachers do not tell anything new to their students, because the knowledge exists already, pregnant within them. Instead the authentic teacher helps the truth to be born."*

This is an evocative description of how an executive coach works with a growing or established leader, providing an effective combination of facilitation and challenge, which reveals progressively deeper levels of wisdom. It also holds true for the experienced leader coaching his or her colleagues and teams.

Coaching occurs in a variety of modalities in organisations and the coaches themselves have a wide array of professional backgrounds and training. There are three primary modalities of coach-client relationship discussed in the literature; executive/manager as coach, internal executive coach and external executive coach.

2.3.1.1 Executive as Coach

Authors in the late 1980s (Evered & Selman, 1989; Orth, Wilkinson, & Benfari, 1987) explored the potential for managers adopting coaching skills to support the shift from control-based models of management to more empowerment-based approaches. The theme of manager as coach has remained prominent, both as a technique for fostering normal employee development (Goleman, 2000) and in providing leaders with tools for confronting performance problems in a constructive manner (Waldroop & Butler, 1996). The image of the

leader as a successful coach leading his (sporting) team to victory remains a useful metaphor for creating an interest in managers to acquire such skills. This is perhaps more attractive than the opportunity to simply learn behavioural tools at the heart of well-functioning communication, which is the actual challenge facing managers learning to coach.

Whilst training and encouraging managers to adopt a "coach approach" is a valuable process, the fact that managers are ultimately held accountable for the subordinate's performance means that they will need to be careful to distinguish between their quite different roles as boss and coach.

O'Neill (2000) suggests that we characterise these two roles with distinct tasks. In the role of boss, the manager has the task of specifying performance expectations and ensuring the employee's commitment to them. O'Neill cautions against moving onto a coaching role until the employee's commitment has been assured with goals understood. Ideally, the employee is emotionally committed and has already taken a clear initiative. When the boss is satisfied that this first stage has been achieved, the coaching task can begin – working with the employee to accomplish the previously agreed performance expectations.

Though an important example of how coaching skills can be used in organisations, the coaching relationship established between executive and subordinate is inherently limited in its scope for openness and experimentation by the 'client' due to the conflict in roles between boss and coach. This research work is concerned with exploring coaching relationships that are not limited by this constraint. Our attention therefore now moves to examining the use of specialist coaches to provide executive coaching, and in particular the choice between using internal or external coaches.

2.3.1.2 Internal vs. External Executive Coach

One important question in considering the development of managerial and executive coaching in organisations is the choice between using internal and external coaches. Internal coaches are typically HR professionals from the company's staff who allocate a portion of their time to coaching, whereas

external coaches are either staff members from, or owners of, third-party firms who specialise in providing coaching services, usually along with other complementary services.

Hall, Otazo & Hollenbeck (1999) compare the advantages of internal and external coaches, noting that internal coaches offer the benefit of detailed knowledge of the organisational environment, such as history, politics and culture. They may also be seen as more available than their external counterparts, and more likely to focus on the organisation's highest priorities. Internal coaches may also have an advantage in establishing a trustful relationship with the executive client, so long as the confidentiality of the relationship is not put under pressure by conflicting activities such as assessment.

The advantages of working with an external coach include the outside experience and perspective that they bring. This allows a more objective assessment of organisational and personal challenges and a wider array of possible inputs from the coach. Working with an external coach offers a higher level of confidentiality, which may help the executive client feel safer to explore new ideas, concerns and radical solutions. An external coach can be expected to be freer to provoke the client into confronting issues, whether of a personal or professional nature, that might be regarded as un-discussable with an internal coach.

As we consider coaching at more senior levels we can expect that executives are more likely to prefer an external coach vs. an internal staff member. One of the pitfalls of being a senior executive is the fear that others have of communicating bad news, being direct or confronting the boss with difficult information. Similarly senior executives are reluctant to share opinions or feelings that might show uncertainty or vulnerability to internal parties (Kiel et al., 1996), lest they have a destabilising impact on morale. Combining this recipe for loneliness at the top with the inevitable pressures and complexity of such leadership roles mean that having a confidential development partnership (Judge & Cowell, 1997) becomes a valuable option to consider.

As described above the dynamics of internal and external executive coaching relationships are quite different, with the advantages of external

coaches becoming more compelling, the greater the seniority of the executive client.

The remainder of this literature review will predominantly focus on this modality of executive coaching relationship, although some of the information may also have relevance to the study of executive coaching performed by internal coaches or executives acting in the role of a coach.

The next sub-section looks at the various applications of executive coaching in organisations.

2.3.2 Executive Coaching Applications

There are several different ways in which executive coaches are deployed in organisations, both in terms of the focus of the coaching and its' expected duration. It is important to distinguish between these different approaches in order to focus our research efforts appropriately.

2.3.2.1 "Full Service" Executive Coaching

What one might call a "full service" executive coaching option usually consists of a six to eighteen month partnership involving a detailed assessment of the executive's current situation and development objectives (Kiel et al., 1996; Levinson, 1996; Peterson, 1996) followed by a regular series of coaching meetings and communications during which the coach (or coaches) and client work towards those objectives, revising them along the way as appropriate. For senior executives there may be a pairing of external coaches, one with more of a psychological background and training and the other with perhaps a business and organisational development background (Kiel et al., 1996).

Witherspoon (2000) distinguishes three flavours of this type of executive coaching relationship: coaching for performance; coaching for development and coaching for the executive agenda. Coaching for performance aims to support an executive who is facing challenges in performing at the level which either they or the organisation expects. For fast-track executives, perhaps being groomed for a promotion or future board position, coaching for development offers more of an agenda of building on existing strengths and attending to weak

spots. Coaching for the executive agenda brings us back to an approach tailored towards the most senior executives many of whose challenges are not addressed by mainstream leadership development programmes. Peterson (1996) and Masciarelli (1999) recommend that executive coaches who work with CEOs or board members ideally are equipped with their own previous experience of such roles.

Coaching can be particularly attractive to senior executives and board members not only because of its' flexibility and customisability, but in providing the leader with an opportunity to engage in a dialogue and think through ideas that may not be ready for his/her colleagues' consumption. Lyons (2000) likens this safe space to a theatre or laboratory in which the leader can refine and rehearse his or her ideas. Senior executives have few opportunities for continuing development, which is seldom seen as a priority given all of the other pressing issues on their agenda (Kiel et al., 1996). And yet such complex and demanding roles call for more, not less, self-awareness which in turn requires high quality feedback which is often hard for colleagues to give to senior executives fearing the consequences of being too direct (Hall, Otazo, & Hollenbeck, 1999).

Miller (2000) suggests that executive coaching relationships can be more effective as part of a comprehensive development plan, including development assignments, 360 feedback and other assessments, specific skills trainings and regular development conversations with their superior (where they have one.)

2.3.2.2 Focussed Applications

Ennis et al. (2001) differentiate between such a "full service" approach sponsored by the organisation and four other forms of coaching relationship that are available to executives: targeted content coaching; feedback debriefing; career coaching and personal/life coaching.

Targeted content coaching is a narrowly focussed activity aimed at developing a specific skill or learning particular concepts or information, for example presentation skills or time management. Peterson (1996) and

Witherspoon (2000) concur with this description, naming the approach targeted coaching and coaching for skills respectively.

Feedback debriefing is a process involving a small number of sessions to support an executive in understanding the results of a 360 degree feedback report, and in building an action plan to take advantage of the feedback in a constructive way. This will often be part of a leadership development programme, but does not necessarily involve any other coaching elements. A full service executive coaching partnership would contain this process as part of a more in depth information gathering effort (Ennis et al., 2001).

Career coaching usually consists of a limited number of sessions focussed on the executive's career aspirations and goals, with the coach providing specialist advice on career selection, work/life balance and transitions. Whilst career coaching can be funded by the executive's organisation as part of ongoing development or an outplacement process, it is also commonly financed directly by the executive without involving the organisation (Ennis et al., 2001).

Personal coaching or life coaching are increasingly popular alternatives to counselling or psychotherapy focussing on self-improvement, balance and both personal and professional goals. Ennis et al. (2001) distinguish this approach, which is typically funded by the executive, from executive coaching which is sponsored by an organisation with the intention of impacting business results. Executives will also contract directly with executive coaches, but this sort of relationship requires clear boundaries and expectations since without sanction from the organisation the coach will be more limited in his or her ability to work with the system within which the executive operates. Though it is tempting to argue that such a relationship may be focussed on non-organisational factors, it is likely that much personal development work will still have systemic links with the workplace.

Executives may also come into contact with coaching as a tool for transferring learning from training programmes back into the workplace (Olivero, Bane, & Kopeirnan, 1997). Conventional leadership development training struggles to deliver long-lasting behavioural change. Typically such

training takes place in groups, off-the-job and in a modular format. Once the training is complete, the trained leader returns to a high-speed and high-pressure work environment where the new skills are often overwhelmed by the prevailing and entrenched patterns of group behaviour. Additionally the "one size fits all" nature of conventional training approaches fails to take into account the varying needs of the complex individuals that they seek to provide for. Follow-up coaching, either in person or by telephone, with individuals or groups, can be integrated with group-based skills training allowing the executive to personalise, consolidate and practice the skills that they have learned. To date these types of follow-up receive little attention in the literature.

An example of this approach comes from this researcher's professional practice as an executive coach where he has acted as coach to participants on leadership programmes providing individual coaching sessions that give participants a space to reflect on and integrate learning from an experiential leadership development module. Other models include scheduling coaching sessions between modules of long-term development programmes, or as a follow-up for individuals and teams. The use of telephone and video conferencing can support these processes for geographically dispersed groups in international companies (Charbonneau, 2002).

Executive coaching would appear to be a powerful complement to conventional leadership training approaches, providing the opportunity to sustain a learning framework for longer periods. This becomes an advantage since it reinforces behavioural learning, and serves to accommodate the learner's diverse personal needs.

Having explored a variety of valuable ways in which executive coaching is employed in organisations, the following sections narrow the focus to the consideration of long-term "full service" executive coaching relationships between senior executives and external coaches, such as those described in section 2.3.2.1. The next section summarises some of the key dimensions of such relationships as set out in the literature.

2.3.3 Effective Executive Coaching Assignments

A range of literature from 1996 to 2001 offers us examples of the wide range of ways in which executive coaches structure relationships with their clients, the principles on which the relationships are built, and the processes followed, both during the life of the relationship and within individual sessions (Ennis et al., 2001; Hall, Otazo, & Hollenbeck, 1999; Judge & Cowell, 1997; Kiel et al., 1996; Kilburg, 2000; Levinson, 1996; Miller, 2000; O'Neill, 2000; Peterson, 1996; Pinchot & Pinchot, 2000).

In the last few years empirical studies have begun to emerge that place more of an emphasis on examining the effectiveness of coaching relationships (Bush, 2004; Harder+Company, 2003; Hurd, 2002; Sztucinski, 2001; Wasylyshyn, 2003).

If we are to examine what makes executive coaching effective, let alone successful, practitioners suggest that we consider the following dimensions: the principles, components and goals of coaching, and the coaching process itself.

2.3.3.1 Principles

An important foundation for an effective coaching relationship is the commitment of the executive entering into it to willingly exploit the opportunity (Bush, 2004; Hunt, 2004; Laske, 1999; Sztucinski, 2001). Organisations play a role both in ensuring that executive coaching opportunities are seen as developmental rather than remedial and supporting appropriate confidentiality boundaries between coach and coachee.

Despite a conscious willingness to enter the relationship Kiel et al. (1996) add that coach and client should plan for resistance from the client during the coaching process – as a natural part of challenging existing behaviour. Discussing this likelihood in advance provides better possibilities for overcoming it when it arises.

Given the intensely results-focussed context of executive coaching it is important that the relationship itself is focussed on results (Ennis et al., 2001), stemming from meaningful goals established at the outset of relationship. Bush (2004) found that results need to benefit the individual client personally and/or

professionally, with a client typically leveraging personal outcomes to the benefit of the organisation. Periodic reviews ensure momentum is maintained (Kiel et al., 1996) and allow for recalibration and refocusing of goals as the relationship progresses.

Kilburg (2000) asserts that:

> *"the most effective thing that coaches do with their very able and largely successful clients is to provide a safe environment and a process that forces both parties to be reflective about the situation facing the leader."*

He calls this environment reflective containment and establishes it by agreeing in advance important parameters and expectations, including time, fees, confidentiality and goals, and incorporating these into a formal agreement. Clarified in advance such parameters and expectations can act as reference points during the emotional ebb and flow of the process. If not clear they can become sources of insecurity or confusion that undermine the focus of the coach and executive's attention. Another important component of reflective containment is the coach's style of engaging the client, which should be consistently respectful, supportive, skilful and challenging.

Adopting a systems perspective is emphasised by Ennis et al. (2001), Kiel et al. (1996) and Kilburg (2000) as a key principle of effective executive coaching projects. Kiel et al. (1996) view individuals as being shaped by their pasts, their personal lives and their work environments. Ennis et al. (2001) stress the importance of taking into account all of the organisational systems in which the client is an active or passive member, and therefore may impact and/or be impacted by his behaviour. (Kilburg, 2000) and (Orenstein, 2000) assert the importance of psychodynamic forces operating at a group, inter-group and organisational level. Inherent within this principle is the belief that the unconscious plays a major role in individual and group behaviour (Orenstein, 2000) and the fact that the executive coach becomes part of the organisational system by virtue of the coaching relationship.

A principle that separates executive coaching from personal coaching is the fact that the organization is, usually, funding the process. Consequently executive coaching needs to be a three-way partnership between coach, executive and organisation (Bush, 2004; Ennis et al., 2001; Kiel et al., 1996). Critically this suggests a legitimate role for the organisation in influencing the objectives and success criteria of the relationship. Bush (2004) notes that one way the organisation supports such processes is by fostering a culture that supports development and learning. (Hunt & Weintraub, 2002) raise concerns about whether a more direct influence from outside the coach / client relationship will undermine its potential, by weakening the boundaries around the reflective containment. The safety of such reflective containment is critical to exploration and experimentation by the executive. At its worst, organisationally sponsored executive coaching risks being an attempt by a boss to 'fix' a subordinate (Noer, 2000) – executive coaches need to beware that the three-way partnership remains balanced in all three parties' interest.

"No manual or guide could ever spell out all the nuances of executive coaching, and creativity plays a significant role in achieving the desired outcome" (Kiel et al., 1996). These authors stress the need for flexibility in adapting the executive coaching process to the particular needs and preferences of clients, for example in choosing meeting venues that put the client at his or her ease. Noer (2000) suggests that sticking too closely to particular methodologies may be a pitfall in this kind of relationship, given the complexity of each client's situation and the variety of personality types engaged in the process.

Ennis et al. (2001) stress that coaches should have the necessary business and behavioural learning competencies, along with the integrity and good judgement required to provide the foundations for effective executive coaching. The theme of executive coaching competencies is developed in section 2.4.2.

Having presented some principles of an effective executive coaching relationship, we now consider some of the key components we should expect to see.

2.3.3.2 Components

Kilburg's (2000) list of components of an executive coaching assignment are listed in the table below. He first highlights the importance of developing an intervention agreement and building the coaching relationship. These have been explored in the above discussion of principles, with particular reference to focus, goals, confidentiality and containment. Orenstein (2000) also stresses the importance of both the initial contact by the executive or organisation, and the preliminary meetings with the executive and his or her superior for creating a foundation for the rest of the process.

Table 6: Components of Executive Coaching Assignments

1. **Developing an intervention agreement** (establish focus and goals, making time commitments, agree on methods, confidentiality constraints and agreement, fees)
2. **Building the coaching relationship** (establish working alliance, initiate and conserve containment)
3. **Creating and managing expectations of coaching success**
4. **Providing an experience of behavioural mastery or cognitive control over the problems and issues**
   - Assessing, confronting and solving problems and issues
   - Identifying and working with emotions
   - Identifying and managing resistance, defences and operating problems
   - Identifying and managing conflicts – in the organisation, the working relationship and the unconscious life of the client
   - Using techniques flexibly and effectively
   - Making the unsaid said, and the unknown known – getting issues on the table
   - Using feedback, disclosure and other communication techniques
   - Emphasising the reality principle – what will work most effectively with the best long-term outcomes
   - Confront tactfully acting–out, moral issues or ethical lapses
   - Coach and client trying to use highest level defensive operations – ie. sublimation, learning/problem solving, communication, curiosity, humour and creativity.
5. **Evaluating and attributing coaching success or failure**, assessing each session together, and periodically looking back to see what has been achieved.

Adapted from Kilburg (2000) p62

Creating and managing expectations of coaching success are critical both for expanding the possibilities that the executive may see from the relationship, and clarifying the level of commitment needed to have it be successful.

> *"Providing an experience of behavioural mastery or cognitive control over the problems and issues"*

The accompanying examples of coaching methods (see Table 6) provide an array of support in assisting the client's behavioural development. Finally we see the performance appraisal process, reviewing the achievements of the executive, and of the coaching process.

Peterson (1996) and Orenstein (2000), amongst others, offer alternative ways of describing the key components of a coaching relationship. Many common threads link them with each other and Kilburg (2000).
Peterson (1996) describes his model for "managers, executives and professionals" built on five coaching strategies which are used to support coaches gain the client's commitment, avoid resistance and diagnose and resolve coaching challenges. This is summarised as follows:

1 Forge a Partnership

First conversations dedicated to trust building by exploring the client's goals and work context, and the clarification of confidentiality and the coach's role.

2 Inspire Commitment

Creation of a plan for development and behaviour change based on a detailed analysis of the client's current situation and what they want to achieve through coaching. The analysis looks at four categories of information: goals; abilities; perceptions and standards ("GAPS"), using a wide range of information gathering processes such as interviews (with the client, their colleagues, superiors and friends or family); instruments;

reflection; observation and review of company documents, such as performance reviews, job description and strategic summaries.

3 Grow Skills

Helping the client identify appropriate methods for acquiring the skills that they have prioritised in the previous stage, whether by analysis of real-world cases (strategy, marketing and finance), role play (interpersonal, behavioural skills), working with a mentor or reading. Peterson stresses the value of spacing practice of new skills and experimenting with them in different scenarios to anchor the learning.

4 Promote Persistence

As clients follow through on insights and skill-building in earlier phases, the coach plays an important supporting role by helping to identify opportunities for practice, supporting the client in taking risks and not giving up when challenges arise and leaving behind old habits which will rise up to obstruct the putting into practice of new behaviours.

5 Shape the Environment

Working with organisational sponsors of coaching processes to reward learning and remove barriers to individual development.

Peterson's approach places more emphasis on the assessment phase of the relationship and demonstrates less of a behavioural approach to skill development than Kilburg.

2.3.3.3 Goals

Identifying clear goals with the client early in the coaching process is critical for achieving a focussed progression (Kilburg, 2000; Whitmore, 1996; Witherspoon & White, 2000), even if this leaves room for plenty of unexpected goals to also be achieved. Kilburg (2000) identifies in Table 7 following a range

of goals that can be set by clients and coach in a typical executive coaching assignment.

A review of this list shows that Kilburg's focus is on the client's behaviours, and his/her psychological and social competencies, which he asserts are the source of the individual's effectiveness, and hence his or her ability to impact the organisation's effectiveness. The way that some of these items are framed reveals the author's clinical perspective.

Table 7: Typical Goals of Executive Coaching

1. **Increase** the **range, flexibility** and **effectiveness** of the **client's behavioural repertoire**
2. **Increase the client's capacity to manage an organisation** (planning, organising, staffing, leading, controlling, cognitive complexity, decision making, tasks, jobs, roles)
3. **Improve the client's ability to manage his/her career** and to **advance professionally.**
4. **Improve the client's ability to manage self** and **others** in conditions of environmental and organisational **turbulence**, **crisis** and **conflict**.
5. **Improve the client's ability to manage** the **tensions** between **organisational, family, community, industry** and **personal needs** and **demands**.
6. **Improve the client's psychological and social competencies**
   - Improve the client's capacity to learn and grow
   - Increase psychological and social awareness and understanding
   - Increase tolerance of ambiguity
   - Increase tolerance and range of emotional responses
   - Increase flexibility in and ability to develop and maintain effective interpersonal relationships within a diverse workforce
   - Increase the client's awareness and knowledge of motivation, learning, group dynamics, organisational behaviour etc.
   - Decrease acting out of emotions, unconscious conflicts and other unhelpful psychodynamic patterns
   - Improve the client's stress management and stress hardiness
7. **Improve the effectiveness of the organisation/team**

Table 8: Different Types of Coaching in Organisations

The Coaching Continuum - Witherspoon (2000)

	Coaching for Skills	**Coaching for Performance**	**Coaching for Development**	**Coaching for an Executive's Agenda**
When	"I need to sharpen my skills for.." "I know how, but I don't always do it well."	"There's pressure to improve." "I need to do a better job at..." "I'm not aware of my impact on …" "I haven't committed to doing it well."	"I'm being groomed to advance.." "I'm being promoted to.." "I'm considering a career move to.." "I'm in the succession planning pool for.."	"It's lonely at the top." "I'm in over my head." "I need a dialogue partner for.." "I'm facing a big challenge at.."
Who	Leaders/individuals at all levels	Senior executives, key performers, executives at risk	Promising people and high potentials	CEOs and heads of business units
Why Primary coaching focus:	To sharpen skills for a current project or task. Sessions address one or two key skill areas	To improve the executive's effectiveness in the current job or role, coaching sessions address one or more core competencies needed to be successful	To prepare the executive for a future position, a leadership role or career move. Sessions address one or more core competencies needed for future success.	Focus on the executive's wider agenda, including business results and personal factors
What/Goals Person works with a coach to:	Assess current skills; Clarify expectations for current project/tasks; Prioritize needs for current project/tasks; Enhance effective action; Improve (to some extent) learning agility.	Assess current competencies for present job; Clarify expectations for present performance; Prioritize needs for present job performance; Plan for continuing improvement; Enhance effective action; Improve (to a noticeable extent) learning agility.	Assess current competencies; Clarify expectations for future performance; Prioritize the executive's need for future job performance; Plan for continuing development; Enhance effective action; Improve (to a significant extent) learning agility.	Develop more ideas and options; Prioritize the executive's needs; Plan for the executive's agenda; Obtain better support for the executive's agenda; Enhance effective action; Improve (to a variable extent) learning agility.
Duration	One or more sessions over several weeks or months	Several months or quarters	Several quarters of more	Highly variable, depends on issues

Witherspoon & White's (2000) coaching continuum model (see Table 8) frames the choice of goals inside of four different contexts for the executive coaching work, (i) coaching for specific skills, (ii) coaching to improve struggling performance, (iii) coaching to develop executives identified as "high-potential" and (iv) coaching for senior executives (perhaps the closest to the "Full-Service" model described earlier). However Witherspoon & White, unlike Kilburg, do not explicitly suggest any goals in the domain of psychological competence.

2.3.3.4 Process

The relentless increase in speed and complexity running through organisational life fosters stress, pressure and often confused or misdirected priorities. Most people in work environments, especially leaders, experience less quiet time in which to reflect, to be creative, to imagine and to learn. Coaching provides a structured "time-out" where reflection, creativity, imagination and learning are put back at the top of the agenda. Kilburg (2000) refers to coaching sessions as islands away from the daily pressures, where leaders can retreat for as little as an hour and return refreshed, renewed and relieved.

Figure 1 below shows a six stage coaching process, which starts with establishing containment, metaphorically transporting coach and client to that island. The next stage takes the executive into various levels of reflection on the outer and inner circumstances under discussion.

Stage 3 provides an opportunity for the coach to lead the client deeper into events to explore some of the more fundamental sources of different behaviours in order to ensure that both are addressing the issue that is the most likely source of the unsatisfactory outcome.

Then the scene is set for exploring different choices for taking action (Stage 4), where the coach can help the leader 'think outside the box', considering choices that might not be clear from his or her own habitual way of seeing the world. Over time the coach's challenging helps the leader to identify blind spots – areas of possibility that they have ruled out due to past experiences, or de-emphasised due to perceptions of their own strengths and weaknesses.

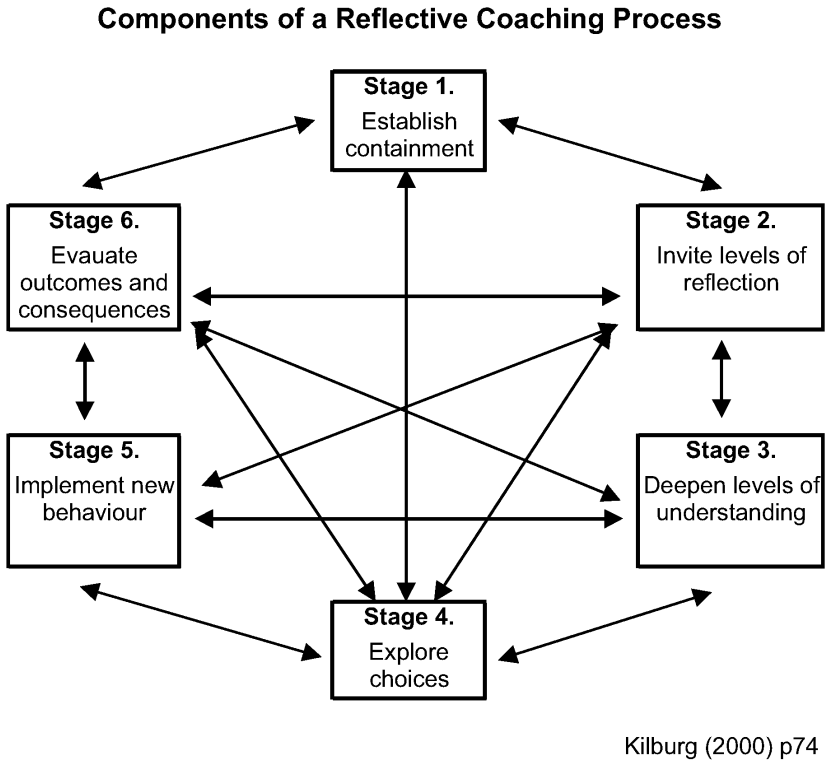


Figure 1: Components of a Reflective Coaching Process

The coaching relationship supports the leader in reopening or discovering wide arrays of possible actions and strategies, and in developing awareness of when he or she invests in assumptions that unnecessarily limit options for taking action.

Stage 5 is the essential point for translating the results of reflection and dialogue into action. Here the coach is valuable in training the executive to face any lingering resistance and cross the threshold into the world of committed action (without which the coaching process has minimal impact on the real world of the leader and/or his or her organisation).

The final stage allows a review of progress to date, and a reflection on the state of the coaching containment and process to ensure conditions are optimal for further progress.

As the coaching process is repeated the leader can be expected to increase his or her familiarity with its key stages, and in many cases to learn some of the coaching techniques for creating containment, identifying underlying issues,

nurturing reflection, exploring choices and supporting implementation of new behaviours.

Kilburg (2000), O'Neill (2000), Pinchot and Pinchot (2000), Wilkins (2000), Orenstein (2000), Kiel et al. (2000) and Levinson (1996) offer more detailed descriptions of particular interventions and techniques that coaches employ in their sessions to further the goals of the executive coaching process, which are too many and varied to explore here.

2.4 Executive Coaching Procurement and Matching

In the three earlier sections of this theoretical chapter we have reviewed definitions of executive coaching, distinguished the practice from similar practices and examined different modalities of executive coaching. Then we looked at various applications of executive coaching before examining individual executive coaching assignments in more detail. Having understood executive coaching from this variety of perspectives, we can now focus our attention on issues connected to bringing together executives with executive coaches.

Attempting to understand how executives and coaches come together from the academic literature is extremely difficult, however the practitioner and corporate literature offer us some threads to begin weaving together.

Increasingly executive coaching is occurring throughout large organisations, with large numbers of executives and coaches working together. It would appear that this phenomenon has arisen for the most part without centralised planning and organisation (Corporate Leadership Council, 2003) – rather individual executives identified that they and/or their colleagues would benefit from working with an executive coach and through a wide range of methods found their way to practitioners who appeared able to provide this service. As executive coaching has become more widely known and better understood more organisations have assisted executives in taking advantage of this opportunity.

Some of the main issues here include identifying the scale, focus and logistics of the executive coaching project, identifying criteria for selecting executive coach candidates (such as competencies, credentials, academic and professional background, referral and recommendations) and deciding the mix

between internal and external management of the project. Sherman and Freas (2004) remind us that selection of motivated executives to be coached is also an important part of the process.

The Corporate Leadership Council (2003) identified five challenges to the effective management and utilization of executive coaching within organisations, and recommended strategic practices to address them. These included finding well-qualified executive coaches and matching them to their executives, choosing the most appropriate projects on which to deploy executive coaching and ensuring such initiatives are linked to organisational priorities, and finally monitoring the performance of executive coaches and the impact their work is having on the business.

Items 1, 3 and 5 in Table 9 are wrapped up within executive coaching procurement and matching processes, and it is these aspects which are examined in the following sections. Firstly we need to think about the criteria that are being used to select executive coaches. This leads us into the question of what competencies executive coaches might be expected to have and what role the professionalization of coaching is playing, or might play, in clarifying standards around executive coaching competencies. Finally we look at what has actually been found out about the backgrounds and competencies of those practitioners already present in the executive coaching business.

2.4.1 Selection Criteria

Executive coaching procurement and matching processes range from individual executives sourcing their own coach through informal networks, for example by recommendation from a friend or colleague (Arnott & Sparrow, 2004), through to organisations creating a pool of many executive coaches from which candidates are chosen for consideration by interested executives (Corporate Leadership Council, 2003). An intermediate scenario is where the organisations retain and recommend practitioners who have performed well on previous engagements (Arnott & Sparrow, 2004).

These different approaches all require some decisions about which professional and personal characteristics the potential client (both individual and organisation) seeks in their executive coach.

Table 9: Challenges to the Effective Management and Utilization of Executive Coaching within Organisations

1. **Difficulty finding best-fit professional coaches**
   An abundance of coaching providers coupled with an absence of coordinated coach recruitment approaches prevents organisations from identifying suitable coaches.
2. **Unfocused coaching engagements**
   Organisations often do not appropriately prioritize coaching engagements, offering coaching based on merits of an individual request rather than business needs and requirements.
3. **Poor matching of coaching resources to executive requirements** High-impact coaching depends on a positive relationship between executive and coach, yet few organisations are able to ensure accurate matching of coaches' experience and personalities with executives' needs and requirements.
4. **Disconnect from the organisation**
   The "behind closed doors" nature of coaching engagements often means that coaching goals do not correspond with business or organisational requirements and coaching fails to generate an ongoing impact for the business.
5. **Inconsistent delivery and quality of coaching**
   A wide diversity of coaching approaches and styles prevents organisations from effectively implementing and managing a performance standard for coaches across the organisation.

Corporate Leadership Council (2003)

There is little literature available at this point that examines this executive coach-client matching process. Questions arising revolve around the criteria used to recommend or select executive coaches in a marketplace where there are a confusing mix of credentials connected to executive coaching, but no one generally accepted standard (Zeus & Skiffington, 2003).

Recommendations take the form of personal and professional referrals whilst selection processes are used both to facilitate individual coach-client relationships and increasingly to build a pool of practitioners to work within organisations (Jarvis, 2004). Such executive coaching pools are developed both by organisations for their internal use and by external suppliers who offer candidates from their pools to work within client organisations.

2.4.2 Competencies

Given the nature and scope of executive coaching described earlier what might be the competencies an executive coach needs to have? This is relevant both for potential purchasers of executive coaching services, and for those thinking about the possibility of becoming an executive coach themselves.

The literature contains some comprehensive listings of the range of competencies and specialist knowledge that executive coaches should have. For example, Ennis et al. (2001) suggest that executive coaches should have "strong knowledge, experience and expertise" in:

> *"business management, interpersonal communication, the behavioural sciences and behaviour change, organisational behaviour, organisational systems and development, leadership development, adult learning, individual, team and organisational assessment, career development, team building and development, and applied psychology."*

Attendees at the inaugural Executive Coaching Summit meeting (see 2.4.3) in 1999 identified the following characteristics of an executive coach:

Distinguishing Characteristics of an Executive Coach:
(Smith & Sandstrom, 2003b)

- A firm grounding in business knowledge and competencies
- Thorough understanding of the world of the executive leader
- A broad understanding of leadership and leadership development
- Knowledge of systems dynamics (organisation and community)
- Highly developed communication proficiency allowing them to operate in the executive's environment
- Stature and reputation that gains respect of executive clients
- Knowledge of adult development frameworks
- High standards of personal and professional ethics
- Advanced coaching skills and capabilities
- A commitment to lifelong learning

Kilburg (2000) and Orenstein (2000) suggest that an understanding of unconscious psychodynamic processes at individual, group, inter-group and organisational levels are also desirable for effective executive coaching.

These perspectives highlight the cross-disciplinary nature of executive coaching (Grant & Cavanagh, 2004) and show why the boundaries between executive coaching, consulting and psychotherapy are difficult to clearly define.

In this researcher's experience executive coaches originate from a variety of different professional backgrounds, notably, but not exclusively, human resources or other functions in business, management and organisational consulting or counselling, psychotherapy, clinical or organisational psychology. This variety means that different executive coaches can be expected to have different blends of the ideal competencies listed above. Often coaches have a mix of psychological and business education experience. Clients might expect those with a more focussed education in business to be stronger in understanding business challenges, whilst those educated in psychology to offer more expertise in the process of behavioural change (Miller, 2000).

The variety of competencies implicit within different professional backgrounds begs the question about whether all executive coaches should be expected to possess the widest range of cross-disciplinary competence. In

practice it seems more realistic to expect areas of specialisation and hence selection processes which ensure an accurate match between client needs and executive coach competence. Sherman & Freas (2004) point out that a coach's personality, education and professional experience might be a perfect match for one client and fail to be what is needed for another.

The following section considers the role of professionalization in this debate.

2.4.3 Professionalization and Certification

Macdonald (1995) explores the development of professions from a sociological perspective, examining for example the emergence of the medical and accountancy professions. He points out the challenge faced by suppliers of intangible professional services which, more so than tangible goods sold by a manufacturer or retailer, require a high degree of trust on the part of the purchaser in the technical skills and professional ethics of the supplier. Building on Larson's (1977) work he explores both economic and social dimensions to the development of professions. From an economic perspective professions provide benefits to those who are members by erecting barriers to entry and achieving some degree of monopoly. This requires some degree of "regulative bargain" with the state in return for the provision of standardised services. From a social perspective professions bestow on members a greater level of respectability and status, useful factors in building trust with potential clients.

Grant & Cavanagh (2004) argue that the coaching industry (in general) has reached a key point in its maturation at which it must take the steps necessary to move from being a service industry towards being a respected cross-disciplinary profession with a solid research base. Drawing on Bullock, Stallybrass & Trombey (1988) and Williams (1995) they identify six key criteria necessary for coaching to acquire professional status:

- Significant barriers to entry;
- A shared common body of knowledge rather than proprietary coaching methods;
- Formal qualifications at university level;

- Regulatory bodies with a power to admit, discipline and meaningfully sanction members;
- An enforceable code of ethics;
- Some form of state-sanctioned licensing or regulation.

Stober & Parry (2003) point out that with coaches and coaching researchers originating from a variety of disciplines there is a risk of a "compartmentalization of thought and research and possibly *turf wars* about where coaching *belongs*".

Who would be the opposing sides in the *turf war*? The different dimensions by which we might characterise the parties trying to distinguish themselves in coaching (and executive coaching) would include academic background, further professional training, professional affiliations, business experience and specific coaching (and executive coaching) practitioner experience.

An example of the potential for this comes from Zeus & Skiffington (2003) who write:

> *"Coaching is a profession, and like all established professions it requires extensive training and supervision. Coaches, especially, require one-on-one supervised training by a clinician in the instruction and practice of using tools and techniques to produce sustained behavioural change."*

Wasylyshyn (2003), whilst making the case for appropriately trained and experienced psychologists to take an active place in executive coaching, points out that:

> *"Standards of competence or proficiency and possible certification have yet to emerge from the profession of psychology."*

In the same article in the American Psychological Association's Consulting Psychology Journal (the source of much of the more helpful literature to date on executive coaching) Wasylyshyn describes the International Coach Federation (ICF) as a:

"commercial source ... providing training and certifications to thousands of people who are interested in becoming executive coaches".

Skiffington & Zeus (2003, p. 231) assert that:

"to date, there is no association that has been accredited by any government body and certainly none that is truly representative of full-time, professional practicing coaches. The reality is that some of the larger "international" coaching associations were privately founded by commercial training companies for the purpose of externally "legitimizing" their training courses. These types of associations generally have a private business agenda to add large numbers of members to their databases for commercial purposes".

Sherman & Freas (2004), neither of whom are psychologists, offer a different perspective:

"Until a body of knowledge about coaching wins acceptance we'll remain sceptical of current efforts to introduce universal standards and high barriers to entry ... coaching remains as much an art as a science, best practiced by individuals with acute perception, diplomacy, sound judgement, and the ability to navigate conflicts with integrity. Perhaps the most important qualifications are character and insight, distilled as much from the coach's personal experience as from formal training."

The difference of emphasis between psychologists and non-psychologists is perhaps not surprising given their different professional training and experience. This issue is explored later in this study (see section 3.2.6) by looking in more detail at the different professional communities in the United States in which this researcher found executive coaches to be participating.

Sanson, Arond-Thomas & Guilday (2005) reflected on factors that were supporting and opposing professionalization amongst the members of the

Executive Coach Summit (ECS) – a community of experienced executive coaches with strict entry requirements. Factors in favour of professionalization include increasing competition from other disciplines, the need and opportunity to distinguish between executive coaching and other types of coaching, the desire to achieve more by pooling resources and the opportunity to serve clients better. Factors against include the constraints on people's time and energy, concerns that professionalization might add to competition or restrict some coaches' existing freedoms and the lack of engagement from academics in clarifying the theoretical base for coaching.

Table 10: Factors in Favour and Obstacles to Creating a Professional Body for Executive Coaching

Factors in Favour	Potential Obstacles
• Intense market competition with other professionals, such as management consultants, industrial and organisational psychologists and trainers • Desire to achieve more in business and/or societal terms by establishing coordinated communications with the clients, government and other interested parties • Additional skills and experience required of executive coaches by their clients • Higher fees available to professionals in this market when compared with the broader personal coaching market for individuals.	• Busy professionals' reluctance or inability to commit the necessary volunteer time in the foundation stages • Successes already achieved by the first waves of executive coaches - less of an incentive to create a professional body which might heighten competition • Concern about being excluded by strict credentialing standards • Executive coaches' preference for independence and self-sufficiency • Limited support apparent from academia

Maher & Pomerantz (2003) argue for the development of executive coaching credentials either in alignment with ICF's existing Professional Certified Coach (PCC) and Master Certified Coach (MCC) processes or as a

stand-alone initiative. Such credentials should distinguish executive coaches from personal/life coaches by recognising specific experience in business as an executive or working as a coach or consultant with executive clients, whilst also validating their coaching training and competency.

It should also be noted that there are some ECS members who call for an approach to credentialing that places a higher emphasis on the delivery of outcomes in work with clients, on the basis that this is likely to be the ultimate measure of success in this field. Current ICF credentialing approaches focus on a blend of completion of accredited training, accumulated client hours, peer evaluation and/or competency evaluation but without assessment of specific client outcomes.

Macdonald's (1995) case study on the development of the accountancy profession shows that such processes have in the past taken many decades to evolve, given the challenges of defining objectives, negotiating between competing groups of practitioners, building relationships with government, developing training standards and building respectability in society. Given the cross-disciplinary roots of coaching and executive coaching, and the relatively recent emergence of these practices, we might be wise to assume that we are still at a relatively early stage of the process.

2.4.4 Suppliers of Executive Coaching

2.4.4.1 Individual Executive Coaches

Despite the early research, described above, into the types of competencies and credentials which executive coaches might be expected to have, there has been little work thus far looking at the population of coaches actually in the market place. Only quite recently four studies have been published that begin this work. Two of these studies looked at coaches across all segments of coaching practice (Gale, Liljenstrand, Pardieu, & Nebeker, 2002; Grant & Zackon, 2004; Liljenstrand, 2004), whilst the third looked at business and executive coaches (Bono, Purvanova, & Towler, 2004) and the fourth to coaches with an academic background in psychology or business (Liljenstrand, 2004).

Liljenstrand (2004) examined the professional titles used by a sample of 928 coaches with academic backgrounds in business, clinical or I/O psychology. She found that professionals with an I/O psychology background were more likely to use the title Consultant than those with a clinical psychology or business background and that around 30% of each group used the title Executive Coach.

Bono, Purvanova & Towler (2004) surveyed 480 business and executive coaches providing useful findings about coaches backgrounds, age and gender and experience as a coach. The average age of their respondents was 49 years, with an average of nine years experience as a coach.

These researchers classified respondents by the area of study of their highest academic degree. The classes and split of respondents were as follows: Industrial and Organisational (I/O) Psychology 17%, Business or Management 21%, Clinical or Counselling Psychology 14%, other 48%.

They also found some differences in coaching practice based on the type of prior training that a coach had. For example they found that psychologists (from both categories above) were more likely to work with CEOs and that the average level in the organisational hierarchy of the person being coached was higher for psychologists.

In each class of respondent more than 90% of coaches had some management experience. 35% of I/O psychologists and 52% of Clinical/Counselling psychologists were licensed psychologists. However, very few psychologists were certified coaches (13%) as compared to coaches from Business and Miscellaneous backgrounds (53%).

For all classes, the most common client was a mid-level manager, vice president, or director. I/O psychologists tended to have entrepreneurs for clients less frequently than did all other groups.

The researchers looked at the average number of visits with the person being coached. In general, I/O psychologists reported the fewest number of sessions with the person being coached (6-10 visits on average). Although the average number of sessions for Clinical/Counselling psychologists, Business, and Miscellaneous coaches was 11-20 visits, data indicate that the miscellaneous group reported the highest average number of sessions per client.

Despite some interesting data emerging from these studies they all included significant numbers of coaches who are not working primarily with executive clients. There was no qualification of respondents who described themselves as executive coaches to check this attribution against any definition of executive coach.

2.4.4.2 Categories of Supplier

Apart from the previous studies that segmented individual practitioners by their academic background, only one study was found which categorises types of coaching supplier. Arnott & Sparrow (2004) looked at how "coaching contributes value to businesses and organisations across the UK" with a particular focus on the procurement of coaching services. It should be noted that this survey looked at coaching in general in organisations, not executive coaching specifically. They received responses from 110 private and public sector organisations with over 500 employees in the United Kingdom (UK). 55% of these organisations report using coaching, twice as many private sector organisations than in the public sector. Over 70% of organisations with more than 5,000 employees who use coaching reported that executives were the primary recipients of this service.

Respondents were asked to specify which of three possible categories they would choose for their supplier of executive coach – coaching firm, individual coach or network of coaches. These categories were not defined for respondents. The results were as follows: Coaching Firm 47%; Individual Coach 39%; Network of Coaches 14%.

This researcher originated a six-category model of executive coaching suppliers following my attendance at two annual meetings of the *Executive Coaching Summit (ECS)*. The model, published as part of a review of the 2002 meeting, is shown following.

Categories of suppliers of executive coaching services

(Sanson, Arond-Thomas, & Guilday, 2005)

- Professional service firms with executive coaching divisions
- Executive coaching firms
- Training institutions offering executive coaching services
- Executive coaching networks
- Networked independents
- Independents

This list is ordered by the likely size of the organisations in each category in terms of headcount – the order is not meant to suggest anything about the likely quality of service provided by each category of supplier – clients must explore for themselves their priorities against the ability of each supplier to meet them.

However one might expect that each category offers certain strengths and opportunities when compared with the others, and conversely weaknesses and risks.

Table 11 describes each of the executive coaching supplier categories, whilst Table 12 following describes possible advantages and disadvantages that client organisations might want to consider in selecting their preferred category of supplier.

The choice of supplier type will rest on many factors. The size of the engagement is critical, impacting how many coaches might be needed and in which geographic locations. Larger international projects will require a supplier with the ability to deploy coaches far and wide. This is therefore more likely to be serviced by a Professional Services Firm, although an Executive Coaching Firm or Executive Coaching Network are also possibilities. Conversely smaller assignments may well be better served by a local Independent or Networked Independent coach who can provide specialists in the right area, perhaps even with experience of the client organisation.

Table 11: Model of Categories of Executive Coaching Supplier

Type of EC Supplier	Description and Characteristics
Professional service firms with EC divisions	Companies with established businesses in professional service areas (e.g. management consulting, organisation development, training and development, HR/compensation, outplacement) that employ ECs or have EC divisions.
Executive coaching firms "EC firms"	Focussed executive coaching firms, usually with a core staff of employed professionals and/or partners. Broader team of associates/sub-contractors who work on a project-by-project basis under the firm's brand.
Training institutions offering EC services	EC training institutions which also offer services from a pool of faculty members and graduates.
Executive coaching networks "EC networks"	Focussed EC networks containing 5-100 members operating under a consistent brand. Allow customers a wide choice from one source. Supporting network brand through careful new membership screening. Network members also operate under their own brands.
Networked independents	Independent ECs with their own brands, who develop a variety of alliances. Can offer teams of ECs and consultants. May be members of EC networks, and/or associates/sub-contractors with other firms.
Independents	Independent ECs who tend to work alone, or with one or two colleagues. Attract a steady flow of business by reputation/personal network/their own brand. Refer larger projects to Networked Independents or EC firms.

Firms wishing to develop coaching competencies inside the organisation may favour a Training Institution with the ability to provide in-house training from a team of coaches working with a consistent methodology.

In considering suppliers' ability to provide services around broader organisational initiatives, each of the different categories of supplier organisation in Table 11 might also then be further categorised on their ability to offer services such as process facilitation, strategic consulting, leadership skills training, organisational consultation, psychotherapy, outplacement, etc.

Having reviewed the literature in the field of executive coaching, which has for the most part been generated by practitioners, it is clear that there is an array of questions about executive coaching which would benefit from closer examination. In order to have this be a helpful research study it is necessary to focus our attention on a discrete area within the field. The preceding literature review moved from definitions of executive coaching, through modalities and applications to focussing in on the procurement and supply of executive coaching services. This final topic alone encompasses issues such as executive coaches' professional identity and backgrounds, how coaches organise themselves to address the market for their services and how organisations are developing their processes to source competent coaches and work with them effectively over time.

The remainder of this study focuses in on this territory related to the supply of executive coaching services. In order to further refine the focus of my work I developed the following two research questions:

- *What are the academic, professional and personal backgrounds of executive coaches?*

- *How do executive coaches organise themselves to meet demands for executive coaching services?*

The next chapter describes and discusses the findings from the empirical work that I carried out in order to explore these questions.

Table 12: Advantages and Disadvantages of Different Types of Executive Coaching Supplier

Adapted from Sanson, Arond-Thomas and Guilday (2005)

Type of Executive Coaching Supplier	**Strengths and Opportunities**	**Weaknesses and Risks**
Professional service firms with executive coaching divisions	• Reputation in the market. • Professional standards. • Pre-existing relationships between supplier and client firm. • Experience in managing larger engagements.	• ECs may not have specialist skills. • Confusion with consulting approach. • Potential conflicts of interest between different parts of the firm. • Smaller pool of specialist ECs to choose from than EC networks.
Executive coaching firms	• Specialist ECs with experience working together. • Ability to handle larger engagements. • Consistent methodology available.	• Small choice of firms given relatively new market, not so many medium to large firms established to date. • Less choice of coaches than EC networks.
Training institutions offering executive coaching services	• Reassurance that ECs have standardised training, if the faculty/principals also have engagement skills – similar strengths to EC firms.	• Less engagement management skills than focussed firms. • Less choice of coaches than EC networks.
Executive coaching networks	• Breadth of choice available in selecting EC. • Potential for staffing larger engagements.	• Less quality control in selection and monitoring of ECs. • Network members may have less experience working together.
Networked independents	• Ability to customise her/his team to the client's needs. • Lower overheads may translate to lower fees.	• Less professional or administrative resources than a larger firm. • Less input and supervision by colleagues
Independents	• Unique skills of the independent may be a strong fit with the particular client and his/her needs. • Lower overheads may translate to lower fees. • Scheduling flexibility.	• Less professional or administrative resources than a larger firm. • Less of input and supervision by colleagues.

3 SPECIFIC EMPIRICAL CHAPTER

This third chapter has three main elements. Firstly the research methodology employed in the study is explained. Then the detailed findings of the empirical work are presented and summarized. Finally these findings are discussed as a whole in order to make connections between different dimensions of the research enquiry.

3.1 Research Methodology

3.1.1 Methodology Selection

There are numerous types of methodologies for conducting academic research, the use of which varies depending on an array of factors. These factors include the level of development of research into the field in question, the type of data available, the nature of the research question, the resources at the disposal of the researcher and the degree of control that a researcher can exert over the subject of study.

One could liken the choice of methodology in the practice of academic research to the choice of a recipe in the practice of cookery. Before choosing a recipe one needs to consider the type of meal one would like to produce, the ingredients that are available, the equipment and facilities that one has at one's disposal, one's own cooking skills, the amount of time and money available to complete the culinary project. The choice of recipe will need to accommodate all of these factors. However the choice of possible recipes is so wide, that it is still likely that many different ones will be suitable.

Similarly for a researcher considering their selection of research methodology, there is rarely only one suitable choice, rather a range of options that are each likely to shed a different light on the research question. In fact a 'good' theory will stand up to, and be strengthened by, examination under a range of different research methodologies (Wacker, 1998).

That said, we can identify some methodologies that are more likely to be attractive for research into executive coaching. A key categorisation for examination is that between analytical and empirical research. Wacker (1998) distinguishes between analytical methodologies that employ primarily logical

and mathematical deductive techniques to derive new theory from existing relationships, and empirical methodologies that draw on observation and analysis of naturally occurring phenomena to derive new theory inductively. Analytical methodologies are deductive since they start with fundamental laws and use these to derive new theory that may have a more limited scope. Empirical methodologies are inductive since they draw on experience of naturally occurring phenomena to derive theories that can apply beyond the domains of the phenomena observed. Given the low level of theory development in this area it was decided that empirical methods would be more appropriate. The specific methods used are described in the following sections.

3.1.2 Actual Methodology Employed

The approach for this research project consists of three main elements. The first was attendance at a large number of practitioner conferences. This activity was used both to explore and select useful research themes and to develop appropriate criteria for the recruitment of respondents and interviewees to be included in the survey.

The next step was the development and implementation of two qualitative surveys, each focussing on one of the research questions that emerged from the field observations and the literature review summarised in Chapter 2.

The final step was to analyse the survey findings and to further the exploration of certain themes using follow-up interviews with specially selected subjects. Attendance at conferences continued throughout the life of the project. This strategy provided opportunities to gather additional data to further support the development of models and hypotheses that helped to answer the study's research questions. In addition, such conferences provided a useful context for better understanding and refining both the questions and the answers that were emerging.

3.1.2.1 Attending Conferences

Since executive coaching and the wider field of coaching are relatively young, there are few well-established professional organisations and

communities. However those that do exist provide a meeting point for practitioners and increasingly for researchers. Listed below are the various organisations whose conferences I attended during the duration of my fieldwork, with a short description of each organisation.

Table 13: Professional Associations and Groups Visited During Fieldwork

International Coach Federation (ICF)	Professional association for coaching, offering credentialing programme, international conferences, local chapters around the world. With 7,900 members in 31 countries (as of Jan 2005)
Executive Coach Summit (ECS)	Membership group for experienced executive coaches. Meets annually in North America for a two-day "Summit". Application process used to ensure members have sufficient experience.
Linkage International Inc	Conference organising and consulting company focussed on organisational and leadership development.
Association for Coaching (AOC)	UK based professional association for coaches, founded in 2003. Several hundred members as of Jan. 2005.
European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC)	Association dedicated to promoting high standards of practice in the fields of coaching and mentoring. Previously the European Mentoring Centre. High proportion of members in the UK.
Academy of Management (AOM) (Management Consulting Division)	Professional association for scholars dedicated to creating and disseminating knowledge about management and organisations. 14,600 members from 90 countries (as of Jan 2005)

Table 14 lists the 20 conferences attended during an extended period of fieldwork. Early conferences in 1999 and 2000 allowed me to gain an understanding of the field of coaching in general, including modalities of coaching such as life coaching, leader as coach, managerial coaching and

executive coaching. By 2001 I had decided to focus my research attention on executive coaching with the Executive Coaching Summit in August 2001 providing the opportunity to observe and converse with a concentrated group of executive coaches. The idea for the first qualitative survey looking at the backgrounds of executive coaches emerged after this event, and was implemented the following year. Reflecting on the 2002 Executive Coaching Summit in Atlanta (Sanson, Arond-Thomas, & Guilday, 2005) led to a second qualitative survey looking at how executive coaches organise themselves to address the market for their services.

As can be seen in Table 14 my participation in conferences took various forms. The most common role was simply as a delegate. This gave me plenty of freedom to observe, question and explore during the wide array of conference events. On several occasions I was also a presenter or panellist, contributing my own input and perspectives to the conference discourse. At the Executive Coach Summit in 2001 I took the role of recorder, and in 2002 I coordinated a team of recorders at that event and played a leadership role in writing the after-event report. Recorders document as much as possible of the ECS discussions to facilitate the writing of the after event report – know as a "White Paper".

On three occasions I also took on different degrees of responsibility for the organisation of the events themselves. Each of these different roles provided opportunities to take up particular perspectives on the conferences as a whole, and on their constituent parts. Taking on leadership and speaker roles sometimes provided access to experienced or senior practitioners in a way that was less possible as an ordinary delegate. These experiences were also valuable in providing insights into the themes which were occupying the minds of leaders in different professional organisations and groups.

The selection of conferences was in part affected by my own professional development journey in the field of coaching and executive coaching. With a background in business I found the ICF to be a welcoming professional community within which to grow and make connections. In retrospect some visits to specialist conferences held by professionals from the fields of organisational and consulting psychology would have added to the perspectives

Table 14: Conferences Attended During Fieldwork

	CONFERENCE	MONTH	ROLE	LOCATION	SCOPE
1	Linkage Coaching & Mentoring Conf.	Jul-99	delegate	London, UK	Coaching in organisations
2	ICF Annual Conference 1999	Oct-99	delegate	Orlando, Florida, US	Coaching in general
3	ICF Annual Conference 2000	Oct-00	delegate	Vancouver, BC, Canada	Coaching in general
4	ICF European Conference 2001	May-01	organiser	Grindelwald, Switzerland	Coaching in general
5	Executive Coaching Summit IV	Aug-01	recorder	Chicago, IL, US	Executive coaching
6	ICF Annual Conference 2001	Aug-01	delegate	Chicago, IL, US	Coaching in general
7	ICF European Conference 2002	May-02	delegate	Sitges, Spain	Coaching in general
8	Linkage Coaching & Mentoring Conf. 2002	Sep-02	delegate	San Diego	Coaching in organisations
9	Executive Coaching Summit V	Oct-02	Reporter, co-organiser	Atlanta, GA, US	Executive coaching
10	ICF Annual Conference 2002	Oct-02	delegate	Atlanta, GA, US	Coaching in general
11	European Executive Coach Summit	May-03	co-organiser	Stresa, Italy	Executive coaching
12	ICF European Conference 2003	May-03	presenter	Stresa, Italy	Coaching in general
13	1st ICF Research Symposium 2003	Nov-03	panelist	Denver, CO, US	Coaching research
14	ICF Annual Conference 2003	Nov-03	presenter	Denver, CO, US	Coaching in general
15	Academy of Management 2004 (Consulting Div.)	Aug-04	presenter	New Orleans, LA, US	Management consulting & executive coaching
16	Association for Coaching Conference	Oct-04	delegate	London, UK	Coaching in general
17	Executive Coaching Summit VI	Nov-04	delegate	Quebec City, Canada	Executive coaching
18	2nd ICF Research Symposium	Nov-04	delegate	Quebec City, Canada	Coaching research
19	ICF Annual Conference 2004	Nov-04	delegate	Quebec City, Canada	Coaching in general
20	European Mentoring & Coaching Council	Nov-04	delegate	Brussels, Belgium	Coaching and mentoring in organisations

available for the research. That said I have been able to gain access to some the thinking emerging from these domains through the much of the literature described in the earlier chapter emerging from members of specialist practitioner groups (known as "Divisions") within the American Psychological Association (APA), namely the Society of Consulting Psychology ("Division 13") and the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology ("Division 14").

3.1.2.2 Structured Qualitative Surveys

There were two predominantly qualitative surveys used to explore the two research questions that emerged from the first phase of exploratory fieldwork. These two questions are:

Focus of Survey 1 – Research question 1

- *What are the academic, professional and personal backgrounds of executive coaches?*

Focus of Survey 2 – Research question 2

- *How do executive coaches organise themselves to meet demands for executive coaching services?*

Survey 1 invited respondents to provide information on the following: year of birth; nationality and country of residence; years of experience as an executive coach and the number of clients they have worked with; opinions regarding six provocative statements relevant to executive coaching practice, and finally their academic, professional and personal backgrounds. This survey was completed by 27 respondents between October 2002 and March 2003.

Respondents were screened for specific experience as an executive coach. The survey contained the following preamble to act as an additional screen to allow respondents to check their experience against the requirements of the survey.

> *"The intention of this project is to gain a better understanding of the executive coaching profession by surveying and interviewing a population of experienced executive coaches… For the purpose of this research executive coaching refers to relationships where the client is an organisational leader responsible for leading an organisation or business unit with at least 50 employees."*

Findings from Survey 1 are presented in sections 3.2.1, 3.2.2 and 3.2.3.

Survey 2 asked respondents to review a suggested categorisation of suppliers of executive coaching services and to identify a category representing the best fit for their own business. Respondents were then asked to complete follow-up questions based on their selected category, and to identify other companies which they judged as a good fit according to the categories put forward.

Survey 2 was completed by 39 respondents between December 2003 and March 2004. Included in this total are 10 respondents who also completed Survey 1. Findings from Survey 2 are presented in section 3.2.4.

3.1.2.3 Recruitment of Survey Respondents

There were three principal ways in which I identified potential executive coach respondents for both surveys. The first approach was direct contact during International Coach Federation and Executive Coach Summit activities. During this period I occupied multiple roles both as a national leader of the ICF in Switzerland, a member of ICF's European leadership group and as a delegate, organiser and presenter at ICF conferences and Executive Coach Summits in North American and Europe. This gave me many opportunities to meet executive coaches and to evaluate whether they had the degree of experience which I was looking for in survey respondents.

These contacts drawn from a range of professional communities supported the second approach for recruiting respondents which was to seek referrals from executive coaches and other coaches. All coaches involved in this referral

process were briefed on the research project and the selection criteria required for survey respondents.

Thirdly in those communities where I had fewer direct contacts, I was able to reach out to potential research participants by sending invitations through specific electronic mailing lists serving the coaching and organisational consulting business in Europe and North America, including the list for Division 13 of the APA.

3.1.2.4 Selected Follow-up Interviews

Following the analysis of the findings from the two qualitative surveys, several follow-up interviews were conducted to gather data around specific areas of interest arising from the surveys. One of these interviews was conducted in person, the remainder by telephone. The interviews looked in particular at how Professional Service Firms and Executive Coaching Firms build teams of executive coaches to work with their clients. The interview included questions about the selection criteria for executive coaches and whether they are sourced from existing employees or associates/sub-contractors from outside of the firm. These criteria were then compared with the survey data gathered in Survey 1 on executive coach backgrounds. Interviews were sought from firms identified in Survey 2 as "best representing the description" of Professional Service Firms and Executive Coaching Firms by survey respondents. Findings from these interviews are presented in sections 3.2.4 and 3.2.5.

3.1.3 Limitations

Since there are to date no professional bodies explicitly serving executive coaching, nor globally recognised standards for executive coaching, this study has relied on informal professional networks for identifying and screening participants. Consequently the study has gathered findings from a medium-sized number (56) of survey respondents from certain sub-groups within the total population of executive coaches. These factors put some limitations on the study's findings in terms of generalizability and statistical significance. In terms of generalizability there may be certain sub-groups within the field, such as practitioners with backgrounds in clinical psychology, for whom the findings

may not be as representative since a relatively small number of APA members were recruited for the study. Similarly the modest number of total respondents limits the significance of the study's quantitative findings from a statistical perspective, especially when comparing geographical sub-groups within the data.

These limitations are not however unexpected, given that this is an exploratory study focussing on a field which has thus far only attracted minimal research. These findings can still be valuable in providing suggestions both for further research and improvements in practice.

3.2 Presentation and Discussion of Findings

As described in the previous chapter initial observations of, and interactions with, executive coaches raised questions in my mind about similarities and differences in background and experience between these practitioners. This led to the development of the first survey of executive coaches that looks at respondents' backgrounds and their opinions about some contentious topics in the practice of executive coaching. Sections 3.2.1 to 3.2.3 describe the findings from this survey. Whilst the number of respondents was not sufficient for these findings to be statistically significant, where possible cross-references to findings from other studies are provided for purposes of comparison.

3.2.1 Biographical and Culture Data

3.2.1.1 Year of Birth and Age Range

Survey 1 participants were asked the year of their birth. 26 out of 27 responded to this question. The respondents' ages were extrapolated from the year of birth data.

When taken in 5-year age ranges, the largest number of executive coaches (8/26) was in the 45-49 age range, followed by the 40-44 age range (6/26). However the average age of respondents to this survey was close to 51 years, since the remaining 12 of the 26 coaches who responded were 50 or older.

This result compares with the findings of three other studies referred to in the earlier chapter. Bono, Purvanova & Towler (2004) found an average age amongst 480 business and executive coaches of 49. Liljenstrand (2004) found

that of the 928 coaches in her study 31% identified themselves as executive coaches, also with an average age of 49. Although Grant & Zackon (2004) did not distinguish executive coaches amongst the 2,529 ICF members who replied to their survey, they did find that 42% of respondents were in the age group 45-54, making it the most common one in their study.

Comparing the data between male and female respondents reveals a tendency for women to enter the field of executive coaching at a younger age than men. Among respondents in their 40s there were 9 women versus 5 men, whilst for those in their 50s there were 6 men versus 2 women.

Interpreting the data

Executive coaches tend to be slightly older than coaches in general. This tendency is probably explained by the greater emphasis placed by executive coaches and their clients on the coach's prior experience.

Table 15: Year of Birth and Age Range (Survey 1)

Year of birth range	Total		Age range	Male	Female	Total
1936-1940	3		65-69	1		1
1941-1945	1		60-64	1	2	3
1946-1950	6		55-59	3	1	4
1951-1955	8		50-54	3	1	4
1956-1960	6		45-49	3	5	8
1961-1965	2		40-44	2	4	6
No data	1		No data		1	1
	27			**13**	**14**	**27**
			60-69	2	2	**4**
			50-59	6	2	**8**
			40-49	5	9	**14**
				13	**14**	**27**
			AVERAGE	**52.6**	**49.2**	**50.9**

This issue is explored in greater depth later in this chapter (see 3.2.2.1). The finding that female executive coaches tend to enter the field earlier than their male counterparts is probably explained by different career trajectories between male and female participants in the study.

Table 16: Nationality and Country of Residence

	Nationality		Resident Male	Resident Female	Resident Total
USA	9		3	6	9
USA/Canada	1		1		1
Canada	2		1	2	3
USA/French	1				
UK	5			4	4
Germany	2		2		2
Switzerland	2		3		3
Netherlands	1				
France	1			1	1
Sweden	1		2		2
Belgium	1		1		1
Australia	1			1	1
	27		**27**	**27**	**27**

Region	Nationality		Resident Male	Resident Female	Resident Total
N. America	12		5	8	13
NA/Euro	1				
UK	5			4	4
Euro	8		8	1	9
Australia	1			1	1
	27		**13**	**14**	**27**

3.2.1.2 Nationality and Country of Residence

The respondents to the survey originate from nine different countries spanning North America, Europe and Australia. All but four remain resident in the country of which they hold nationality. When respondents are grouped into regions (North America, UK, Continental Europe and Australia) the data shows that 12 out of 17 respondents from North America and the UK are female whilst 8 out of 9 respondents from continental Europe are male.

Interpreting the data

Whilst this data set is too small for any findings to be statistically significant, the finding that there are higher proportions of female executive coaches in North American and the UK than in Continental Europe may well reflect the differences in these regions as to the degree to which women achieve senior roles in business and in professional services. None of the other empirical studies mentioned earlier reported on this dimension.

3.2.1.3 Executive Coaching Experience

Survey 1 respondents were asked to detail the length of their experience as both a coach in general and an executive coach in particular. Executive coaching was specified in this question as working with a client who is "responsible for leading an organisation or business unit with at least 50 employees". Respondents were also asked to estimate the number of executive coaching clients that they have worked with on at least 10 separate occasions, using coaching sessions lasting at least 30 minutes.

The resulting data is summarized in Tables 16 and 17. Both of these sets of data provide reassurance that a high proportion of respondents indeed have extensive experience as executive coaches. 90% of respondents report five or more years of practice, whilst 80% report 21 or more executive coaching engagements. This data supports the reliability of the findings from this survey as being representative of executive coaches, rather than coaches without significant experience working with executives. None of the previous empirical studies screened respondents in this way.

Table 17: Years of Experience Coaching Executives

Years of experience	**Coaching in general**		**Coaching executives**	
Less than two	0	*0%*	1	*4%*
Two to four	3	*11%*	2	*7%*
Five to six	5	*19%*	4	*15%*
Seven to eight	5	*19%*	7	*26%*
Nine to ten	4	*15%*	5	*19%*
More than ten	10	*37%*	8	*30%*
	27	*100%*	**27**	*100%*
Less than four		*11%*		*11%*
Five to eight		*38%*		*41%*
More than eight		*52%*		*49%*
rounding		*-1%*		*-1%*
		100%		*100%*

Table 18: Number of Executive Clients

Clients to date	**No.**	**%**
0-5	2	*8%*
6-20	3	*12%*
21-50	6	*24%*
51-100	8	*32%*
> 100	6	*24%*
	25	*100%*
0-20	5	*20%*
21-50	6	*24%*
> 51	14	*56%*
	25	*100%*

Table 19: Proportion of Assignments which Include Team Coaching

Assignments Including Team Coaching	No.	%
Rarely (<20%)	1	*4%*
Sometimes (between 20% and 40%)	14	*56%*
Usually (between 40% and 60%)	6	*24%*
Most of the time (between 60% and 80%)	0	*0%*
Almost always (>80%)	4	*16%*
	25	*100%*

Responses regarding the proportion of engagements that include team coaching suggest that this occurs during between 20% and 60% of engagements. 20 of 25 respondents responded in this vein. Four of the five remaining respondents emphasised a much higher proportion of team coaching, providing such on more than 80% of their engagements.

These findings connect to the respondents mixed opinions about whether executive coaching should be combined with organisational level interventions (see section 3.2.2.3).

3.2.2 Opinions About Executive Coaching Practice

Respondents were asked to express their opinion on six issues that surfaced as being of relevance to executive coaching practice during the preliminary stages of fieldwork. Issues selected were those which appeared to attract ongoing discussion amongst executive coaches and others with an interest in the field. Each issue is presented below with a summary of responses on a five-point scale, and then a review of the different comments that were provided.

3.2.2.1 Equivalent Executive Experience

Statement

Coaches who work with executive leaders should have experienced equivalent roles in their own professional life.

Quantitative analysis

Response	No.	%
Strongly agree	4	*15%*
Agree	11	*41%*
Neutral	5	*19%*
Disagree	7	*26%*
Strongly disagree	0	*0%*

Table 20: Equivalent Executive Experience

Qualitative analysis

The answers to this question ranged from those, at one extreme, insisting that executive coaches must have experienced the specific challenges that their clients are presently dealing with; to those which argued that executive coaching employs processes that do not require any experience of what the client is going through.

Those who argued for the value of executive coaches having experienced roles similar to those occupied by their clients, suggest that this is critical for building the client's trust in the potential of the coaching engagement, and the coach's credibility as their coaching partner. An additional theme favouring such experience is that it allows the coach to empathise more easily with their clients both in relation to the situations they find themselves in and also in relation to organisational dynamics, politics and culture, as well as with the successes and the failures inherent within leadership experience. One respondent described this as follows:

"(The) coach needs to understand the pressures and politics associated with the position to be in a position to know what questions to ask"

Several respondents argued that being able to point to such experiences proves more important in the sales phase of the relationship in reassuring a client who is deciding whether to commit to coaching and/or to this particular coach. Once the relationship is established this background can be expected to play less of a role for coaches who focus on eliciting solutions and possibilities from their clients.

There were a few themes representing disagreement with the opinion expressed in this statement. One concern is that, whilst noting that sufficient business experience is both valuable and necessary to foster a common language and conceptual understanding, a coach's specific executive experience might be obsolete or lure the coach into over-identifying the client's situation with something they have been through themselves. The risk here is that the coach offers suggestions and advice from their personal experience in a way that might reduce space for the client to find their own solutions. This concern is characterised by one respondent as follows:

"thinking that experience should be matched is left over from the consulting model".

A second point is that some of the knowledge gained by having been an executive, such as the language of business and organisational dynamics and politics, can be learned through other experiences.

That said studies into critical effectiveness factors in executive coaching do point to the value of previous experience as an executive (Bush, 2004).

3.2.2.2 Clinical Psychological Training

Statement

Executive coaches should have a clinical psychological training.

Quantitative analysis

Response	No.	%
Strongly agree	2	*7%*
Agree	4	*15%*
Neutral	2	*7%*
Disagree	12	*44%*
Strongly disagree	7	*26%*

Table 21: Clinical Psychological Training

Qualitative analysis

Three times as many respondents disagreed with this statement as agreed with it. The most common argument against was the distinction between coaching and psychology and especially clinical psychology that was described by one respondent as relevant only for the:

"5% of the population showing severe dysfunction."

Others noted that coaching is not about working with psychological trauma and is:

"a moving forward process not a healing the past process."

It seems that the distinction between a way of working and the skills available to a practitioner are important here, since despite the difference in practice, many respondents suggested that psychological training could be a

valuable element of an executive coach's background. This argument was supported by comments such as:

> *"not a must, but a terrific asset"*

> *"coaches with clinical psychological training as well as coach training would have powerful skills to offer"*

> *"coaches can be excellent without a clinical background; (however they) should know something about psychopathology ..... and how to work with people experiencing considerable stress"*

The minority of respondents who agreed with this statement commented that such training allowed for an understanding of underlying forces at play with the client, in addition to an increased self-awareness and self-management on the part of the coach. One respondent added that this provides a place to work from ethically, implying that executive coaches without such training might lack a sufficiently rigorous ethical framework.

It is important to note at this point that a review of the results from the later questions in this first survey shows that only a small minority of executive coaches recruited for the survey were clinically trained. A review of the empirical research into executive coaching shows that again a minority of executive coaches have clinical training (Bono, Purvanova, & Towler, 2004; Liljenstrand, 2004). Hence the orientation of these opinions may well have a lot do with the overall academic and professional backgrounds of the respondents.

3.2.2.3 Limits to Organisational Impact

Statement

Executive coaching can only have a limited impact on an executive's ability to deliver organisational results without a wider organisation development intervention.

Quantitative analysis

Response	No.	%
Strongly agree	1	*4%*
Agree	9	*33%*
Neutral	4	*15%*
Disagree	9	*33%*
Strongly disagree	4	*15%*

Table 22: Impact without OD Intervention

Qualitative analysis

This statement prompted quite a balanced split in opinion, with 48% disagreeing and 37% agreeing.

The most common argument made by those disagreeing is that individual leaders can have a significant impact on their organisations, and hence coaching them can have a "ripple" or "catalytic" effect due to the organisational initiatives which emerge from the coaching work. Various respondents speak to both sides of this argument:

> *"Best case is of course to have a wider intervention but ... clients with whom I have worked 'in a vacuum' have still accomplished miracles all by themselves."*

> *"One of my clients made an additional £500,000 for his firm after (the) second session of coaching, my colleague has had improvements of millions*

of pounds arising directly from interventions her clients have devised in 101 nondirective coaching sessions. Wider organisational OD ideally should be happening, and aligned, but individuals when truly functioning can also move mountains"

The framing of the statement perhaps caused a higher level of disagreement than if the question had asked whether wider organisation development interventions might be expected to multiply the impact of executive coaching. Several respondents, for example, expressed sentiments to this effect:

"I think that the impact can be greater if the coaching is combined with OD, but not that it is limited by not having OD interventions. My usual experience is that you start 1-1, grow to support team(s) and then a change process."

"Coaching supports a wider OD effort, but can be effective without it."

That said a significant minority made the case for coaching to be part of a broader strategy incorporating other interventions. One proponent of this view states;

"coaching can only help an executive adapt within a given corporate culture, or decide that adapting is not worthwhile".

Arguments here include that organisational systems are too complex and powerful for changes in only one individual player to have an effect – unless that individual is the CEO. Even if the client is the CEO he or she will need to employ system-wide interventions to push through change. Hence some respondents point out that executives in smaller organisations might have greater potential to effect change without a wider OD intervention.

3.2.2.4 Impact of Client's National Culture

Statement

Executive coaching processes are unaffected by the national culture of the person being coached.

Quantitative analysis

Response	No.	%
Strongly agree	1	*4%*
Agree	4	*15%*
Neutral	2	*8%*
Disagree	14	*54%*
Strongly disagree	5	*19%*

Table 23: Impact of Client's National Culture

Qualitative analysis

More than three times as many respondents disagreed with this statement as agreed with it. The minority who agreed, argued that executive clients share a global culture or common human nature that proves to be most relevant for the coaching work.

> *"Folks is folks. The fundamental human processes are the same wherever on the globe we may be."*

However even some of those in agreement with the statement tempered their position with examples of exceptions. Here is an example from the respondent quoted above:

> *"Cultural and national differences may affect the degree to which a particular phenomenon effects, but not the basic phenomena in human interrelations."*

Hence the majority of respondents felt that coaching is indeed affected by the national culture of the person being coached.

> *"my coaching in Taiwan and the Yukon (Canada) strongly suggest different perspectives to and approaches to coaching"*

> *"Some things are assumed to be acceptable in one culture where they would be a taboo in another"*

> *"non-directive coaching is potentially not appropriate in some cultures"*

> *"Understanding national culture is as important as understanding organisational culture when coaching effectively"*

One respondent expressed a view that best illustrates the two sides of this debate:

> *"Although I believe there are some basic ideas / methods that will run across cultures, the context in which one coaches and the cultural norms, habits of mind and communication potentially add an additional level of complexity in a coaching relationship--especially where (the) coach and coachee come from differing cultures."*

The majority view expressed by respondents is supported by Rosinski (2003) who illustrates how a wide variety of cultural differences can be accommodated by a coach attuned to work with these. Conversely he argues that neglecting to consider these is likely to undermine the potential of the coaching work. Brodbeck et al. (2000) found that prevailing leadership styles varied in important ways between different groups of national cultures. These findings are important for helping executive coaches think about how to engage in their work with cultures from different cultures.

3.2.2.5 Transparency of Engagement to the Organisation

Statement

Executive coaches' role should be as transparent as possible to the organisation.

Quantitative analysis

Response	No.	%
Strongly agree	8	*32%*
Agree	7	*28%*
Neutral	8	*32%*
Disagree	2	*8%*
Strongly disagree	0	*0%*

Table 24: Transparency of Engagement to Organisation

Qualitative analysis

There was a high degree of support for this statement. Respondents agreed with transparency for a variety of reasons that included:

- Providing positive leadership "role-modelling" - the executive being seen to be "willing to grow and adapt";
- Adding to the credibility and acceptance of coaching through the organisation;
- Creating potential for the coach to be available to coach others in the organisation, where appropriate;
- Sending a signal to the organisation to be open to outside ideas;
- Supporting the coach in bringing in different dimensions to their work, such as shadow coaching and providing live feedback in meetings.

Support for transparency was balanced with some specific caveats and concerns. First and foremost appropriate confidentiality within the coaching

relationship needs to be carefully guarded. Work with some clients might be such that openness about the existence of the relationship is not helpful. For example, when a client is wrestling with a crisis, he or she would prefer to keep this confidential, either permanently or at least until a preferred plan of action has been identified.

Another important consideration is to distinguish the coach's role in a way that avoids confusion about the executive's own role, accountability and competence. A worst-case scenario is when an executive abdicates, or is being perceived as abdicating, his or her authority to an outside expert. One respondent summarizes this as follows:

> *"the coach is the one that asks the right questions, not (the one who) makes the changes"*

The nature of the coach's approach (whether non-directive or more consultative/directive) will have an impact on how the relationship and its impact on the organisation are perceived. A non-directive relationship may be expected to create a different set of expectations and concerns than a directive one.

3.2.2.6 Measuring Return on Investment

Statement

The return on investment of executive coaching engagements is difficult to measure.

Quantitative analysis

Response	No.	%
Strongly agree	1	*4%*
Agree	3	*12%*
Neutral	5	*20%*
Disagree	11	*44%*
Strongly disagree	5	*20%*

Table 25: Difficulty Measuring ROI

Qualitative analysis

Executive coaches who participated in this study are generally undaunted by the challenge of measuring return on investment for their services. They disagreed in a ratio of 4 to 1 with the above statement.

Several of those who disagreed recommended collaboration with client organisations at the beginning of the process to define measurable results that are intended to be impacted by the coaching relationship. One respondent names changes in employee retention, revenue and profitability during the lifetime of the coaching engagement as appropriate measures. Another respondent recommended more qualitative indications of coaching impact such as "behaviours, types of decisions and team-work".

Challenges in this work include clarifying which measurable outcomes are within the client's sphere of influence, linking changes in behaviour (a core outcome of coaching assignments) to specific measurable outcomes. Several respondents emphasise the importance of measurement over a medium term time frame, since coaching focuses on supporting behavioural changes that take time

to manifest, and then more time to have an impact on the wider organisational system.

Though few respondents were willing to agree with the statement, some of the comments from the five respondents who chose a "neutral" stance reveal more of the challenges of working with ROI and executive coaching.

3.2.3 Academic, Professional & Personal Background

3.2.3.1 Academic Education

Executive coaches have a wide range of different academic backgrounds. Table 26 shows the breakdown of responses by subject area and type of degree. In this sample of 27 respondents all but two (93%) had Bachelors degrees, 70% masters degrees and 22% doctoral degrees.

A review of the academic subject areas shows a wide range of subjects at Bachelors level. 14 of the 23 respondents who reported a primary subject area had studied psychology, business, economics, education or a combination of two of these subjects. The remaining seven respondents studied a range of other subjects.

Subjects studied at Masters level show a greater concentration on psychology, business, education, and organisational behaviour and development. 14 of the 17 respondents declaring Masters degrees described their studies as falling into these subject areas. Similarly doctoral studies though less common show an even greater level of concentration on psychology, organisational psychology and human resource development.

Given that respondents were screened for extensive executive coaching experience before being able to participate in this survey we can deduce that advanced academic education, though presumably useful, is not essential to becoming established as an executive coach. Executive coaches who pursue Masters and Doctoral education choose subject areas that would appear to support their professional practice.

Table 26: Academic Education by Subject Area

BACHELORS		***MASTERS***		***DOCTORATE***	
Psychology, Business & Psychology, Outdoor education & Psychology	6	Psychology, Counselling, Counselling Psychology, Social & Clinical Psychology, Education & Counselling Psychology	5	Psychology	3
		Industrial/ Organisational Psychology, Organisational Behaviour, Organisation Development, Change agent skills	4	Industrial/ Organisational Psychology, Human Resource Development	2
Business, Business & Accounting, Economics, Hotel management	6	Business	4	Sociology	1
Education	2	Curriculum & Instruction	1		
Electrical Engineering, Chemistry, Applied science	4	Electrical Engineering	3		
Communications, Drama & Religious Studies, History, English	5				
Unspecified	2	Unspecified	2	Unspecified	0
No degree	2				
Total	**27**	Total	**19**	Total	**6**

Broad comparisons with two other much larger studies are possible if we distinguish four categories of subject area: (i) clinical and counselling psychology, (ii) industrial and organisational psychology, (iii) business and (iv) other.

Table 27: Coaches' Academic Backgrounds – Comparing Three Studies

Number of Respondents *Academic subject area*	Liljenstrand (2004) *2361*	Bono et al. (2004) *480*	Sanson (2006) *27*
Clinical/Counselling Psych.	9%	14%	22%
I/O Psychology	7%	17%	23%
Business	23%	21%	17%
Other	61%	48%	38%

Liljenstrand's sample represents coaches in general including personal, business and executive coaches, whilst Bono et al.'s sample is limited to business and executive coaches. Making a comparison between these three sets of data suggests that there are a higher proportion of executive coaches with different kinds of academic psychological training than coaches in general (45% in this study vs. 16% in Liljenstrand's study of coaches in general), although more than half of executive coaches do not have such a background. This supports an argument that purchasers of executive coaching have some clear choices to make about the type of academic background that they value in a practitioner. These choices will of course also take into account the practitioner's professional training and actual experience.

3.2.3.2 Professional Education

Respondents listed a wide variety of professional education that they had pursued in addition to formal academic education. Only seven categories of

education received more than one mention – these are listed in the first part of Table 28 below.

Table 28: Professional Education by Number of Mentions

TYPE OF PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION	No. of mentions
Coach training programmes	13
Psychometrics and/or Myers Briggs Type Indicator	7
Personal development trainings	6
Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP)	6
Psychological training and/or licence	4
Transactional analysis training	4
Being in therapy	3
Having a coach	1
Running a business	1
Sociology (theoretical and practical)	1
Time-line therapist and hypnotherapist	1
Certified facilitator and management consultant	1
Spiritual practices (e.g. tai-chi. meditation)	1
Mediation, Energy psychology	1
Corporate leadership training	1
National Training Laboratory (NTL) programs	1
Certified Public Accountant (CPA)	1
Certificate in public relations	1
Gestalt psychology	1
Certificate in organisational consulting	1
Buddhist retreats	1
Enneagram	1
Co-counselling	1
Appreciative inquiry	1

The most often cited professional education were different kinds of training in coaching skills. Other replies such as psychological training, and training in transactional analysis and neuro-linguistic programming can be seen as overlapping with coach training. In all of these approaches we can expect elements of raised awareness and self-knowledge for the practitioner in training, and the acquisition of knowledge in how to use specific models, approaches and tools with their clients.

Given the debate about the differences between executive coaching and psychology it is interesting to note that only 4 out of 27 respondents report having professional training in psychology. This is consistent with the finding from the previous question that 5 respondents had a Masters degree in an area connected to psychological practice, with 4 more having Masters degrees in areas connected to organisational behaviour, development and change.

Each of the items in the second part of the list represents single replies from respondents. This list contains different categories of professional development that respondents cite as valuable. These range from therapeutic approaches (time-line therapy, hypnotherapy, Gestalt psychology), personal development and spiritual work (having a coach, Buddhist retreats, tai-chi), specific tools and methods (Enneagram, Appreciative Enquiry), business-oriented professional qualifications (certifications in accounting, organisational consulting, public relations, facilitation and mediation) to the practical experience of running a business.

3.2.3.3 Professional Background

Respondents were asked to detail the key elements of their career to date. 25 out of 27 respondents provided information in response to the question: "Please list the key elements of your career history".

A review of the data received summarized in Table 29 below shows both a wide diversity of paths to becoming an executive coach and a strong pattern of executive coaches moving on from organisational life after careers of between 10 and 30 years in length. Most executive coaches report having subsequently held an independent, self-employed status for anything from 5 to 30 years. Most of

those at the longer end of this range reported having been independent from the beginning of, or very early in, their careers.

The first phase of respondents' careers is shown by the shaded bars in Table 29. This data shows respondents having been involved in a wide variety of functional areas including human resources (Guthrie) and training, sales & marketing, finance and administration. Several respondents also mention holding leadership roles such as "President". "Director", "senior leadership roles", "management". The openness of this question means that it is not possible to ascertain from this data the proportion of respondents who have actually held different kinds of leadership role. This would be a useful question for future researchers to focus in on.

The second phase of respondents' careers is illustrated by the clear bars Table 29. These show a remarkable consistency with 25 out of 27 respondents stating explicitly that they worked as independents in their own businesses as executive coaches. Many respondents also mention that they worked in the role of consultant. Only two respondents report subsequently returning to life as an employee (Phase 3).

These findings suggest the importance of executive coaches' prior experience as perhaps a catalyst for becoming an executive coach and a resource in their subsequent executive coaching work. The striking pattern shown in this sample of a two-phase career history has implications for the structure of the supply side of the executive coaching market. It would appear that a high proportion of executive coaches choose to be self-employed and therefore to market themselves to clients directly, or to work under other's brands as sub-contractors.

A caveat to this finding is that the recruitment process for this survey may have failed to attract practitioners who are on the payrolls of larger firms active in the executive coaching market. Follow-up interviews with several professional service firms (see section 3.2.4.2.1) suggest that many of the executive coaches who are employees of consulting firms are engaged in providing a range of consulting services, with executive coaching being only a

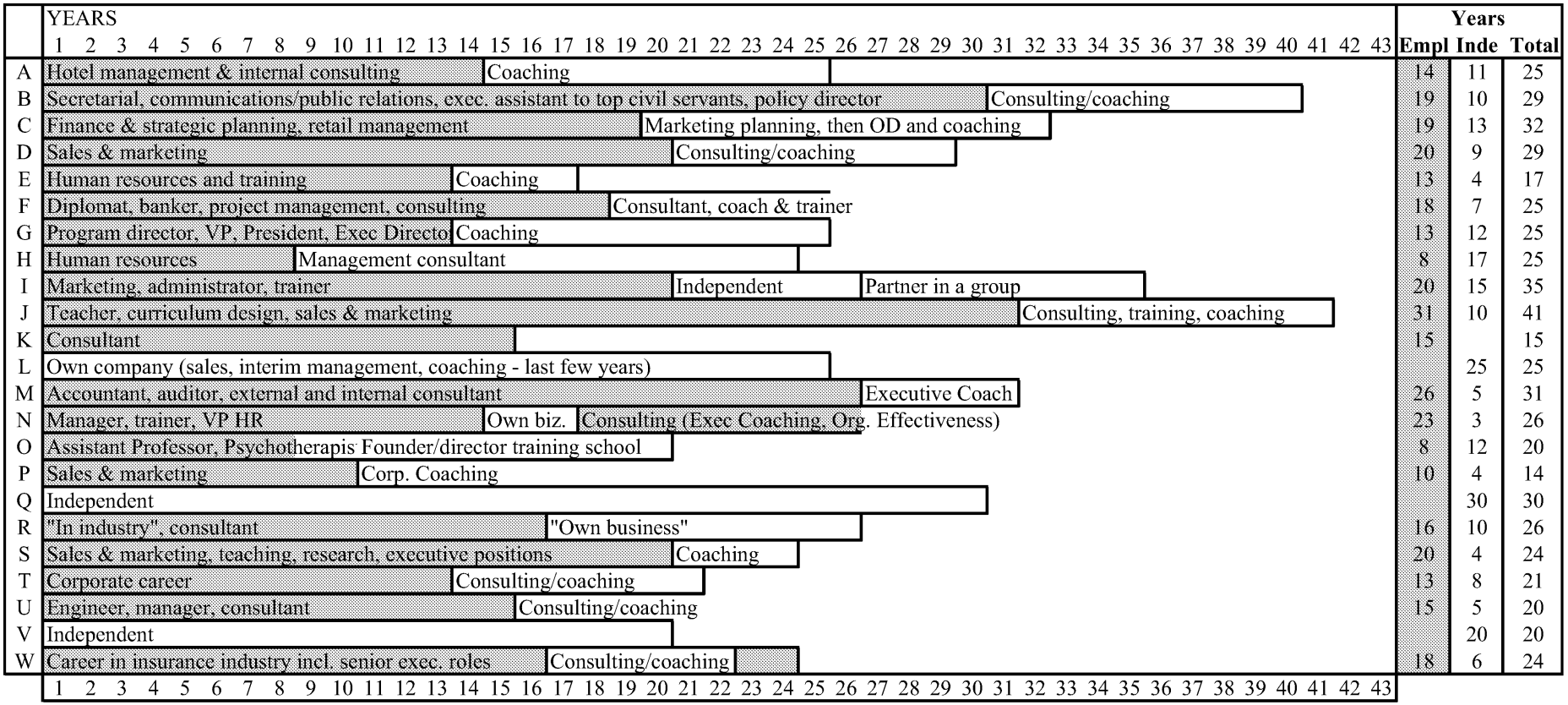


Table 29: Executive Coach Career Histories: Transition from Employed to Independent

part of this mix. That said, other firms that offer executive coaching services do so by developing pools of sub-contractors who can be drawn on as needed.

Responses to the following question provide some clues about the kinds of life experiences that have influenced people to make the career changes that have lead them into executive coaching.

3.2.3.4 Life Experiences

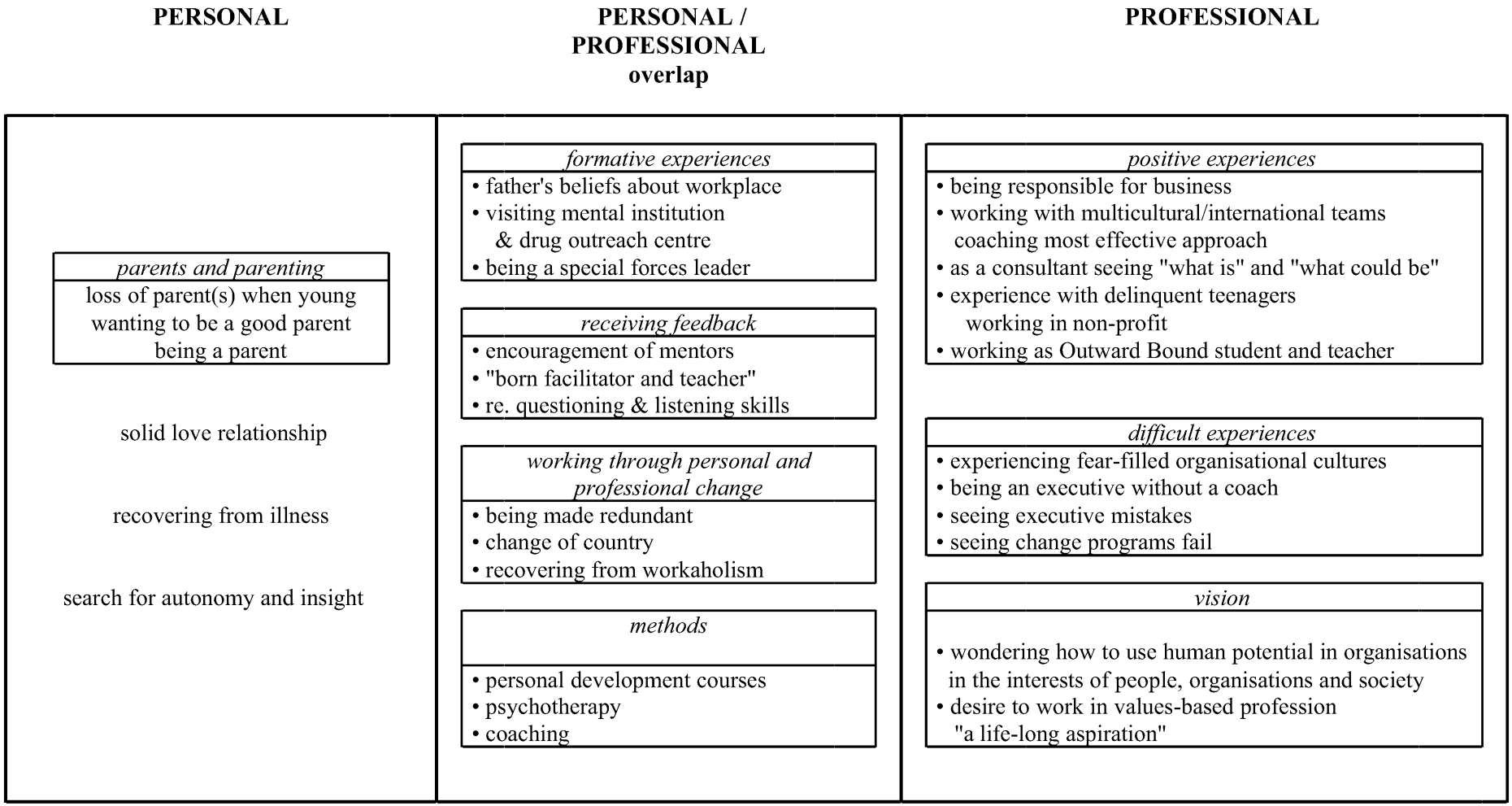
Respondents were asked to identify any specific life experiences that had been influential, whether in their decision to become an executive coach, or in developing the abilities they need to be effective in that role. 20 out of 27 respondents provided answers to this question. Their replies, summarised in Table 30, are divided into three categories, personal, professional and those that appear to overlap both personal and professional domains.

Personal life experiences cited as relevant by respondents fall into three categories. Firstly there are losses and hardships such as the deaths of parents or other close family members, personal crises connected to illness, workaholism and redundancy. There are also powerful experiences such as contact with other's mental illness and adventurous experiences in the military and the outdoors. Finally there is the support and influence of others, whether parents, partners, friends or colleagues.

Executive coaches draw on a wide range of professional experience in their work. Responses to this survey can be grouped into three broad categories, positive and difficult professional experiences, and statements tapping into a personal vision of work and professional life. The positive experiences cited include experiencing successes, especially around organisational change and personal development. The difficult experiences include both troubling experience as an executive and witnessing executive and organisational failures. More visionary comments report a desire to establish increasingly meaningful work tasks and workplaces for those responding and employees in general.

Experiences that overlap more distinctly personal and professional domains include receiving encouraging feedback from family and colleagues and taking

Table 30: Relevant Personal and Professional Life Experiences



on personal development work, whether through courses, psychotherapy or personal coaching.

3.2.4 Categories of Executive Coaching Supplier

The results of the first survey are detailed in sections 3.2.1 to 3.2.3, and provided data about individual executive coaches' backgrounds and opinions.

The second survey explored how executive coaches organise themselves to offer their services to the market. Respondents were asked to review the researcher's seven-category model of executive coaching suppliers (see Table 11, section 2.4.4.2).

Firstly respondents were asked whether this model was in their opinion an accurate representation of the marketplace. Then they were asked to identify which category represented a "best-fit" for their own business, and which would be their second best-fit.

Of the 38 respondents to this second survey, 30 were based in the US and Canada, 3 in the UK, 4 in Continental Europe and 1 in Australia; hence the picture provided by this data is largely a North American one.

3.2.4.1 Alternative Categories

Three of the respondents suggested alternative categories of executive coaching supplier in addition to those in Table 11. Each of these suggestions aimed to describe combinations of executive coaching with other disciplines such as consulting or training. Two of these three respondents still identified themselves with supplier categories from the model presented in Table 11 that appear to fit with the services that they describe, given the notes provided with their answers.

The final respondent focuses less on executive coaching than on training internal coaches in organisations, and consulting to organisations as to how to introduce coaching programs. She selected the "Other" category and offered the description "coaching consultancy" to describe her firm's profile.

3.2.4.2 Best-fit Categories: Self Assessment

35 of the 38 respondents to Survey 2 identified a category of supplier type that represented a best-fit for their own organisations. 24 respondents selected a further category representing a second best-fit. The categories selected are shown in the table below:

Table 31: Best-fit Categories of Executive Coach Supplier

Category	1st best fit	2nd best fit	Total
Executive coaching firms	8	1	9
Independents	8	3	11
Networked independents	7	10	17
Professional service firms	4	4	8
Executive coaching networks	4	3	7
Training institutions	3	3	6
Other	2	0	2
Internal executive coach	1	0	1
None	1	14	
Total	**38**	**38**	

There were 14 non-responses to the option to choose a second best fit – these are taken to indicate that these respondents were satisfied with their first choices.

Depending on which categories respondents identified themselves with they were asked to complete certain supplementary questions. The following sub-sections review the data provided against each of the categories of executive coaching supplier. The data included specific information about each category and suggestions of firms that, in the respondents' view, were good examples of the categories as they were defined in Table 11. The names of firms are not provided here, although disguised profiles are offered where this would be helpful.

3.2.4.2.1 Professional Service Firms

Professional Service Firms (with executive coaching divisions) are defined in this model as being companies with established businesses in professional service areas (e.g. management consulting, organisation development, training and development, HR/compensation, outplacement and recruitment) that employ executive coaches or have executive coaching divisions.

Four survey respondents identified their organisations with the Professional Service Firm category as a first choice, with four more selecting this as a second choice. Supplementing the notes provided by respondents with reviews of their websites showed that they were almost all either owners of, partners in or sub-contractors to *small* firms with 3-10 professionals. These firms usually provided primary activities consulting to organisations around leadership development, human capital, strategy implementation, large-scale change. Respondents provided executive coaching either within the aforementioned initiatives or as a subsidiary service offering. This response is a typical example:

> *"We are a strategy implementation firm…we all do some "executive coaching" as part of our engagements however I have a practice within our company that is about 20-30% of my billable time that is solely 'exec. coaching'… there is one other consultant in our firm that does this kind of stand alone coaching."*

All survey respondents had the opportunity to provide examples of firms that they judged fit this category. Most of the names provided were familiar to this researcher as well-known international consulting firms. They included some firms which are related to the "Big 4" accounting firms, some of the famous names in management, strategic and change consulting, specialists in leadership, human resources and remuneration consulting and finally leading international head-hunting and outplacement firms. There were also some specialist firms with a more restricted North American presence.

In addition several of the follow-up interviews were with large organisations that fall into this category that had been reported as important

market participants by respondents to the survey. The firms interviewed in this way are described below:

Firm A is an international training and development company which offers other professional services such as consulting and executive coaching to its client-base. The training and development company is the ultimate parent organisation.

Firm B is an organisational consulting firm that focuses on working with CEOs and senior leaders managing change. Part of an international group of human resources and strategy consulting firms, its ultimate parent company is in a different industry sector.

Firm C is a privately held international consulting firm focussed on leadership development and performance improvement.

Firm D is an international outplacement company that offers executive coaching services as a distinct service. This firm has an ultimate parent company in a different industry sector.

Interviewees from these firms were chosen based on their ability to provide reliable information about the following topics:

- the number of executive coaches in their teams;
- the degree of utilisation on executive coaching work;
- the split between employed and associate/sub-contractor coaches; and
- competition in the market for executive coaching services.

Firms B & C are consulting firms with between one hundred and "several" hundred consultants who are conventional employees. In contrast Firms A & D have teams of executive coaches who are hired on a contract-by-contract basis. One of these firms has two lead coaches who are employed in coordination and leadership roles.

In selecting executive coaches Firms B & C tended to place a greater emphasis on academic qualifications (especially in psychological fields) than Firms A & D which place greater emphasis on business and leadership

experience complemented by coach training accredited by the International Coach Federation.

Three of the four firms reported a wide array of competition around executive coaching, both from similar firms, firms with different expertise, business schools and many small companies or "one man shows". One interviewee experienced competition between similar kinds of firms in the market, hence between outplacement firms, between consulting firms and between training and development firms. Hence organisations may be working with executive coaching suppliers simultaneously, the firms having entered through different parts of the organisation, in collaboration with different categories of "gate-keeper".

Hence a challenge in assessing the extent of executive coaching being used are the multiple points of entry for executive coaching – in some organisations executive coaching may be being sourced both by the human resources and organisation development functions, and also directly by operational functions. In large organisations there is also the challenge of coordinating group-wide initiatives, as well as those taken on by specific business units or in particular geographical locations.

3.2.4.2.2 Executive Coaching Firms

Executive Coaching Firms are defined in this model as being firms focussed on executive coaching with a core staff of employed professionals and/or partners and a broader team of associates/sub-contractors who work on a project-by-project basis under the firm's brand.

Of the eight respondents who identified this category as their first best-fit seven shared details of the number of employees they had in relation to associates. All but one of these reported no more than two employees and between two and 15 associates. One respondent reported that his firm had 10 employees and 200 associates. However review of this firm's website showed extensive activity around leadership development and training, suggesting that it might more accurately belong in the Professional Services Firm category.

It is interesting to compare the size of these organisations to the size of the organisations that respondents nominated as members of this category when responding to a later question in this survey. Not only are most of those firms nominated substantially larger than their own firms, but on closer inspection they would appear to more accurately placed in the Professional Service Firm or Training Institution categories.

Reflecting on the data gathered in this survey, on multiple observations and conversations during field work it now appears that the Executive Coaching Firm category will mostly be populated by smaller firms due to their narrower focus when compared to Professional Services Firms who generally lead with other services and offer executive coaching as a secondary service or as support on other projects. Executive coaching firms may find advantage in partnering with Professional Service Firms who have not developed particular executive coaching competencies.

3.2.4.2.3 Training Institutions

Training Institutions are defined in this model as being bodies that train executive coaches as their primary activity, and also offer executive coaching services from a pool of faculty and graduate practitioners.

Three respondents to the survey selected this category as their first choice – review of their websites confirms the choice of this category and illustrates the diversity within it. The three institutions vary in their focus. One focussed on providing training in order to become a personal or executive coach to "professionals with graduate degrees". The next provides leadership training for a particular vocational community. The third is a graduate school whose main offering is Masters and Doctoral degree programmes in clinical and organisational psychology for mature students. Three more respondents identified this category as their second choice. Two of these offer different proprietary executive coach training programmes, and the third gives courses within a university's continuing education program on various aspects of organisational coaching. Each of these respondents also offers executing coaching services, whether as a primary or secondary activity. Each also has a

home grown network of coaches who have passed through their programmes, although there was no data gathered as to what degree each uses these networks to provide services.

The survey provided information about this category from two other directions. Firstly several of the other respondents named Training Institutions as organisations for whom they act as associates/sub-contractors. Secondly, respondents cited a range of Training Institutions who provide executive coaching services. These institutions were mostly coach training schools, although there were also some specialist leadership development consultancies (which arguably belong in the Professional Service Firm category) and, from one European respondent, several business schools.

3.2.4.2.4 Executive Coaching Networks

Executive Coaching Networks are defined in this model as entities containing typically 5 to 100 members operating under a common brand, allowing customers a wide choice of executive coaches from a single source. Networks can be expected to support their brand through careful member screening. Network members are likely to continue operating in parallel under their own brands.

Four respondents placed themselves in the Executive Coaching Network category as a first choice. Interestingly each of the four was from a different country – the United States, Canada, France and Sweden.

Reflecting on the various data gathered during this process it now seems that the Executive Coaching Network category is more likely to be sustained with a smaller rather than larger number of members. It acts as an alternative to creating an Executive Coaching Firm for practitioners who prefer to collaborate under one brand but also to maintain their own brands. Larger groupings are more likely to fit the Professional Service Firm or Executive Coaching Firm categorisation since they need some kind of core group of owners/partners to provide the centre of gravity. Few such larger configurations have emerged in this study. One that did would be more accurately categorised as an Executive Coaching Firm with a large number of associates. This categorisation rests on

the ownership and control of the configuration – if ownership and control is shared broadly amongst members this would be classified as an Executive Coaching Network, whereas if ownership is concentrated in a few members with the others only participating in projects that they work on then this would fall under the Executive Coaching Firm categorisation.

Interestingly one respondent who classified herself as a Networked Independent gave the following description of her collaboration with three colleagues – which would appear to describe an Executive Coaching Network:

> *"I have my own Executive Coaching business and have formed an alliance with three other executive coaches. We are operating under the name of (...) Executive Coaching Group. We market together and work on larger projects together. As a result we are able to offer a choice of coaches and we provide a 'lead coach' who manages the client relationship and the coaches. An added benefit to the client is we are able to provide organisational observations back to the client that a number of independent coaches cannot do."*

A distinction that emerges in trying to categorize this example is that this group appear to operate as an "alliance" under one brand that they market jointly for larger projects, whilst maintaining their own brands for work that they can handle on their own. If the projects are marketed under one practitioner's brand and then colleagues are brought in to handle the larger projects this fits more into the Networked Independent category. If the collaboration involves several practitioners also sharing in ownership and building a firm together, then this would fall under the Executive Coaching Firm definition.

3.2.4.2.5 Independents and Networked Independents

Independent executive coaches are defined in this model as being independent executive coaches who tend to work alone or with one or two colleagues. They attract a steady flow of business by virtue of their reputation and their own personal network. Independents may therefore refer larger

projects to Networked Independents or executive coaching firms, or create partnerships with such suppliers on a case-by-case basis.

Networked Independents are defined in this model as being independent executive coaches with their own brands, who develop a variety of alliances for the purpose of fulfilling larger executive coaching contracts. Hence they can offer teams of executive coaches and consultants and they may be members of Executive Coaching Networks, and/or associates/sub-contractors with other firms.

These two categories were the most often selected by respondents to this survey. Eight respondents selected Independent as their first choice of best-fit category, and of those six chose Networked Independent as their second choice. This represents a total of 17 respondents chose Networked Independent as their first choice or second choice.

The quotes below illustrate a variety of perspectives on these two categories. Two of the respondents identify themselves as fitting the Independent category, although their descriptions would appear to match that of Networked Independents.

> *"(The group) comprises consultants who have some coaching experience. They tend to refer me in as executive coach; I refer them in for change management initiatives."*

> *"I'm mostly in the independent category, although I can draw from alliances with other independents to work larger contracts."*

> *"I am an Independent who dabbles in all of the above (supplier categories) as I have grown my business through alliances in order to deliver the services of Executive Coaching rather than marketing (them)."*

> *"Previously .. I was a partner in a firm specializing in the coaching of leaders. Frankly, I hated it. The coaches were more like consultants, the consultants freely discussed their clients, and the standard of coaching*

wasn't consistent. I decided to buy myself out of the partnership and created networks with one European company, and one US based company, in addition to doing independent coaching. It works well."

There is not sufficient statistical justification to extrapolate the preponderance of independent executive coaches in this sample to the industry as a whole. In addition to the relatively small size of the sample - it might be that the marketing for respondents to this survey was more effective in reaching and attracting practitioners who fit these categories, rather than those working in professional service firms. We should also remember that a high proportion of respondents to this survey are from the North American market and hence patterns observed may not be replicated in other regions.

However it is clear from a variety of aspects of this project's fieldwork that Independent and Networked Independent executive coaches constitute a significant proportion of current practitioners. Evidence gathered during this study for this assertion has several dimensions: (i) the prevalence of practitioners acting as associates/sub-contractors for other entities (see 3.2.4.3 below); (ii) the reporting of professional service firms that their competitors include many practitioners in these categories; (iii) the examples of some professional service firms creating executive coaching pools using primarily associates/sub-contractors and (Olivero, Bane, & Kopeirnan) examples of large client organisations building their own pools of independent executive coaches.

3.2.4.3 Role of Associates/Sub-contractors

Respondents were asked to estimate the degree of their revenue that was earned as an associate or sub-contractor to other firms and organisations.

Table 32 displays the data that emerged. This shows that half of the executive coaches in this sample earn between 1 and 25% of their revenue as associates/sub-contractors for other firms or institutions. Another quarter earns no revenue as associates/contractors whilst 16% earn more a quarter of their revenue this way. A review of the names of the organisations for which respondents act as associates/sub-contractors shows examples of Professional

Service Firms, Training Institutions, Executive Coaching Firms and Networked Independents.

Table 32: Proportion of Revenue Earned as an Associate/Sub-contractor

Category	0%	1-10%	11-25%	26-50%	51-75%	76-100%	No reply
Executive coaching firms	2	4	1			1	
Independents	4	2		2			
Networked independents		2	5				
Professional service firms	1			2			1
Executive coaching networks			3	1			
Training institutions	1	1					1
Other	1		1				
Internal executive coach							1
None							1
Total	**9**	**9**	**10**	**5**	**0**	**1**	**4**
	24%	*24%*	*26%*	*13%*	*0%*	*3%*	*10%*

The eight respondents who chose a first best-fit category of Executive Coaching Firm were asked how many employees and how many executive coach associates/sub-contractors they work with. Most of these firms were small reporting 0-2 employed executive coaches and 2-15 associates. There was one larger example reporting 10 employed coaches and no less than 200 associates/sub-contractors. Another respondent's firm had built a group of over 150 associates/sub-contractors, but comments that no more than 10% of these are being used at any one time. A consistent pattern emerged of firms having a small employed core and a larger pool of associates/sub-contractors.

In addition these respondents were asked to estimate the percentage of executive coaching fulfilled by employees and the percentage fulfilled by associates/sub-contractors. Five out of the seven who responded to this question reported 75% or more executive coaching hours being fulfilled by associates/sub-contractors, with the remaining two respondents (both small firms) reporting 80-90% of hours being fulfilled by employed executive coaches.

3.2.5 Selection and Matching

This fieldwork provided a range of opportunities to gather data on the question of how executive coaches are selected as candidates for executive coaching work (or as employees in firms offering executive coaching), and how executive coaches are matched to individual clients. There were two particular moments during the data gathering process that provided data explicitly focussed on one or both of these issues.

The first of these was the 2004 Executive Coaching Summit (ECS) at which I hosted a working group looking at the issue of executive coach selection and matching. A wide range of practicing and experienced executive coaches provided input to the discussion. The second set of opportunities during fieldwork to examine this issue were the follow-up interviews conducted with established firms offering executive coaching services. The findings from these and other sources are combined below.

Executive coach selection takes place both on an individual basis and in more systematic ways. The point of entry to organisations is either through executives or human resources functions. Coaching happens at many different leadership levels, from the "C-Suite" down the corporate structure to middle management.

Selection for executive coaching pools or individual assignments within client organisations is made using a variety of criteria. These include coaching education; formal academic and professional education; business experience; coaching experience and language and culture fit with the individual client(s) and/or organisation. Personal connections were cited as another aspect of the selection process, as were references from previous clients, reiterating the findings from Arnott and Sparrow (2004).

The follow-up interviews conducted with established firms offering executive coaching services revealed two different approaches to coach selection. As was described earlier (section 3.2.4.2.1) two of these firms offer executive coaching services with their employed consulting staff. These firms place a strong emphasis on academic qualifications (especially in psychological fields), as well as on strong consulting and relationship management skills. The

other two firms have teams of associates/sub-contractors who are selected more for their business experience in addition to specific coach training credentials.

Selection processes for building executive coaching pools inside client organisations often include the screening of written applications and some sort of interview. Corporate human resources professionals reported large numbers of applicants from independent practitioners, creating a problem with regard to how to make decisions as well as to whom to call for an individual interview. A more recent development is the use of assessment centres. In such contexts executive coach candidates are observed coaching on real issues and required to make presentations about their personal philosophy of coaching and how they put this into practice. Candidates need to complete a written application and succeed in a screening interview before being accepted onto the assessment centre.

Matching of coaches to executives is seen as a critical step in the executive coaching process. A first consideration is the question regarding what represents a good match between executive coach and client.

Opinions were divided amongst ECS practitioners whether to give executives an opportunity to choose from two or three coaches or to allocate a specific coach having made a judgement about the kind of relationship dynamics that will be helpful in each case.

A second important question is whether matching (as well as coach selection) is handled inside the client organisation, or whether it is contracted-out to a specialist coaching company which then provides a team of coaches and helps the organisation make appropriate matches for their executives. A next step put forward by an international corporation that has developed the assessment centre model described above is to explore an intermediate strategy of building a consortium of corporations who would create a joint pool of screened coaches from which they could each draw resources.

3.2.6 Professionalization of Executive Coaching

During several years of fieldwork I participated in numerous conversations about the professionalization of coaching in general and executive coaching in particular. These conversations illustrated a split between practitioners about the

value of pushing for the professionalization of executive coaching. On one hand there are those who argue that coaching is a liberal profession which has grown by being inclusive and open to new entrants. On the other hand, some assert that for coaching and executive coaching to mature into respected professions, rather than suffer the fate of more fleeting management development practices (i.e. "fads"), then a formalised profession must indeed be built up with characteristics such as those described by Grant & Cavanagh (2004a).

Looking at the United States, the most developed market for executive coaching, provides an example of how different groups of practitioners organise themselves into professional communities.

The long and sophisticated professional tradition of psychology has been established by the *American Psychological Association* (APA), which was founded in 1892 and has over 150,000 members (Source: APA website). It is not surprising that, given the rigorous and lengthy training that psychologists require, that they would resist the attempts of non-psychologists to enter executive coaching - an area which might seem their natural territory. The APA has two "Divisions" (out of more than 50 in total) that offer communities for psychologically trained executive coaches. These are Division 13, the Society of Consulting Psychology and Division 14 the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, founded in 1938 and 1945 respectively. Review of these divisions' websites shows references to coaching in organisations including, but not limited to, executive coaching. Given that members of the APA are required to have doctoral degrees in psychology it might not be surprising that to date no explicit additional credential for executive coaching has been developed.

The *International Coach Federation* (ICF) is the most established body focused on serving practitioners who identify themselves as coaches. It was founded in 1994 by Thomas Leonard, who was also the founder of one of the first coach training schools in the United States, "Coach University". Leonard had realised that there needed to be an independent body to address accreditation of training schools, certification of coaches and potential regulation. By the end of 2004 ICF had accredited 28 coach training programmes (19 from North

America, 6 from Europe, 2 from Asia and 1 from Australia) and credentialed around 1,300 coaches from 24 countries (Source: ICF website). At the same date its membership numbered around 8,000 from 52 countries. Not surprisingly the membership is concentrated in English-speaking countries, with the United States accounting for 61%, Canada 10% and the United Kingdom 8% respectively. However members from European countries excluding the UK accounted for just over 10% of the total and have driven the development of coach credentialing in French and German. Wilkins (2000) cited ICF as the only body offering accreditation of coach training programmes, and certification of professional coaches.

Many helping professionals who already have received training in other fields do not regard the ICF as a necessary, or even credible, certification body. Carr (2004) criticises the ICF for having too close a relationship with the training schools which founded it and for both accrediting training schools and "credentialing" coaches.

The contrasts between the APA and the ICF are striking, in terms of size, focus, longevity and barriers to entry to name a few. The APA is primarily an American institution – founded in a time when international professions were far from practical. ICF, though more than 85% of members live in English speaking countries, has a much broader geographic spread and offers certification in several languages.

The role of universities in training professional coaches is in its early stages, with programmes emerging at an increasing rate during the period in which this fieldwork was carried out and written-up. It is more common outside of the United States for private coach training institutes to affiliate themselves with universities preferring accreditation by an academic rather than a practitioner body.

That said two university programs were included in the list of ICF accredited programs as at the end of 2004, and for some institutions it may continue to be seen as valuable to seek this kind of connection with a practitioner association.

Most importantly from the perspective of this research, only two of the ICF-accredited training programmes are explicitly executive coaching programmes, and ICF itself has yet to develop a credential focussed on the specific competencies required of executive coaches.

The lack of ICF focus on executive coaching resulted in many non-APA executive coaches being ambivalent about ICF's relevance for their professional identity. This lead to the creation of the *Executive Coaching Summit* (ECS) in 1999 as an event located next to, but distinguished from the annual ICF Conference.

The Executive Coaching Summit (ECS) is a body of executive coaches that has been meeting annually in North America since 1999, on one or two days preceding the annual ICF conference. The connection to the ICF conference points to the fact that many (but not all) ECS members have been or continue to be ICF members.

This group has explored a variety of themes at its meetings. The first four meetings were reported on via "White Papers" produced subsequent to each event (Smith & Sandstrom, 2003a, 2003b). This researcher co-wrote the paper following the fourth ECS in Atlanta in 2002 (Sanson, Arond-Thomas, & Guilday, 2005), and examined some of the themes arising in the four meetings as a whole. Attendees were divided on the question as to whether executive coaching is a profession in its own right or simply a methodology. They also debated whether there should be a certification process for aspiring executive coaches and how to promote professional standards of practice.

The United Kingdom provides another complex example of professional associations crowding into the marketplace, including: the International Coach Federation; the Association for Coaching; the European Mentoring and Coaching Council; the Special group in Coaching Psychology (British Psychological Association), and the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. Again this range of bodies represents the inter-disciplinary nature of coaching and executive coaching. Each body has an interest in professionalization, although not all of these interests are compatible. Time will tell whether they can create working relationships with each other that can be collaborative and constructive.

Similar constellations and dynamics have been observable in several other developing European markets for coaching and executive coaching such as France, Germany and Switzerland. The same trends can be expected wherever this new professional practice emerges, particularly where professional bodies for psychologically oriented consultants are already established.

The debates about professionalization of executive coaching seem set to continue as the practice continues to mature and professionals from different disciplines work to define and understand it.

3.3 Conclusions from Empirical Work

The findings described in the preceding sections can be organised into three broad categories that might be thought of as "The What", "The Who" and "The How" of the supply of executive coaching services, adapting Hilb's (2002) model of the different aspects of the coaching relationship. For the purposes of this study "The What" refers to the practice and implementation of executive coaching, "The Who" denotes the individual practitioners themselves, and "The How" the way in which practitioners and purchasers collaborate to deliver executive coaching to coachees. The following sub-sections offer a discussion of these different dimensions of executive coaching supply.

3.3.1 Executive Coaching Practice and Implementation

Although this research project has taken as a working assumption that executive coaching is already a well-established professional practice there are a number of aspects of our understanding of the phenomenon of executive coaching which are reinforced or clarified by these findings.

During my several years of fieldwork I observed that executive coaching was indeed growing steadily from the scale and frequency of practitioner events that I attended and learned about. For example the attendance and applications received for the Executive Coaching Summit events in the U.S. continue to grow. Similarly interest in executive coaching workshops within the annual ICF conference has also steadily increased.

Executive coach colleagues are increasingly busy and more able to focus their time on executive and team development work – whilst in earlier years they may have earned a higher proportion of their income from peripheral activities. Executive coaching training programmes appear to be growing in number, although this is not in itself proof of increased executive coaching activity.

As executive coaching becomes more prevalent organisations are becoming more sophisticated about how they make the best use of it. An array of survey and anecdotal data gathered during fieldwork supports this view, with organisations paying attention as to when to use executive coaching (and when not), how to select executive coaches and then match them to their coachees, and how to monitor the progress of executive coaching relationships and larger scale executive coaching interventions. There also appears to be a growing commitment to developing coaching competencies within organisations in a systematic way, with some organisations working towards the creation of coaching cultures (Clutterbuck & Megginson, 2005).

However, it remains unclear to this researcher where the boundaries are being drawn between the use of internal rather than external coaches in coaching executives, and how these boundaries vary depending on the culture of the organisation. Similarly, whilst there are now some developed methodologies for calculating return on investment for coaching interventions it is not clear how many organisations actually use such quantitative approaches.

3.3.2 Executive Coaches

The exploratory nature of this study's methodology has surfaced a number of insights into the identities and backgrounds of executive coaches. They tend to be experienced professionals who usually have had a significant exposure to organisational life, often in leadership roles, before becoming an executive coach. A high proportion of them have chosen to become independent practitioners and, having left organisational life, appear set to remain as independent practitioners. Organisations wishing to contract with executive coaches need to take into account this inherent preference for independence in their work arrangements.

Executive coaches have eclectic academic backgrounds. 63% of those surveyed in this study hold Masters degrees, and 22% doctoral degrees. Those who pursued graduate education tended towards fields such as clinical and counselling psychology, industrial and organisational psychology, organisational behaviour and business. However a significant proportion of executive coaches practice without this kind of academic training. This study did not go as far as to explore the specific approaches used by executive coaches, and relate these back to the training and experience in their backgrounds, however this would be an interesting topic for future research.

A demographic review of this sample of executive coaches, largely from North America, the United Kingdom and Continental Europe, showed that gender representation appeared to vary between these three regions – with North America and the United Kingdom showing a majority of female executive coaches, whilst Continental Europe had a majority of male practitioners. It should be stressed that with the sample so small (N=27) these findings are not statistically significant, but they provoke interesting questions both about typical pathways which people follow in becoming professional executive coaches, and how dependent these might be on sociological and cultural factors.

These findings illustrate that one aspect of the pathway followed in becoming an executive coach is the process of building a foundation of experience through working in organisations. Almost all of the coaches surveyed have spent a significant amount of time working in organisations, most in the "for profit" sector, but some in the public sector. The contribution of this organisational experience can be assumed to be multi-faceted, with professionals learning about both successes and failures, acquiring technical and functional knowledge, and accumulating experience of leading teams, departments and in some cases whole organisations.

Personal and professional life experiences clearly also play a role in influencing people's decision to become an executive coach. Here the data can only provide some preliminary themes, although this appears to be fertile ground for future research.

Personal experiences cited by respondents as influential include losses of close family members, the influence and encouragement of mentors and colleagues, being made redundant or becoming burned out and a variety of personal development processes such as coaching, psychotherapy and training courses.

Professional experiences that are cited as having played a part in prompting a move into executive coaching can be put into two broad categories – general and negative. General experiences cited include: time spent in corporate leadership roles; consulting to organisations; experiencing organisational changes and working with multi-cultural teams. One might assume that these coaches draw on the positive and negative aspects of these experiences as one of the foundations in their executive coaching practice. Negative experiences cited by respondents include: being an executive without the support of a coach; being frustrated by the regular failure of change programmes; witnessing or experiencing mistakes made by executives; wrestling with the fear present in failing companies and suffering the under-utilization of people's potential in the workplace.

3.3.3 Supply of Executive Coaching Services

So given "The What" and "The Who" - how is the interface between client organisations and executive coaches being managed, and how are the practitioners organising themselves to best serve these *systems*?

3.3.3.1 Client Organisation Approaches

The findings reinforce my view that the primary modality for executive coaching is one coach to one executive. That said it is also the case that a significant number of executive coaching engagements are combined with team development processes. Therefore organisations need to manage not only multiple dyadic coaching relationships, but also a number of team coaching scenarios, at any given time. This challenges organisations to find economies of scale in managing such numbers of coaching relationships. My findings suggest that organisations would appear to have developed varying degrees of

sophistication in approaching these challenges. These are illustrated by the following categories of engagement between organisations and executive coaching suppliers: Ad hoc; Corporate coach pool; Consortium coach pool and Contracted out. Sketches of these different approaches are provided below.

Ad hoc: organisations which do not coordinate the proliferation of executive coaching services – individual dyads form spontaneously as and when executives decide that they would like to work with a coach. They or their human resources counterpart enter the market through their existing network in search of a coach.

Corporate coach pool: organisations that develop a pool of executive coaches, and possibly their own internal processes for coach selection, coachee-client matching and quality control.

Consortium coach pool: a pool of executive coaches developed by a consortium of corporations, thereby sharing the investment of time and cost in screening and selecting coaches, and sharing access to the coaches who are selected.

Contracted out: organisations that form relationships with one or more firms which specialise in the supply of executive coaching services. These firms offer a pool of pre-screened coaches, and perhaps some additional services such as personality assessments. The client organisation acts as an intermediary between their executive coachees and the executive coaching firms. The executive coaching firms may employ account managers who support processes such as matching the individual corporate clients with suitable coaches from their pool.

These categories primarily describe the matching of executive clients with external executive coaches. In addition, there are some organisations that also

develop a pool of internal executive coaches who supplement the coaches available from outside the organisation.

3.3.3.2 Revisiting Categories of Executive Coaching Supplier

Given the different ways in which organisations are managing their engagement with external executive coaches how are the practitioners positioning themselves? Findings from the second survey in this study broadly supported the framework of categories of executive coaching supplier set out in section 2.4.4.2. However some of the category descriptions benefit from further clarification. Table 33 shows the revised model.

A large proportion of respondents to Survey 2 identified themselves as working as solo practitioners or in small firms with one or two partners or employees, whichever of the categories of executive coaching supplier that they chose as their "best-fit". This appears to reflect the backgrounds of the executive coaches who it would seem prefer to maintain a high degree of independence in their working structures rather than becoming salaried employees.

This is not an issue when the coaching assignment is limited to one or a few individual executive clients, but becomes more problematic when we look at large-scale international executive coaching interventions. In the latter scenario Professional Service Firms with international office networks may at first appear to have an advantage in providing the kind of coverage that the client is looking for. However client organisations need to be cautious to verify the coaching competencies Professional Service Firm employees possess against those that they need. This is a factor in some firms investing the time and expense in building their own pool through a customised selection process, joining a consortium or seeking out specialist coaching firms, perhaps hiring separate firms for coverage of different geographical regions.

This issue raises the question as to how independent executive coaches can best collaborate with each other in order to meet the needs of international organisations. Observations made during fieldwork suggest that there is a dynamic and unpredictable process in place whereby groups of coaches are forming national and international alliances that involve varying degrees of

mutual commitment. These alliances do not appear to be particularly stable with some languishing whilst others are acquired, for example by other firms trying to build broader geographical coverage.

It remains to be seen whether executive coaches can master formulas for collaboration that might allow them to grow larger international firms, or whether this challenge will be better met by global firms in other consulting domains who add an executive coaching service line to their existing business.

These developments may be impacted by both the ongoing development of communications technology and the less concrete development of professional communities and institutions amongst executive coaches. Both enable practitioners to connect more effectively with each other and with their clients.

The biggest challenge facing executive coaches wishing to collaborate effectively, especially in an international context, is how to balance the requirement to systematically engage with a large client system across borders when the practitioners themselves have such diverse approaches to their work. Developing more explicit codes for executive coaching practice may allow this diversity to be reduced and/or be made more explicit over time, however given how long it has taken other professions to develop practices that are approximately consistent we will need to patient.

Table 33: Revised Model of Categories of Executive Coaching Supplier

Type of EC Supplier	Description and Characteristics
Professional service firms	Companies with established businesses in professional service areas (e.g. management consulting, organisation development, training and development, HR/compensation, outplacement). Executive coaching is either a distinct service offering and/or one of various tools used as part of professionals' client work.
Executive coaching firms "EC firms"	Focussed executive coaching firms, usually with a core staff of employed professionals and/or partners. Broader team of associates/sub-contractors who work on a project-by-project basis under the firm's brand.
Training institutions offering EC services	Training institutions with expertise in training professional executive coaches, which also offer services from a pool of faculty members and graduates.
Executive coaching networks "EC networks"	Focussed EC networks containing 3-100 members marketing services under a consistent common brand. Allow customers a wide choice from one source. Sub-groups form and contract project by project. Supporting network brand through careful new membership screening. Network members also operate under their own brands.
Networked independents	Independent ECs with their own brands, who develop a variety of alliances. Can offer teams of ECs and consultants. May be members of EC networks, and/or associates/sub-contractors with other firms.
Independents	Independent ECs who tend to work alone, or with one or two colleagues on projects requiring a few coaches. Attract a steady flow of business by reputation/personal network/their own brand.
Internal executive coach	Employees of organisations who work part-time or full-time coaching leaders within that organisation

4 CONCLUSIONS

4.1 Recommendations for Research

The purpose of this study from a research perspective was to broaden our understanding of executive coaches' diverse backgrounds, and the different ways in which executive coaches organise themselves to supply the market for executive coaching. Clarifying these differences is important for designing future research to better understand how executive coaching can be used most effectively by organisations. In addition the study surfaced a range of information around the process by which organisations procure and use executive coaching services.

There are various ways in which to examine the dimensions of difference that emerged in this study. One dimension is in the domain of background. This includes academic background (both level of study and subjects), professional training (such as in behavioural areas, consulting and business), professional experience (including leadership roles, functional and industry experience) and influential life experiences. At a more fundamental level we have differences such as gender, national culture and other aspects of individual coach and client identity.

In a more practical dimension the study found differences in how executive coaches prefer to organise themselves to serve their clients. Whilst some executive coaches prefer to be employed by consulting or specialist executive coaching firms, the majority of practitioners who participated in this study preferred to leverage their prior experience in organisations but remain independent either as solo operators or by collaborating with a few colleagues.

These multiple dimensions of difference provide a feast of potential questions for researchers to explore. With so few studies having demonstrated empirically the factors that make executive coaching interventions successful, these dimensions of difference can be used to focus on specific variables. Potential research includes examining whether results achieved in given coaching scenarios might be impacted by differences in academic and/or professional training, competence and experience of executive coaches. For example, under what circumstances is professional experience more important than academic background, and vice versa? This topic connects to the two-step process of selecting coaches and matching them to executives. What are the keys to success in matching executive coaches to clients?

What role does culture, gender, race and/or age play in successful matches? Which elements of executive coaches' backgrounds are important in supporting executive clients? For example, how important is it for a coach to have experience of working in international environments when coaching an executive who is living outside of their home country and/or leading a multi-national team or organisation?

Turning to large-scale implementations of executive coaching in organisations, researchers could make an important contribution by examining how organisations build pools of executive coaches. What criteria are organisations using to select executive coaches and what processes are being used, if any, to verify each coach's specific competencies? Are organisations looking for particular executive coaching approaches and orientations from their coaches? Do they value specific approaches or prefer having a range of different approaches to draw on depending on the specific coaching request? Another important avenue for researchers would be to explore how executives are selected to receive coaching. Is executive coaching being reserved for specific types of coachee, such as senior executives, "high-potentials" or those identified as successors or problem cases? How is executive coaching being integrated with other development processes within organisations – such as leadership development programmes?

On the subject of measurement and evaluation, how are organisations monitoring the effectiveness of large-scale coaching programs given the challenge of protecting the confidential "container" which coaches and clients need to do their work without threat of disclosure?

Researchers also have a valuable role to play in helping us understand the different routes that professionals take in becoming executive coaches. Participants in this study tended to have a two phase professional biography with the first phase being a medium to long-term experience as employees of organisations, followed by a second phase as an independent practitioner and/or entrepreneur. It would be useful to explore whether this finding is limited to the communities within which this researcher conducted most of his fieldwork, or whether it is replicated amongst executive coaches who, for example, have trained as industrial and organisational psychologists. Are there identifiable career paths that lead different groups of professionals to the identity "executive coach"? Several participants also shared

that there were important turning points, for example personal crises or life transitions, which influenced their decision to become coaches or executive coaches. How do factors such as gender, race and age play a role in whether someone becomes an executive coach, and is this correlated to the gender, age and race profiles of executives in different parts of the world?

Further research into the catalysts and motivations for becoming executive coaches, including comparisons with the experiences of those in related disciplines, would be particularly helpful. For example, what role do mentors and colleagues play in encouraging decisions to pursue this path? To what extent do the different routes to becoming an executive coach influence the category of supplier with which individual practitioners become aligned? What other factors influence a practitioner's choice to work for a professional service firm, an executive coaching firm, or to become a networked independent? Is becoming an independent practitioner easier or more accepted in certain countries?

Measuring the amount of executive coaching activity that is taking place in different marketplaces and within multi-disciplinary firms would help us to understand the true extent of executive coaching as an economic activity. Similarly it would be valuable for purchasers of executive coaching services and practitioners alike to have more empirical evidence about which kinds of firms are actually providing these services and to what extent. How is the market segmented between the many independents and networked independents in different territories and international consulting firms with a wider geographical reach? Are specialist executive coaching firms becoming established in different countries serving primarily national markets?

An important area for further research would be to deepen our understanding of how purchasers of executive coaching are making decisions about how to organise and coordinate their various executive coaching activities and how they partner with individual coaches or firms to implement them. When is it better to build a pool of executive coaches and when is it preferable to contract this function out? Are corporations favouring specialist executive coaches or more broadly focussed consultants and psychologists for whom executive coaching is just one part of their service offering?

Researchers could make a valuable contribution to our understanding of the development of executive coaching by helping to surface the assumptions underlying the competing discourses about the practice from different professional communities. What are the key differences in how executive coaches from different professional backgrounds practice – are there fundamental differences or is there significant common ground between best practices from different traditions? Can we trace particular executive coaching approaches back to sources in other disciplines? Are executive coaching practitioners aware of these origins?

This inquiry would be supported by the development of a comprehensive history of executive coaching making connections with important developments in other practices such as life coaching, process consulting and positive psychology. It would be helpful to look at how broader sociological changes have impacted the development of these practices.

4.2 Recommendations for Practice

The outcome of this research study for practice can be looked at from the perspective of the purchasers of executive coaching services and from those of the different types of supplier of executive coaching.

From the perspective of purchasers of executive coaching services this study provides clearer visibility about the range of different types of executive coach available on the market, and the different configurations in which they can be found. Understanding that executive coaches carry with them a range of different academic, professional and personal backgrounds gives potential executive coaching clients more options about how to select coaches and, where relevant, the organisations that provide them.

Purchasers of executive coaching services are encouraged to identify the criteria which executive coaches will need to satisfy, and in which order of priority. What are the needs of your particular clients? What are the goals of the executive coaching intervention? The answers to these kinds of questions will help to inform purchasers whether to prioritise specific professional experience, and coaching or clinical psychology competencies. Similarly purchasers need to clarify whether

specific credentials are important or rather evidence of an ability to work at different or specific levels of analysis (i.e. organisation, work group and/or individual). They must also remember to value the role that "chemistry" and rapport play in a successful coaching relationship – and to ensure that a matching process includes the space to explore this dimension.

Client organisations need to decide how much of the executive coach selection and matching process they wish to manage in-house and how much of this they wish to contract-out to a specialist firm.

From the perspective of suppliers of executive coaching this research points to the importance of clarifying their market positioning in a responsible and proactive manner. Which type of executive coaching supplier is the practitioner identified with? Which disciplines inform their values as an executive coach? Are they primarily identifying themselves as another type of practitioner who also takes on the role of executive coach when this fits the client need?

Suppliers of executive coaching are invited to enter the ongoing debate about whether a distinct professional body is required for executive coaches. Such a body might support the integration of the range theoretical perspectives that have informed the rise of executive coaching. This can only happen if professionals and academics from the different constituencies in this field come together in good faith to lay the foundations for its future.

In conclusion I would like to suggest that one element of common ground between academic research and executive coaching is the pursuit of wisdom.

Arlin (1990) characterises wisdom as the "art of problem finding", with its preoccupation with questions rather than answers, its search for complimentarity between points of view, an openness to change, the pushing and possible redefinition of limits and a taste for problems that are of fundamental importance.

I hope that this dissertation serves in a small way to further the work of coaches and their clients in their quest for wisdom and fulfilment, and supports the academic world in explaining the emergence and the future of executive coaching.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: Survey of Executive Coaches' Backgrounds

AN INTERNATIONAL STUDY OF EXECUTIVE COACHING

by Michael Sanson MA (Oxon)
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INTRODUCTION

This email questionnaire is being sent to you following your generous offer to be part of an international research project into the practice of executive coaching.

The intention of this project is to gain a better understanding of the executive coaching profession by surveying and interviewing a population of experienced executive coaches. In particular the research intends to explore the academic, professional, cultural and life experiences that inform executive coaches' work, and how these experiences support coaches in meeting the special challenges of coaching at the most senior levels within organisations.

For the purpose of this research executive coaching refers to relationships where the client is an organisational leader responsible for leading an organisation or business unit with at least 100 employees.

Following the review of the questionnaire data the researcher will contact a sample of respondents and request a follow-up individual interview, lasting 60 to 90 minutes.

The confidentiality of your replies will be respected by ensuring that no comments quoted will be in anyway linked to the identity of the respondent. However, the intention is to list respondents' names and nationality – if you would rather not be listed please advise.

If you have any questions or comments about the questionnaire or the overall research project please contact Michael Sanson by email: msanson@unlimited.com.

Your co-operation in this project will support a greater understanding of the executive coaching profession both in the business and academic worlds.

Once again, many thanks for your support of this project.

QUESTIONNAIRE

I BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

I.1 Name: < >

I.2 Nationality/ies: < >

I.3 Male/Female: < >

I.4 Year of birth: < >

I.5a Country of birth: < >

I.5b How long did you live/have you lived there: < >

I.6 Country of residence: < >

I.7 Which other countries have you lived in for 6 months or more ?

< >

I.8 Which other countries you have worked in extensively (for a total of 6 months of more) ?

< >

I.9 Which languages do you speak ?

(please list languages and indicate fluency as follows - native (N), fluent (F), intermediate (I), basic(B))

< >

I.10 Which languages do you coach in ?

< >

II PROVOCATIVE QUESTIONS

Please indicate you opinion about the following statements, using the scale described below - Strongly agree / Agree / Neutral / Disagree / Strongly disagree

---

II.1 Coaches who work with executive leaders should have experienced equivalent roles in their own professional life.

< > Strongly agree < > Agree < > Neutral < > Disagree < > Strongly disagree

Please provide some specific reasons for your reply:

< >

II.2 Executive coaches should have a clinical psychological training.

< > Strongly agree < > Agree < > Neutral < > Disagree < > Strongly disagree

Please provide some specific reasons for your reply:

< >

II.3 Executive coaching can only have a limited impact on an executive's ability to deliver organisational results without a wider organisation development (Wood & Petriglieri) intervention.

< > Strongly agree < > Agree < > Neutral < > Disagree < > Strongly disagree

Please provide some specific reasons for your reply:
< >

II.4 Executive coaching processes are unaffected by the national culture of the person being coached.

< > Strongly agree < > Agree < > Neutral < > Disagree < > Strongly disagree

Please provide some specific reasons for your reply:
< >

II.5 Executive coaches' role should be as transparent as possible to the organisation.

< > Strongly agree < > Agree < > Neutral < > Disagree < > Strongly disagree

Please provide some specific reasons for your reply:
< >

II.6 The return on investment of executive coaching interventions are difficult to assess.

< > Strongly agree < > Agree < > Neutral < > Disagree < > Strongly disagree

Please provide some specific reasons for your reply:
< >

III EXECUTIVE COACHING EXPERIENCE

III.1 How many years have you been coaching for (as a specific professional activity) ?

< > Less than two
< > Two to four
< > Five to six
< > Seven to eight
< > Nine to ten
< > More than ten (please indicate how many)

III.2 How many years have you been coaching executives ?
(responsible for leading an organisation or business unit with at least 100 employees)
< > Less than two
< > Two to four
< > Five to six
< > Seven to eight
< > Nine to ten
< > More than ten (please indicate how many)

III.3 Approximately how many of this type of individual client have you coached for ten or more sessions (min 30 minutes) in your career to date ?
< > 0-5
< > 6-20
< > 21-50
< > 51-100
< > More than 100

III.4 How often do your executive coaching assignments include equivalent developmental work with the executive's team.
Please make one selection with an X:
< > Almost always (>80%),
< > Most of the time (between 60% and 80%),
< > Usually (between 40% and 60%)
< > Sometimes (between 20% and 40%)
< > Rarely (<80%)

IV BACKGROUND
The objective of this research project is to understand the range of different backgrounds which executive coaches have. In Section IV you are asked to list key elements of your own academic and professional education, and your career and personal experiences.
You are invited to answer in a "bullet-point" format.

IV.1 ACADEMIC EDUCATION
Please list - in bullet points - your key academic achievements (including institution, subject/field and title of degree)

Bachelors degree: < >
Masters degree: < >
Doctorate: < >
Other academic achievements: < >

IV.2 FORMAL PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

Please list - in bullet points - any formal professional education/credentials which you have received - no matter what the field (for example medicine, engineering, law, finance, psychology etc..) – <professional certificates, diplomas, licences etc..>

< >

< >

IV.3 INFORMAL PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

Please list - in bullet points - any informal professional and personal education and training which you judge has made an important contribution to your development as an executive coach (for example skills and personal development trainings, spiritual practice, etc)

< >

< >

IV.4 CAREER HISTORY

Please list the key elements of your career history, for example:

1978-84 - bullet point description 1

1985-88 - bullet point description 2

1989-92 - bullet point description 3

1993-95 - bullet point description 4

1996 to date - bullet point description 5

< >

< >

IV.5 LIFE EXPERIENCES

Please list any specific life experience which you deem to have been important in influencing your decision to become an executive coach and developing your abilities to be effective in that role.

< >

< >

IV.6 IMPORTANCE TO COACHING PRACTICE

Reflecting on your answers to questions IV.1-IV.5 please consider which category of experience has proved most/least important in forming the skills which you actually employ in your executive coaching practice.

Please attribute an importance rating to each, with:

1 = critical 2 = very important 3 = important 4 = useful and 5 = unimportant

< > Academic Education
< > Formal Professional Education
< > Informal Professional Education
< > Career History
< > Life Experiences

IV.7 IMPORTANCE TO CLIENT HIRING DECISION

Reflecting on your answers to questions IV.1-IV.5 please consider which category of experience appears to be most important to your clients' decision to hire you/your organisation to provide executive coaching.

Please attribute an importance rating to each, with:

1 = critical 2 = very important 3 = important 4 = useful and 5 = unimportant

< > Academic Education
< > Formal Professional Education
< > Informal Professional Education
< > Career History
< > Life Experiences

END OF QUESTIONNAIRE

Thank-you very much for your time, Michael Sanson

APPENDIX 2: Survey of Categories of Executive Coaching Suppliers

AN INTERNATIONAL SURVEY OF SUPPLIERS OF EXECUTIVE COACHING

Estimated time for completion: 10-15 minutes

This survey forms part of Michael Sanson's doctoral research into international executive coaching at the University of St. Gallen in Switzerland. The survey looks at the way in which executive coaches are organised to supply services to the market.

You will find on the next page a set of categories of suppliers of Executive Coaching services to organisations.
This survey aims to test this categorization by asking experienced executive coaches (including internal executive coaches) where they would locate themselves and other suppliers of executive coaching services in this schema.
Respondents may also suggest alternative categories or approaches that they feel to be more helpful. Follow-up questions aim to provide further important data needed in building an understanding of the supply of executive coaching services.
The confidentiality of your replies will be respected by ensuring that no comments quoted will be in anyway linked to the identity of the respondent. However, the intention is to list respondents' names and nationality – if you would rather not be listed please advise. A summary report of the findings will be circulated to all of the respondents.
If you have any questions or comments about the questionnaire or the overall research project please contact Michael Sanson by email at msanson@unlimited.com.
Your co-operation in this project will support a greater understanding of the executive coaching profession both in the business and academic worlds. Thank you for this contribution to the development of our field.

A PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

Name	
Organisation	
City/Country	
Daytime telephone	
Email address	
Website	

The categories of executive coaching suppliers follow on the next page.

Please read the following table to familiarize yourself with differences between the various categories.

CATEGORIES OF SUPPLIERS OF EXECUTIVE COACHING

Type of EC Supplier	Description and Characteristics
Professional service firms with EC divisions	○ Companies with established businesses in professional service areas (e.g. management consulting, organisation development, training and development, HR/compensation, outplacement) that employ ECs or have EC divisions.
Executive coaching firms "EC firms"	○ Focussed executive coaching firms, usually with a core staff of employed professionals and/or partners. ○ Broader team of associates/sub-contractors who work on a project by project basis under the firm's brand.
Training institutions offering EC services	○ EC training institutions which also offer services from a pool of faculty members and graduates.
Executive coaching networks "EC networks"	○ Focussed EC networks containing 5-100 members operating under a consistent brand. ○ Allows customers a wide choice from one source. ○ Supporting network brand through careful new membership screening. ○ Network members also operate under their own brands.
Networked independents	○ Independent ECs with their own brands, who develop a variety of alliances. ○ Can offer teams of ECs and consultants. ○ May be members of EC networks, and/or associates/sub-contractors with other firms.
Independents	○ Independent ECs who tend to work alone, or with one or two colleagues. ○ Attract a steady flow of business by reputation/personal network/their own brand. ○ Refer larger projects to Networked Independents or EC firms.
Internal executive coach	○ Employees of organisations you work part or full-time coaching leaders within that organisation

B SURVEY QUESTIONS

1 WHICH CATEGORY BEST FITS YOU AND/OR YOUR ORGANISATION?

1.1 Referring to the descriptions on the preceding page, which ONE category is the one that you are best located in as a supplier of executive coaching?

(please mark one with an **X**)

X	***BEST FIT FOR ME AND/OR MY ORGANISATION***	***Follow up questions***
	Professional Service Firm with EC Division/Services	***2, 3, 4 & 8***
	Executive Coaching Firm	***2, 3, 5 & 8***
	Training Institution offering EC services	***2, 3, 6 & 8***
	Executive Coaching Network	***2, 3, 7 & 8***
	Networked Independent	***2, 3 & 8***
	Independent	***2, 3 & 8***
	Internal Executive Coach	***2, 3 & 8***
	Other: specify below	

Clarifying comments:

1.2 If there is a <u>second category</u> which also fits, please circle it below:

X	***2ND BEST FIT FOR ME AND/OR MY ORGANISATION***	***Follow up questions***
	Professional Service Firm with EC Division/Services	***2, 3, 4 & 8***
	Executive Coaching Firm	***2, 3, 5 & 8***
	Training Institution offering EC services	***2, 3, 6 & 8***
	Executive Coaching Network	***2, 3, 7 & 8***
	Networked Independent	***2, 3 & 8***
	Independent	***2, 3 & 8***
	Internal Executive Coach	***2, 3 & 8***
	Not applicable	

Clarifying comments*:*

a. **If you prefer to offer an alternative categorization and locate yourself in it please describe this below:**

2 WHICH SERVICES DO YOU AND/OR YOUR ORGANISATION PROVIDE ?

These questions apply to all respondents.

2.1 Which of the following services have <u>you</u> personally provided in the last 12 months.
*Please place an **X** in the relevant boxes.*

X	*TYPES OF SERVICE PROVIDED BY ME PERSONALLY*
	One on one coaching - face to face
	One on one coaching - telephone
	Executive mentoring
	Organisational development consulting
	Leadership development programs
	Management consulting (eg. strategy, process improvement etc..)
	Facilitation of processes/meetings
	Outplacement services
	Skills Training (eg. presentations, public speaking, ..)
	Assessment interpretation for organisations (eg. assessing job candidates)
	Assessment interpretation for individual executives (ie. for development)
	Interim management (filling an internal management role for a fixed term)
	Other 1:
	Other 2:
	Other 3:

Clarifying comments:

2.2 Which of the following services has <u>your firm, network or department</u> provided in the last 12 months. *Please place an **X** in the relevant boxes.*

X	*TYPES OF SERVICE PROVIDED BY ME PERSONALLY*
	One on one coaching - face to face
	One on one coaching - telephone
	Executive mentoring
	Organisational development consulting
	Leadership development programs
	Management consulting (eg. strategy, process improvement etc..)
	Facilitation of processes/meetings
	Outplacement services

	Skills Training (eg. presentations, public speaking, ..)
	Assessment interpretation for organisations (eg. assessing job candidates)
	Assessment interpretation for individual executives (ie. for development)
	Interim management (filling an internal management role for a fixed term)
	Other 1:
	Other 2:
	Other 3:
	N/A: eg. independent

Clarifying comments:

3 WORKING AS AN ASSOCIATE/SUB-CONTRACTOR

This question applies to all respondents.

For the purpose of the following questions **an associate/sub-contractor** is defined as:

"an executive coach who provides services under a separate organisation's brand, where the organisation has developed and owns the relationship with the client organisation."

3.1 What percentage of your revenue in the last 12 months was earned as an associate/sub-contractor?
Please place an **X** in the relevant box.

X	*% of REVENUE EARNED AS AN ASSOCIATE*
	0 %
	1-10 %
	11-25 %
	26-50 %
	51-75 %
	76-100 %

3.2 Please list the organisations with which who have worked as an associate/sub-contractor over the last 12 months?

(i)	*(iv)*
(ii)	*(v)*
(iii)	*(vi)*

4 PROFESSIONAL SERVICE FIRMS

These questions are for respondents who located themselves in the primary category of Professional Service Firms in Q (1.1)

4.1 If this is your primary organisation, are you employed (full or part time) or an associate/sub-contractor. Please place an **X** in the relevant box.

	Employed full time			**Employed part time**			**Associate/sub-contractor**

4.2 If employed, what percentage of your billable hours is for executive coaching vs. other services?
Please place an **X** in the relevant box.

X	*% BILLABLE TIME PROVIDING EXEC COACHING*
	0 %
	1-10 %
	11-25 %
	26-50 %
	51-75 %
	76-100 %

4.3 To what degree does your firm use associates/sub-contractors in providing executive coaching services ? Please describe in the box below:

5 EXECUTIVE COACHING FIRMS

These questions are for respondents who located themselves in the primary category of Executive Coaching Firms in Q (1.1)

5.1 How many salaried executive coaches does the firm have?

5.2 How many associate/sub-contractor executive coaches has the firm employed over the last 12 months?

5.3 What percentage of the firms billable executive coaching hours are performed by salaried personnel vs. associates/sub-contractors?

%	Salaried personnel

%	Associate/sub-contractor

6 TRAINING INSTITUTIONS OFFERING EC SERVICES

This question is for respondents who located themselves in the primary category of Training Institutions in Q (1.1)

Please describe below how you organise the provision of executive coaching services.

7 EXECUTIVE COACHING NETWORKS

These questions are for respondents who located themselves in the primary category of Executive Coaching Networks in Q (1.1)

7.1 What percentage of your revenue over the last 12 months came from your membership of executive coaching networks?

X	*% of REVENUE EARNED FROM EC NETWORK*
	0 %
	1-10 %
	11-25 %
	26-50 %
	51-75 %
	76-100 %

7.2 How many executive coaching networks are you a member of?

7.3 How many members are there of your primary executive coaching network?

7.4 What is its' name?

8 THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF EXECUTIVE COACHING SUPPLIERS

This final question applies to all respondents.

For each category including your own please identify THREE organisations or individuals which FROM YOUR EXPERIENCE best represent the description of that category. Please answer this question from your experience, rather than speculating who might fit in particular categories. It is fine to leave blank spaces if no examples come to mind.

Professional Service Firm with EC Division
(i)
(ii)
(iii)
Executive Coaching Firm
(i)
(ii)
(iii)
Training Institution offering EC services
(i)
(ii)
(iii)
Executive Coaching Network
(i)
(ii)
(iii)
Networked Independent
(i)
(ii)
(iii)
Independent
(i)
(ii)
(iii)

- *Thank-you, this was the last question.*

About the Author

Michael Sanson was born in London in 1966 and spent much of his first 30 years based in the United Kingdom. After studying Engineering Science and Economics at Brasenose College, Oxford he developed his financial and business knowledge whilst qualifying as a Chartered Accountant with Arthur Andersen. After a year-long journey of reflection and discovery around East Asia he spent five years working in the telecoms and IT sectors in financial and commercial roles.

In 1998 Michael initiated a multi-dimensional life transition which brought him to Switzerland and marked the beginning of his second career as a professional coach. Early in this process Michael was introduced to Professor Martin Hilb who's Multicultural Management doctoral programme at the University of St. Gallen has subsequently provided the frame for this research work.

In parallel with his research activities Michael has grown a thriving corporate and executive coaching business. He has been a visiting coach and consultant at IMD, the international business school in Lausanne, since 2000 and in addition serves a range of corporate clients on a variety of coaching and consulting assignments. He also maintains a private practice in which he coaches individuals both in person and by telephone.

Michael was the founding president of the International Coach Federation (ICF) in Switzerland, and has also been a member of the ICF's European leadership team. He is an editorial board member for the International Journal of Coaching in Organizations.

Michael is married to Graciela, a Latin-American career diplomat, and they have three young sons. They expect to be moving in the next year or two to another diplomatic posting. Details will be available on Michael's website when the move is finalised – www.michaelsanson.com.